

# Agenda Item

**Executive Board**

**6 August 2008**

**MW**



## East Devon Natural Environment Awareness Grant Scheme

### Summary

To set up a grant fund to deliver a greater understanding and appreciation of East Devon's countryside, specifically grants will be available to local organisations that assist in the District Council's ambitions and aims to help educate children and young people about the natural world. The grant scheme will operate to secure appropriate environmental education benefits for local schools, voluntary organisations and local community organisations. It will be aimed at projects that are unlikely to secure significant grant funding from other sources.

### Recommendation

**That Executive Board approves the creation of an East Devon Natural Environment Awareness Grant Scheme and agrees the allocation of £75,000 for the support of schemes and projects that deliver the criteria outlined within this report.**

#### a) Reasons for Recommendation

To help support the work of the district's local schools and voluntary organisations in delivering projects that educate children and young people about their local natural environment. The grant scheme will bring forward new and innovative schemes that will help to broaden young people's understanding of their countryside and foster an appreciation and understanding of the diversity of our wildlife. The scheme will mirror and help take forward the work of the Countryside Service's environmental education programme.

#### b) Alternative Options

Not to agree the proposal

#### c) Risk Considerations

The risks have been identified in Appendix A and clauses put into the scheme to enable that both legal and financial risks are eliminated in the application process so that those schemes awarded funding have to clearly demonstrate project viability both financially and legally.

#### d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

The grants scheme meets the Council's corporate objectives for :  
Children & Young People  
Safe, Clean & Green Environment  
Inspirational Council  
Meeting our Diversity & Equality duties

#### e) Date for Review of Decision

March 2010

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 The work of the Countryside Service over the last five years has identified a significant demand for grants in this area, especially with organisations seeking to deliver a broad based environmental education programme that enables local school children and young people to engage and interact with their local environment.
- 1.2 It is therefore anticipated that this scheme will be extremely competitive and popular with local schools and charitable organisations seeking funding for new and innovative programmes. The growing awareness of the environmental agenda is now being reflected in the work of local schools and the demands placed upon the Education Ranger for the schools services is indicative of this growth.
- 1.3 The District Council is uniquely placed through its community leadership role to set up a high profile and locally driven scheme that will make a long lasting impact with the children and young people of the district.

## **2 The operation of the grant scheme**

- 2.1 The details of the grant scheme are outlined in <Appendix A> however it is important to highlight the following areas :
  - The grant and its operation will be administered and serviced by the Countryside Service and all prospective schemes will be via a formal application process and formally assessed by a panel of Officers from EDDC, Natural England and Devon Curriculum Services.
  - The amount available to any one organisation is capped at £10,000 to ensure that the scheme is available to as many schools and voluntary organisations as is possible across the district.
  - There is no limit to any one school or voluntary organisation on their applications as long as they meet the criteria listed.
  - It is imperative that any scheme or project approved is innovative in its approach. This will ensure that the funds will encourage a more dynamic approach to delivering environmental education across the district.
  - The framework for the grant scheme is deliberately simple for applicants and will not create unnecessary “hurdles to jump through” as it is understood that many of the applicants will be local schools who are already overburdened with performance management targets. It is hoped that by keeping the application process simple and having a panel of assessors it will encourage high numbers of applicants.
  - The focus will be on the quality and relevance of the project/scheme proposal and its ability to meet the Council’s corporate objectives for ‘Children & Young People’ as well as a ‘Green Environment’.

## **3 The assessment of projects**

- 3.1 The grants scheme will be run on an annual reviewable basis and details of each successful project will be recorded and details of its outputs and outcomes will be part of an annual report that will be presented to Executive Board as part of the overarching monitoring and evaluation process to ensure that added value is being given to the Council with the scheme.
- 3.2 The panel of assessors will meet every two months to assess applications so that there is an opportunity all year round for applications to be considered. This will enable applicants the time to fully consider issues of match funding and where possible a partnership based approach to their project.
- 3.3 The Countryside Service will monitor progress on each project once it is approved to ensure that the outputs that were agreed by the panel of assessors are being delivered and there is no

significant variance in the scope of the scheme or project. The applicant will have to demonstrate that there are no significant financial and/or legal risks associated with the project as part of the application process. The panel of assessors will be within their rights to request further information on areas they feel require greater clarification before a decision is made.

- 3.4 Those bodies who are successfully approved for a grant will need to validate all capital, goods and services expenditure approved by the grants scheme with appropriate proof of expenditure such as receipted invoices. This is particularly relevant to those schemes who are awarded the maximum amount of funding.

#### **4 Benefits to EDDC**

- 4.1 The successful creation and delivery of this grants scheme will provide the Council with a significant opportunity to take forward its Children & Young People corporate strategy priority together with its 'green environment' priority and run it with the other work being undertaken by the Countryside Service within the schools and voluntary sectors.
- 4.2 The ability to fund potential projects at the local level and to organisations who are often unable to meet stringent and overly bureaucratic funding schemes across the whole district under the grants scheme will bring forward new partnerships and activities that have been up until now unable to move forward.
- 4.3 The scheme will foster a sense of community leadership by the Council in an area that is highly valued by Councillors through the work of the Education Ranger and enable children and young people the opportunity to access nature both formally through their local schools or informally through schemes run by organisations who are delivering natural environment programmes. It is these organisations that operate within East Devon that will benefit from such a grants scheme and where possible integrated applications between multiple "natural environment providers" will be encouraged to pool resources and bring together new and genuine partnerships.

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#### **Legal Implications**

The council has power to give financial assistance under section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 where they consider it likely to achieve any one or more of the following objects:

- (a) the promotion or improvement of the economic well-being of their area;
- (b) the promotion or improvement of the social well-being of their area, and
- (c) the promotion or improvement of the environmental well-being of their area.

In exercising this power the council must have regard to its Sustainable Community Strategy (Community Plan). It is part of this strategy's vision that 'our actions do not compromise the economy, communities or environment of future generations'. In relation to protecting and improving the environment, the plan identifies the Local Strategic Partnership priority as 'seeking to improve access, value, quality and use of our local environment in order to improve the physical and mental health of local communities'. Grants for environmental education would relate to securing this objective.

#### **Financial Implications**

The financial implications are included in the report.

#### **Background Papers**

- East Devon Environmental Education Grant Scheme proforma

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Mark Williams  
Chief Executive