

Introduction

Stafford College embarked on its journey towards sustainable development in 2006 when it became an active member of SAFE (A Sustainable Agenda for Further Education) which promotes sustainable development among all Staffordshire Colleges. The College signed a pledge with the other Colleges in Staffordshire to 'embrace sustainable development in order to reduce their impact on the environment by the prudent use of resources, reducing waste to landfill, reducing consumption of energy and water and promoting sustainable development among businesses and the wider community'.

The Sustainability Group was established in October 2006 and initially approved a Statement of Intent and an Action Plan. Membership is voluntary and includes teaching and support staff, senior management and governors. The first student members will join in September 2008.

It was acknowledged from the outset that the College was starting from a low base-line. Rather than establishing a grand plan the group recognized its limited knowledge and experience and set itself simple steps for improvement. The key priorities were to actively manage energy consumption and waste.

The Action Plan was reviewed and reported to the SMT and Resources Committee in November 2007. Priorities for 2007-8 are to ensure continued progress with energy and waste management and to commence work on raising the profile of sustainable development, curriculum development, sustainable procurement, capital building schemes and paper, print and copying.

Over time as understanding and experience has grown the Group has developed policies for energy and waste management. Most recently the group has developed its statement of intent into a full Environmental/Sustainability Policy which received approval in June 2008.

The College is submitting an application to the Green Awards in order to seek an external appraisal of its progress towards embracing sustainability and embedding it in the College's operations.

Progress over the last 12 months

The following charts the College's progress over the last 12 months focusing on the key themes from the action plan.

Energy Management

In November 2007 the SMT approved the Energy Policy which is a simple statement of the College's intentions to procure and manage its energy as efficiently as it can supported by SMART targets.

Carbon Trust Funding was approved in November for two additional days of consultancy to investigate the electricity base load. As a result a night-time energy audit took place in December identifying all the sources of energy consumption on site when the College is closed. This has produced a list of areas that are being addressed to improve house-keeping and reduce consumption. Specific issues have been resolved and follow up audits are planned.

An energy campaign to save electricity commenced in November 2007. Phase 1 targeted lighting and encouraged staff to switch off and make the most of natural light. Phase 2 started in February 2008 and targeted equipment, especially desktop computers, monitors, printers and copiers. Both phases were accompanied by posters and stickers put up in every room by energy champions (volunteers) working alongside Estates and Facilities staff. Posters saying thank you are now going up as the final part of this phase of the campaign. In addition e-mail reminders at special times of the year including just before College holiday periods are being circulated to the whole College. Awareness and behaviour has improved considerably, although constant reminders are needed to maintain good habits!

In December 2007/January 2008 an automated system was implemented to switch off all desktop computers at 10pm, with a follow up check at midnight. Around 6% of machines are routinely switched off, saving £300 and 8.700 kwh to date.

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Very close monitoring of electricity and gas usage has been implemented utilising billing details and half hourly data for electricity. The indications are that electricity consumption will be lower than in the 2006-7 academic year. Whilst this cannot be definitely attributed to improved housekeeping since the campaign started it may be that this has influenced the outcome. Rationalisation of accommodation usage means that the College will now close at 5pm on a Thursday evening, achieving electricity savings of 15,000 kwh and £1,000 pa.

The oil fired boilers in Tenterbanks are to be removed during July to be replaced by gas fired boilers. These will be far more energy efficient and are expected to save £28,800 and 73 tonnes of CO₂.(per Carbon Trust) per annum. Securing funding for this project has been a major success. The replacement boilers will virtually complete the package of works identified by the Carbon Trust in 2006 and based on their figures the College will be saving 118 tonnes of CO₂ per annum by the end of 2008-9.

In May the College funded a Smart Meter site survey. This will enable meters to be installed at various points in each of the main buildings and they will monitor gas, electricity and water consumption and relay it back to a central point. The implementation of this technology is essential if the College is to make further progress in managing energy consumption as it will enable targets to be set and monitored in a way that cannot be done when there is only one meter for the whole site.

The College has continued to procure its energy for main site through the OGC framework agreement and has added the three units at Palmbourne to the agreement. For the second year the rates secured have been competitive when compared with average market prices.

Waste Management

The segregated waste programme is progressing well with wood being added to the segregated items from December 2007. Since the inception of the new waste management system in November 2006 the College is now separating 50% of its total waste which is being recycled by the waste contractor. This is a very significant achievement removing around 158 tonnes of waste from landfill each year.

A waste management policy with SMART targets was approved in December 2007.

A waste questionnaire was issued in March 2008 to assess levels of awareness and attitudes to waste management. A very pleasing outcome was that 23 colleagues volunteered to become champions for their area, 76 were prepared to segregate more types of waste and 43 were willing to take waste to designated areas on a regular basis. This voluntary effort across all Faculties and Units will be harnessed to support Estates and Facilities colleagues as they extend the scheme.

Estates and Facilities are piloting separate bins for plastic bottles, cans and polythene. This is a direct response to many colleagues who have been enthused by action so far and want to see it extended. New bins are on order and will be introduced across the College over the coming months. Bin inspections show that there is still paper and cardboard being placed in general bins and therefore going to landfill. An awareness raising campaign will start next term to encourage colleagues to be more responsible about separating these waste streams. A baler will be introduced into the recycling area over the summer and this will be used to bale cardboard and plastic waste which will generate a small income stream.

Estates and Facilities Unit staff continue to lead the way, supporting separation and recycling and carrying out the physical work. The campaign next term must harness staff commitment and goodwill from elsewhere around the College if a further significant change is to be seen.

Raising the profile of Sustainable Development through awareness raising, training and development

The College is pro-active about accessing free, and paid, seminars and courses on sustainability. Reports are fed back to other members of the Sustainability Group at its meetings. Examples include carbon footprinting and BREEAM assessment. The College is also a member of SBEN, Agenda 21 and Envirowise.

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Some excellent curriculum materials made available through members of SAFE have been circulated to colleagues for use with students. A lesson observation scheme with the focus on sustainability content and practice has also been provided. The staff intranet has been populated with information from the Sustainability Group and the College's commitment can be found as the opening page to the Estates and Facilities section. A staff development powerpoint has been issued to all Faculties and a staff development session offered in the College's annual programme of events.

Two dedicated notice boards have been set up to promote the work of the group. Students made a superb display in the Library and Information Centre earlier this term and have collected aluminium cans for recycling as part of their course work. Student planners for 2007 and 2008 contain details of the College's commitment and how students can be involved.

An A5 leaflet has been produced highlighting the College's commitment to sustainable development, outlining the actions it has taken and inviting staff and students to be pro-active in this area. The leaflet has been circulated to all staff and will be available on open evenings and at other promotional events.

The Sustainability Group is committed to designating a day of special events to promote Sustainable Development. This is to be developed for the 2008-9 academic year possibly on the 5th June which is 'designated World Environment Day'.

Progress with other 2007-8 Priorities

Procurement - Suppliers wishing to tender or to quote for significant College contracts are now required to demonstrate their environmental credentials. Specifications and supplier appraisal questionnaires seek assurances and marking includes points for demonstrating commitment to environmental improvement. As a result the College's sportswear supplier has reduced packaging and implemented a policy of re-use. The College's desktop computer tenderers were required to source machines that met or exceeded an energy star rating and sample machines from all providers were rigorously tested to ensure that they met acceptable standards and were economic to run.

Building - Specifications for the new accommodation strategy have been clear from the outset that the College is committed to sustainable development and requires buildings capable of achieving a BREEAM excellent rating. Architects and consultants have taken this on board in the feasibility stage and the project has now been formally approved by the LSC. Energy wise staff in energy efficient buildings should prove a powerful combination!

Students and Curriculum - The College is keen to involve students and will build on information in student planners by delivering a sustainable development tutorial to all students from September 2008. Staff are encouraged to promote sustainable development by incorporating relevant aspects into their curriculum areas and encouraging students to consider environmental issues and sustainable development in their assignments. A foundation degree course is under discussion with Staffordshire University. Presentations have been made to the Student Council and a student undertaking A2 environmental science has agreed to join the group in September. One of the next big challenges is how to harness the students' creative energy to improve what we are doing.

Conclusion

Stafford College is firmly committed to the principles of sustainable development and to continuously improving its efforts in this area. This is demonstrated by the considerable progress made from a very low base just 20 months ago. Tackling issues in small incremental steps has enabled the Sustainability Group to reach a point where it has successfully sought approval to a formal Environmental/Sustainability Policy for the organisation. This provides an overarching policy statement under which a suite of simple statements about energy use and waste management sit. These will be added to as work progresses over the next 12 months on areas such as student involvement, sustainable procurement, curriculum, paper management.

Pat Eagle and Deborah Evans – co Chairs of the Sustainability Group

Supporting Documents

Environmental/Sustainable Development Policy

Energy Management Policy

Waste Management Policy

Energy Campaign Flyer

Energy Campaign Posters

Sustainable Development leaflet

Waste Report

Energy Report

Action Plan

Energy Questionnaire and report

Waste Questionnaire and report

Staff Development Powerpoint