

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

HELD ON TUESDAY, 19th MARCH, 2024 AT 4.30 PM

**VENUE: COMMITTEE ROOM 1 CITY HALL, PLATER WAY,
SUNDERLAND**

Present: -

Local Councillors

Councillor Dodds

Christian and Other Denominations

Barbara Adshead (Substitute)

Rev Dr David Whiting

Zaf Iqbal

Church of England

Amy Clarke

Rev Chris Howson

Teachers Association

Nicola Jackman

Steven Beck

Rachel Winlow

In Attendance

Cathryn Forbes, Specialist Officer

Richard Cullen, Strategic Lead, School Improvement & Early Years

Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer

SAC227 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors P. Smith and Williams. Also apologies from Caroline Weir, Matt Moore, Nicky Anderson, Tracy Conway, Elizabeth and Tony Wortman.

SAC228 Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 17th October, 2023

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th October 2023 were a true record

SAC 229 Matters Arising

Mrs Forbes advised that the Annual Report had now been posted to the DfE and NASACRE websites.

Mr Wood to send out the NASACRE Members log in and password details to the new Members of the Council.

SAC230 SACRE Membership

The Assistant Director of Law & Governance submitted a report (copy attached) for Members of the Standing Advisory Council to review and approve the list of volunteers (listed in 3.1 of the report) onto its Membership.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Paul Wood, Clerk to the Council presented the report and advised of a slight error within the report and that Sarah Hammal would be designated as a Coopted Member and not as stated within the report as Christian Denominations & Other Religions for the time being.

It was acknowledged that Mr Kevin Lapping was in attendance at the meeting as a Pagan representative and that he would be included in the report for the next meeting to be added to the Membership.

Ms Hammal, Ms Dunne and Mr Lapping were all welcomed to the meeting.

It was AGREED to approve the new volunteers listed in paragraph 3.1 of the report onto the Membership of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education.

SAC231 NASCARE Briefing – including attendance at Annual Conference

Mrs Forbes addressed the Council advising that the NASACRE website could help new Members in regards to training and as advised above, Mr Wood would circulate log in details.

Mrs Forbes also advised of the Westhill Awards and how each SACRE could apply for bursaries for projects, with the whole list also on the NASACRE website and was something to consider and may be useful to have on the June agenda.

Rev. Howson commented in relation to a recent meeting on City of Sanctuary in Newcastle and that we did not have any schools participating and suggested that a project be utilised on this. Mrs Forbes suggested that Rev. Howson have a look at the website to see if the Awards could be used for such a project.

Mrs Forbes also briefed the Council on the nominations for NASACRE Executive Committee members, the NASACRE Notice Board and that the RE Hubs was to be discussed further in the agenda but wished to comment that in relation to Training linked to RE Hubs it was encouraged that Teachers set up their own local groups/networks and dates of these were also on the NASACRE website.

Mrs Forbes advised of the NASACRE Conference taking place on 20th May at Hilton, York and the possibility of sending two delegates with SACRE funding the travel. Should any Members wish to attend then to contact Mr Wood in the first instance.

The Chair strongly encouraged Members to regularly check the website.

SAC232 NASACRE Training

The Chair informed that she had recently attended training with Mrs Weir on Collective Worship.

Mrs Forbes commented that it was definitely worth attending some of the training sessions offered and as this was to be a regular item on future agendas it would be nice if Members were able to contribute on their experiences.

SAC233 Feedback from @in conversation with NASCARE meeting 23.11.2023

Mrs Forbes informed that Karenza Passmore was the chair of our RE Hub for the North East which aimed to create a resource which was much more accessible for Teachers. There was an introduction to the RE Hubs project, shared issues with other North East SACREs and discussions around hybrid meetings.

Mrs Forbes advised that there had been a little bit of movement in relation to if every authority needed its own SACRE or if we could have a North East SACRE and if the Memberships would be better served this way. Mrs Forbes also advised that these meetings would be held regularly to discuss these issues further.

Mr Cullen commented that with the Sunderland position and the growth of Academies we had chosen to go with RE Today for the Agreed Syllabus. So the ambitions of moving towards a regional basis may mean the choice of individual units would be restricted but it would be interesting to see how we move forward in this regard.

In response to Rev. Howson's query over what was to happen to Mrs Forbes role now that she was retiring, Mr Cullen informed that they were looking to appoint to the role after easter when expressions of interest were being sought.

SCA234 Updates on Interfaith Network and the recent Youth Conference on '@Faith and Climate for Sustainable future' and HMD in Sunderland

Mr Iqbal and Rev. Howson updated the Council on upcoming events and invited Members to an Iftar for Ramadan if they wished to attend. There was also a Big Lunch scheduled in Summer for the 2nd June on Minster Green.

Mr Iqbal informed that he had been carrying out a great deal of work with the schools on Ramadan and also a couple of weeks of work in Washington Academy as well as setting up a prayer room.

Rev Howson informed that they had held a Holocaust Memorial Day which had been well attended and that they had a new person coming into the Minster and may be a possible new Member for SACRE. Rev Clare MacLaren was to join from Newcastle as Provost of Sunderland Minster and a replacement for Rev Stuart Bain. Rev Howson commented that she would be brilliant to work with and would be great for SACRE.

SCA235 November Ofsted Report and its comments on RE

Mrs Forbes advised that the full Ofsted Report was on the NASACRE website and covered a whole raft of areas with the main points, extracted from the annual report, being that:

'RE in schools is generally of poor quality. Although it is a statutory subject, schools often consider RE as an afterthought. As a subject on the curriculum, it is under-valued. RE is a complex subject, and the lack of clarity and support from government makes schools' job harder. Some schools steer through these challenges well, but most do not. We found that:

- many schools do not meet the statutory requirement to teach RE at all stages
- pupils are rarely taught enough substance to prepare them to engage in a complex, multi-religious and multi-secular society (where religion and non-religion play different parts in different people's lives)
- too often, schools do not teach topics in the RE curriculum deeply enough for pupils to develop a substantial understanding of the subject matter
- non-examined RE is typically not high quality.'

'All pupils should develop a broad and secure knowledge of the complexity of religious and non-religious traditions. It will take coordinated effort by stakeholders to improve the quality of RE in schools:

- schools need high-quality professional development to teach RE well
- curriculum publishers need to identify clearly what pupils will learn and when, building on knowledge over time, so that pupils develop a deep knowledge of the chosen religious and non-religious traditions
- the government should provide clear expectations about RE provision in schools. Schools should follow these. Current non-statutory guidance for RE

should be updated and include clear information for schools about the breadth and depth of the syllabus they are expected to teach.'

In response to Rev. Howson's query as to what each school was doing, the Chair advised that as her school was a Church School, RE was a core subject and the Calendar reflected that, but it was her job as RE Lead to champion that.

Ms Winlow advised of the difficulties within her school as the vast majority of families within had no faith, but this could also be a positive as it gave the opportunity to introduce them to these faiths. On the negative side they did not have a great number of staff with expertise so she was in affect the only source for religious education.

Ms Winlow also advised that Ofsted had been happy with a developing subject and she wanted to teach across the whole key stage.

Mr Beck wished to echo those comments advising that he could see quite a few knowledge gaps within his school and he was having to backfill some concepts and had to strip back and be creative.

Ms Jackman informed the Council that her school was an Academy but they had chosen to follow the agreed syllabus and the teachers available had needed help and training for this.

Ms Dunne advised that RE was a core subject within the Catholic schools and Ofsted were looking for parity between the subjects. RE had to be 10% of the timetable every week and within the secondary schools there was the expectation that RE at GCSE would be taken.

Rev Dr Whiting commented that in relation to training, the closest available was in York and that there was an issue of recruitment in the North East. Mrs Forbes added that this was the case with RE leads also.

In response to a query from Rev Howson on if the Council had any plans to tackle this, Councillor Dodds advised that she could ask the Leader on this. Mrs Forbes commented that as a SACRE they could write to each school and ask the question of how much RE they were providing but they did not have any powers to enforce.

Mr Cullen advised that the Headteachers determine the curriculum and due to the demands of Ofsted on secondary schools in particular, RE was not the main focus and therefore naturally the Headteachers focussed more on the subjects they were to be judged on, until this changed RE's prominence was always going to be less. Mr Cullen also wished to stress that this was the same context nationally and wasn't just a Sunderland specific issue.

Mrs Forbes commented that it would be interesting to see what the report due out in June advised and that the full Ofsted report was now on the NASACRE website if people wished to view.

SCA236 RE Hubs – A look at the Web Pages

Mrs Forbes took the Council through the RE Hubs website and advised that if there were any speakers wishing to give talks at school, the Hubs offered an accreditation via online course every month on either Teams/Zoom. There were also events going on locally and an Event Calendar on the site provided detail on this.

Ms Adshead commented that it was interesting to know about the school accreditation as she had been into several schools to speak and as quakers they all did something different and it seemed teachers were as interested to know as the students.

SCA237 Collective Worship Update and Training attended

The Chair advised that she had attended the NASACRE training and that every child was entitled to collective worship and the course highlighted the features of good collective worship. The Chair advised that at the last SACRE Meeting they had talked about setting up a working party, this had now been established and a Questionnaire was to be circulated shortly. Any Members were welcome to join the working group if they so wished.

Mrs Forbes advised that consideration of Collective Worship had been identified as part of the Self evaluation carried out and it was decided to set up this Working Group to come up with a policy for SACRE to approve.

SCA238 Any Other Business

At this juncture, as there was no further business to discuss, Mr Cullen wished to thank Mrs Forbes for all of her work and support given to SACRE commenting that she would be hard to replace, would be sorely missed and wished her all of the best in her retirement.

The Chair then read out a statement on behalf of Ms Weir who could not be in attendance, thanking Mrs Forbes for her dedication to SACRE, our schools, to our young people and to great RE in Sunderland and wished her all the very best for a long and happy retirement.

SCA239 Date and Time of the next meeting

The next meeting was to be confirmed once the Council Diary had been approved at Annual Council on the 15th May and Mr Wood would circulate the dates for the year soon after this.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting

(Signed) Amy Clarke,
Chair