

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

HELD ON TUESDAY, 21st MARCH, 2023 AT 4.30 PM

VENUE: COMMITTEE ROOM 1, CITY HALL, PLATER WAY

Present: -

Local Councillors

Councillor Farthing
Councillor Dodds
Councillor P. Smith

Christian and Other Denominations

Dr David Whiting
Matt Moore
Tony Wortman

Church of England

Amy Clarke
Caroline Weir
Chris Howson

Teachers Association

Tracy Conway

In Attendance

Cathryn Forbes, Specialist Officer
Paul Wood, Principal Governance Services Officer
Sara Gummerson, School Improvement Officer
Elizabeth Wortman

SAC193 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors McKeith and Samuels. Also apologies from Richard Cullen, Fahmena Khatun, Natalie Fountain, Lisa Quinn-Briton and Louise Ridings.

SAC194 Minutes of Previous Meeting held on 13th December, 2022

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th December,2022 were a true record

SAC 195 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

SAC196 SACRE Development Plan

Mrs Forbes requested the Councils consideration of the Development Plan (copy attached) and to think about actions for each meeting. The Plan was following the NASACRE supplied template and was broken down into 5 sections/criteria. Officers had gone through the criteria giving thought to where Sunderland SACRE was now on these issues and had requested that Members give consideration as to what they would like to see the Council do in preparation for this meeting.

Mrs Forbes commented that Collective Worship really needed to be added to the agenda as there was no policy on this, which was important therefore suggested that a policy needed to be devised. The Chairman commented that this was certainly something in need of exploring.

In respect of Section 1: Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders, Mrs Forbes advised that they were well supported by Governance Services and new Members were coming on board now but enquired if there was anything else Members felt we should be picking up on.

Rev. Howson suggested that the Youth Council be invited to attend to share what they would like from SACRE and to get their input. The Chairman commented that this was a point well made and suggested Officers take this forward to invite the Youth Council to a future meeting, however it may prove difficult with their availability but the offer should definitely go out to them.

Mrs Forbes advised that she would add this to the Action Plan.

In response to Ms Weir's enquiry over a more inclusive representation of the city and in particular Sikh and Muslim representatives, Mr Wood advised that we had recently welcomed a number of Muslim representatives onto the Council but unfortunately they had to submit their apologies for this meeting.

In relation to Section 2: Standards and quality of provision of Religious Education, the Chairman referred to training and queried if the Secondary schools were still involved. Mrs Forbes advised that only two secondary schools responded to the latest surveys that were sent out and that it was an issue as to who was leading on Secondary schools.

In response to Councillor P. Smith's enquiry as to what the relations were like with Academies and non-maintained schools, Mrs Forbes advised that the relationship with Primary Academies was good and they were active in what was going on, however the secondary schools were not so good and there may be consideration needed on the budget and as a SACRE how we make that push.

The Chairman commented that the earlier suggestion of getting the Youth Council involved may assist in this matter as their representatives would cover a diverse number of different schools.

The Chairman also commented that having raised this before she believed as we progressed with the new agreed syllabus, those children who have had access to it at Primary level would feel like they are missing out when they get to Secondary level.

Mrs Forbes commented that the difficulties were that Sunderland was quite unusual in that all secondary schools were Academies or Faith run schools. The LA did not have responsibility for their training, so it was stuck in this middle position. SACRE should transcend this barrier however it was difficult and the other issue was the demise of RE Specialists/Advisors in Sunderland whereas other LA's had kept theirs so it was a fine balancing act.

Mr Wortman informed that in Newcastle, the senior schools pay regular visits to the synagogues and whilst unfortunately there weren't any located in Sunderland he still encouraged the schools to visit them. Mrs Forbes commented that the cost of travel sometimes discouraged schools in the past but help could be given on the cost of travel etc through bursaries and she would include this on the Action Plan for consideration.

Ms Weir suggested that a working group look at pulling together all contacts in the area for school groups to access. Mrs Forbes commented that one of the most frequently asked questions was how schools could get speakers in to give talks and as a SACRE they point them towards the Resources Centre, however this requires a payment to join. Mrs Forbes added that this would be a useful piece of work to do in collating what we have available locally and she would include this on the action plan also.

Rev Howson commented that there was St Luke's Mosque and whilst there was no Hindu temple or synagogue in the city there was a beautiful Buddhist Temple in Sunderland that could be visited. Mrs Forbes added that it was about getting this information in place and an Interfaith Conference could be used to invite different faiths to present to pupils who could then take this information back to their schools. This had been looked at in the past but due to the nature of our SACRE had not been progressed but now Membership was on the rise it could be looked at again.

With regards to Section 3 of the Development Plan: The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus, Ms Weir commented that this really was worth celebrating from where we were, to where we are now and wished to thank Mrs Forbes for the massive success of her work. Mrs Forbes commented that especially as this had been achieved during lockdown we had managed to get this done and it had an amazing buzz amongst the schools.

In relation to Section 4: Collective Worship it was agreed on a working group for this and the information recently circulated to Officers by the Chairman, be circulated to the Members of SACRE for their consideration.

Section 5: Contribution of SACRE to promoting cohesion across the community – Mrs Forbes commented that it would be nice if we could provide a profile of SACRE Members, suggesting perhaps a different Member providing a piece on their faith, why they joined SACRE etc to inform what SACRE meant to them and their perspective.

In response to Rev Howson's query over who was promoting the Community Service with regards to the Kings Coronation, Mrs Forbes advised that she could include this in the SACRE Newsletter

Ms Weir referred to the promotion of Holocaust Memorial Day and queried who within the Local Authority linked up on this work. Mr Wortman advised that he and Rev Howson organised the event every year and that they got a terrific response from the Councillors and schools and that the Sunderland Youth Orchestra were involved now. Mr Wortman commented that the response from the general public was great.

Mr Wortman also advised that it had been very noticeable during a recent display on the Holocaust provided in the Bridges shopping centre which had been visited by lots of school children, that the majority of pupils said that they did not get taught this at their school.

Mrs Forbes informed that most pupils started to be taught about the Holocaust at Year 8 as the subject matter was deemed not suitable for younger children and also that Judaism was part of the new agreed syllabus. In response to the Chairman stating that school visits have taken place to the Anne Frank exhibition, Mrs Forbes advised that this was a route they used to educate on the Holocaust also.

In response to Ms Weir's concern that there was no Local Authority Representative who held responsibility in organizing the events and it had been left to volunteers, Mrs Forbes commented that it was worth exploring the issue and she would add this onto the action plan to find a link. The Chairman informed of the ICOS group who were worth contacting in relation to connecting communities.

Mr Wortman advised of the event being held for Srebrenica and that details would be given to Mrs Forbes to circulate to Schools. Mr Wortman also gave the Council a brief summary of the talks he gave to schools advising that it was an informal setting, sitting amongst the children as a storyteller and suggested that if any of the schools wished for him to attend that he could supply details.

SAC197 SACRE Action Plan

Mrs Forbes summed up the actions to be included on the Plan based on discussions brought forward, these included work on Collective Worship, moves to include a pupil voice on the Council and a working group to consider Resources available/Visits, Local Authority Links etc and a form of promotion on who SACRE Members were.

SAC198 SACRE Members Survey Feedback

Mrs Forbes informed the Council of the findings of the recent SACRE Members Survey in which there had been an even split towards venues of City Hall or Bunny Hill Centre and the overwhelming preference had been to keep the date and time the same of Tuesdays at 4.30pm.

In terms of NASACRE, very few Members had accessed the free virtual training and Mrs Forbes urged Members to take advantage of this provision.

Dr Whiting advised that he had attended the training for new Members and advised that it was excellent.

SAC199 SACRE Teachers Survey on the new Agreed Syllabus Feedback

Mrs Forbes informed of the findings from the Teachers Survey circulated on the new Agreed Syllabus for Sunderland advising that all schools had received the survey and if anyone wished for a full breakdown of the answers received this could be given upon request but the general response to the document was one of positivity and there had been no negative comments at all which she was thrilled with.

SAC200 Training Update

Mrs Forbes updated the Council on recent training that had been provided, commenting that the biggest challenge was covering the gaps between backfilling of the old syllabus to the new syllabus.

Ms Clarke commented that there had been a real buzz around the syllabus and it was really positive the depth of knowledge that was being given to the children.

The Chairman added that the Workshops provided by RE Today had been amazing and no one attending could go away thinking anything else.

Ms Conway commented that it certainly reflected the Teachers views and the success of the scheme.

Mrs Forbes then advised the Council of future training planned and that RE Today would be providing another workshop on October 3rd and it was hoped

to make this an annual event. It was confirmed that all SACRE Members would be invited to this.

SAC201 NASACRE Briefing

Mrs Forbes updated the group on the latest NASCARE Briefing and advised that this was on the NASACRE website.

The briefing included in particular, updates on the White Paper, RExChange, A freedom of Information request they had submitted, Westhill Awards, Online Training and a piece of work on Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School by Kevin O'Grady.

There was also information on RE Hubs which was to be covered under Any Other Business on the agenda.

Mrs Forbes referred to the NASACRE Annual Conference which was to be held on 22nd May in London, Sunderland SACRE could fund up to two of its Members to attend so if there were any Members that wished to attend for them to contact Mr Wood in the first instance for him to pass onto Officers for action.

SAC202 Newsletter Items

Mrs Forbes advised that the next Newsletter was being worked on, it would include the feedback from the Teachers Survey, the Community Service for the King's Coronation and requested if there were any other items that people wished to be included.

Members suggested items on events taking place on Srebrenica, Big Lunch details, Ramadan. The Community Iftar Dinner, Passover and the Big Walk at Tunstall Hill. Members to pass over any relevant details to Mrs Forbes for her to include in the Newsletter.

Mrs Forbes advised that should the details come in too late for the Newsletter she could still circulate the details to schools separately or produce an extraordinary newsletter if need be.

SCA203 Any Other Business

Mrs Forbes gave further information on the RE Hubs which were being introduced. The hubs would be providing free training and Kite mark accreditation for speakers and that Mr Wood would circulate the PowerPoint Presentations that had been provided by NASACRE for further discussion at the next meeting.

Ms Weir commented that the kite mark accreditation was most recommended as it would provide that "rubber stamp" for when schools wished to invite speakers to provide presentations.

SCA204 Date and Time of the next meeting

The next meeting was to be confirmed

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting

(Signed) Councillor L. Farthing,
Chairman