

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

HELD ON MONDAY, 11TH JUNE 2015 AT 4.00 PM

VENUE: CLOUGH ROOM, SANDHILL CENTRE

Present: -

Local Councillors

Councillor C Marshall
Councillor P Smith
Councillor P Stewart – Chair

Church of England

Mrs W Lundgren

Co-Opted

Ms L Bousfield
Ms F Bridle

In Attendance

Annette Parr, Local Authority Officer
Cathryn Forbes, Specialist Officer
Zena Wilkinson, Governance Services Officer

As the meeting was inquorate, the following discussions could not be viewed as having been approved and therefore, could not be acted upon until approved at a future quorate meeting.

SAC35 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Leadbitter and Williams, Rev G Phillips and Mrs A Hodgson.

SAC36 Nominations to join the SACRE Membership

Councillor Stewart welcomed Ms Bousfield and Ms Bridle to the meeting and advised members that they were new nominations to join the SACRE membership. Following discussion it was agreed that Ms Bousfield and Ms Bridle would be nominated as Co-opted members.

Councillor Stewart enquired whether Yusef Meah had responded to an invitation to join SACRE. The Clerk advised that she had been unable to forward an invitation as she did not have their contact details. Councillor Stewart agreed to forward the contact details for Mr Meah to the Clerk.

SACRE members AGREED the proposal for Ms Bousfield and Ms Bridle, to join SACRE as Co-Opted members, on the premise approval was confirmed at a future quorate meeting.

SAC37 Minutes of the Meeting held on 5th May 2015

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th May 2015 were a true record subject to the following amendments:

SAC33 Inter Faith Conference

The membership fee for the North East Religious Learning Resources Centre, for schools, was £75 but this included membership for up to 4 members of staff.

Paragraph 3, 3rd sentence: A new RE syllabi had been implemented.

Page 7, Paragraph 5 "Teachers conference".

SAC38 Matters Arising

SAC33 Inter Faith Conference

Cathryn Forbes provided a summary of her role within the SACRE, as a RE Specialist Advisor and explained she shared the officers role with Annette Parr.

Cathryn Forbes advised that following the previous meeting she had drafted a letter to be circulated to all secondary and primary schools, regardless of whether they were academies, to ascertain the level of interest the Inter Faith and RE Conference would generate. Cathryn shared the content of the letter with members.

Mrs Lundgren enquired about the proposed circulation arrangements for the letter. Cathryn shared that the letter would be circulated both electronically and as a hard copy.

Ms Bridle questioned if the purpose of the Inter Faith Conference was to raise the profile of SACRE. Cathryn stated yes and explained she had joined as an officer in October 2014 and she was shadowing Durham SACRE. A lot of schools within Sunderland were using Durham to support their RE learning and she would like to bring this closer to Sunderland.

Mrs Lundgren noted that historically there were a number of resources available from SACRE that could be borrowed by interested parties and questioned the whereabouts of these. Cathryn explained that all resources

were now held centrally, at the North East Resource Centre, based at St Cuthbert's House, Durham.

Members AGREED that the content of the letter to secondary and primary schools was appropriate and could be circulated.

Mrs Lundgren enquired why the meeting was not quorate and it was explained that that the quorum for the meeting was the attendance of one representative from each of the four categories and there was no representation from either the Christian and Other Denominations or Teachers' Associations.

SAC39 Terms of Office of Current Membership

Councillor Stewart noted that a number of the current terms of office were coming to an end. Cathryn advised that she believed Annette Parr was taking this issue forward.

Mrs Lundgren noted that historically there were a number of Church of England representatives and suggested requesting nominations from the Anglican Church. Cathryn advised that there was no stipulation, within the terms of reference, for the number of representatives within each category and she believed it would be beneficial to increase the current membership due to the issues being met with inquorate meetings.

Councillor Stewart advised that he had again contacted the Salvation Army but had not received a response but he would continue to invite representation through another channel.

Members AGREED Cathryn Forbes would forward correspondence to the Bishop to request nominations to join the SACRE membership.

SAC39 NASACRE National Conference Feedback

Cathryn Forbes advised that she had attended the NASACRE National Conference and found the content very interesting.

Charles Clarke, former Secretary of State for Education, was a Speaker at the conference. He was currently working in partnership with Lancashire University to complete a booklet about the relationship of religion and schools, looking at the place of religious education, which would be presented to Parliament.

Cathryn shared that Mr Clarke raised a series of questions at the conference including:

- Should RE remain a statutory requirement?

Cathryn advised that in 1980 RE was not included within the national curriculum because parents had the right to withdraw their child from this subject. The impact of this was discussed at the conference and Cathryn shared that it was clear that Religious Education should be within the curriculum as this enabled critical thinking.

- What should the curriculum subject, Religious Education, be referred to as?

Cathryn explained that historically this subject had been referred to as Religious Instruction, which had allowed parents to withdraw their children. Within Scotland this subject was referred to as Religious and Moral Studies.

Cathryn shared that the number of parents requesting to withdraw their children from this subject had increased and she believed this was because of a lack of parental understanding of what was being taught, parents believed the lesson focused on religious instruction rather than religious education.

- Should Religious Education be taught from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 5?

This discussion included whether Religious Education should be compulsory for all Key Stage 4 pupils, whether the Key Stage 1 syllabus should be slightly different, the Tomlinson Report and missed opportunities.

Cathryn advised that discussion then moved toward SACRE and whether there should be a national curriculum or locally agreed syllabus, taking into consideration the improved communication channels and the impact of global events on children or whether we should rely on a locally agreed syllabi with regard to the local communities.

Cathryn shared that she believed Mr Clarke was acknowledging that in some areas the role of SACRE had reduced and there was a need to review their role. There needed to be more engagement with schools and faith communities and discussion was held about the involvement of Humanitarians and the fact that some children within educational establishments were not part of the six major faiths. If there were representatives of these faiths within the Community SACRE may wish to consider options to improve engagement.

- Community cohesion and SACRE

Cathryn advised that discussion was held in relation to the right of parents to withdraw their children from Religious Education and whether this was still pertinent

Cathryn explained that the Conference also discussed the construction of the SACRE membership and whether this needed to be reviewed.

Cathryn stated that she believed some very interesting topics were discussed and proposed that these were revisited in the Autumn term 2015 for in-depth discussion.

Cathryn advised that she had visited Durham SACRE last week and was informed that they had responded to the letter from Lord Nash about SACRE's and she believed there were actions Sunderland SACRE could undertake to raise their profile. She proposed topics for discussion within the Autumn term, including actions

- To enable SACRE to have a real impact on RE within schools
- To enable a real impact for SACRE within Sunderland

Cathryn shared that Denise Crush, and Mary Myatt were also guest speakers at the Conference and reminded members that SACRE were a member of NASACRE and provided the password.

Councillor Stewart questioned how Mr Clarke would circulate the booklet. Cathryn advised that this would be presented to all schools.

Cathryn shared that a self-evaluation document had been shared, which listed the eight most requested topics from the NASACRE Conference. She advised that she believed it would be beneficial for the questionnaire to be circulated and discussed in full in November 2015. Councillor Stewart advised that a similar exercise had been undertaken previously and agreed to ascertain whether he still had a draft copy. Cathryn agreed to provide a copy of the questionnaire to the clerk for circulation.

Cathryn advised that individual SACRE members were invited to complete an online survey for NASACRE; the link was bishop.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/sacre-what-is-re-for-2. The Clerk agreed to circulate the link to all SACRE members.

Cathryn shared that attendance at the NASACRE was high and included 138 Local Authority members, from an overall total of 153.

Councillor Smith shared that she was uncertain why Bishops did not instruct their representatives to become members of SACRE. Cathryn agreed and confirmed she would write to the Bishop highlighting the concern about the lack of representation within local SACREs.

Cathryn shared that in terms of the Inter Faith Conference in 2016 there was an opportunity for more than one representative from the SACRE membership to attend. She shared that she had found it interesting that within some of the more rural areas SACRE groups were working jointly but had implemented sub committees for individual areas.

Mrs Lundgren shared that she felt it was beneficial to implement local SACRE's, with local representatives, to ensure the correct links were in place.

Cathryn shared that during the Durham SACRE meeting discussions were held about the need for more intra working. Representatives from North Tyneside and Stockton were in attendance and they were undertaking joint work on issues such as an Interfaith Conference and Stockton had recently organised an Inter Faith Conference. Fiona advised that she had attended the conference and found the content interesting. Cathryn stated that she believed there may be an opportunity for partnership working in the future.

Councillor Stewart enquired if Scotland had the same parental rights as England, in that they could withdraw their children from religious education teaching. Cathryn stated no and explained that this was because it was the Church of Scotland.

Cathryn explained the reason that the proposal for the Inter Faith Conference did not include primary schools. She explained that she had received positive feedback to the conference proposal but would be circulating the letter to schools, requesting expressions of interest in attendance at both the Inter Faith Conference and RE Conference, as there was a need to have a clear understanding of the proportion of schools which would be interested. Responses had been requested by 30th June 2015 for both the Inter Faith Conference and RE Conference, as this would provide sufficient time to get the necessary documentation out to secondary schools prior to September 2015.

Cathryn advised that a scheduled meeting with Karenza Passmore had to be cancelled but she hoped this could be re-arranged as she would like to ensure any speakers invited for the events were appropriate.

Councillor Stewart invited members to indicate if they were interested in joining a Working Party for the Inter Faith and RE Conferences.

Members AGREED a preliminary date for the Working Party would be agreed and details circulated to all members of SACRE with an invitation to join the Working Party.

SAC40 RE Conference

Annette advised that the RE Conference would be open to all schools and provided an overview of the initial proposals. These included the options to invite 4 key speakers, including Peter Thompson.

Cathryn stated that she believed the conferences would raise the profile of SACRE. She highlighted that during inspections Ofsted considered Religious Education and citizenship.

Annette explained that she believed the proposed key speakers would provide a diverse range of aspects with an option to have a question forum on the afternoon. Cathryn shared that the proposal would be to include SACRE members within the question forum.

SAC41 Any Other Business

Cathryn requested and received confirmation that the SACRE leaflets had been circulated and received within schools.

SAC42 Date and Time of Future Meeting

Cathryn advised that it would be beneficial if future meetings were synchronised with Durham SACRE Meetings and proposed the meeting were held in the third week in November 2015, March and June 2016.

Members AGREED the meeting would be held on a Thursday evening, the third week in November, 2015, March and June 2016 and commence at 4.30 pm.

19th November 2015

**** March 2016 – this meeting can either be held on the 17th or will fall into April because of the Easter holidays**

24th June 2016

(Signed) Cllr. P Stewart,
Chairman