

At a meeting of the STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE) held at the SANDHILL CENTRE on TUESDAY 17 JUNE 2008 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Mr C Short in the Chair

Church of England

Reverend G M Beck
Father C. Collins
Mrs W Lundgren

Christian and Other Denominations

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|-----------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Mrs E Whitfield | - | Free Church |
| Mrs K Shipley | - | Free Church |
| Mr S Singh | - | Unity Organisations (Multi Cultural) |
| Mr J Bhatt | - | Hindu |

Teacher Associations

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|------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Miss A McChesney | - | National Union of Teachers |
| Mrs C Gibson | - | ATL |
| Mr C Hobbs | - | NAS/UWT |
| Mrs T Laybourne | - | NAHT |

Local Councillors

Councillors Francis and P Smith

In Attendance:-

| | | |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Natalie Chapman | - | Curriculum Support Teacher |
| Gary Shaw | - | Democratic Services Officer |
| Patrick Candon | - | Secondary Strategy Manager |
| Lynda Brown | - | Head of Standards, Sunderland City Council |

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor Stewart along with Mrs S Slater and Mrs L Richardson.

Following a request from Mrs Margaret Ferry, Chief Inspector, the Council gave permission for her to be present at the meeting to participate in the discussions on Items 5 and 6 of the Agenda.

Minutes

It was AGREED that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 12 February 2008 be approved.

Matters Arising

Bursaries

The Chairman advised that most schools had replied to the request for evidence of what projects the bursary money had been used on. The Council were informed that Ryhope Infant School had been holding celebratory events for the past week which all Members were invited to. Mr Short reported that he had attended one of the events that morning with Ms Chapman and Father Collins where the whole school had been addressed by two Buddhists.

Monitoring of RE

The Chairman advised that the first monitoring visit this year had taken place a fortnight ago. Mr Short informed the Council that the visit had resulted in a positive report and showed the school to be compliant and with good quality RE being taught.

Attention then turned to how these monitoring visits should be carried out. Ms Laybourne advised that it was important to make any process as transparent as possible for the benefit of schools. She stated that it would be helpful for SACRE to outline the purpose of their role and how they needed to exercise it. She suggested that advice needed to go to schools to show how monitoring would take place, identifying which schools would be monitored and when.

Following discussions, it was AGREED that another meeting would take place with Primary Heads to address these issues.

RE Conference

The Council was advised that the RE Conference referred to in the minutes would no longer be taking place. Discussions had taken place with Gary Robinson, Governor Support Manager, where it had been decided that it would be appropriate to have a conference along the lines of training

governing bodies on the part RE could play in Community Cohesion, a topic of any Ofsted Inspections that were due to start after September 2008.

The Chairman advised that during the discussions it had become evident that it would be helpful to circulate a FAQs document to governors, in their termly briefing booklet, to include something about RE and the role of SACRE.

Following requests, it was AGREED that a copy of the document be sent out to Members.

Appointment of Member

SACRE Members considered the report of the City Solicitor regarding the nomination of Mr. J. Bhatt for Membership of the Council.

The Chairman advised that Mr. Bhatt had been a practicing Hindu, attending the Temple at Westgate Road for the past 25 years. Members were advised that Mr. Bhatt had been a science teacher at Ryhope and Usworth Schools before becoming a lecturer on the Art and Culture of the Indian Sub Continent at Newcastle University. It was proposed that Mr. Bhatt would represent the Hindu faith.

AGREED that the membership of the SACRE be amended as outlined above.

Report from NASACRE

The Chairman gave an overview of the NASACRE Annual General Meeting that he had recently attended. He advised that the key note speaker had been Karen Armstrong who was a British author of numerous works on comparative religion. The Chairman stated that Ms Armstrong was a former Catholic nun, who asserts that "All the great traditions are saying the same thing in much the same way, despite their surface differences." He stated that her speech suggested that each religion had in common an emphasis upon the overriding importance of compassion, as expressed by way of the Golden Rule: 'Do not do to others what you would not have done to you'. Both the Chairman and Ms Laybourne, who had also attended, expressed how inspiring the talk had been.

Natalie Chapman covered the rest of the business discussed at the AGM and circulated the Ofsted report and the Chair of NASACRE's report that had been distributed. She stated that there was a number of interesting developments mentioned in the reports, such as training for new SACRE Members, visits of good practice being combined with Ofsted visits into schools, and the new criteria for GCSE RE for 2010/11, including Humanist teachings at KS4. Ms. Chapman referred to the Humanist Booklet circulated with the Agenda, stating that Members could consider placing a Humanist Co-opted Member on the Council.

Future SACRE Support

Members were informed that Ms Chapman had taken up a new post as Head of RE and Spiritual Development at All Saints Cof E, Stockton and would no longer be able to carry on her support role to SACRE. The Council and the Officers present took the opportunity to thank Ms Chapman for all her support and the exemplary work carried out during her time in the role and wished her luck in her new position.

The Chairman pointed out that the support role left by Ms Chapman would need to be filled as it was vital to the effectiveness of SACRE. Ms Brown suggested that the future arrangements would be better discussed outside of the meeting. Ms Ferry echoed these comments advising that it would be beneficial to sit down and consider the options for a long term solution. Ms Ferry assured Members that support would be given to the SACRE by Local Authority officers in the interim.

Agreed Syllabus Conference

Mr. Short stated that due to the imminent departure of Ms. Chapman it was prudent to suspend the consideration of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. He advised the Council that it was important to have an expert to lead on the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

Ms. Ferry advised that it was important that positive work went on with schools to ensure top quality RE was delivered. Ms Brown stated that there was a need to establish the current position and the next steps with a view to completing the process of the Agreed Syllabus review. The Chair added that Ms Chapman would be reviewing the current Locally Agreed Syllabus with teachers from all key stages, from Sunderland Community schools in July, as according to the work plan agreed by Ms Chapman and her line manager. Ms. Brown proposed that a sub group be formed to decide an appropriate way forward. The Chair commented that he would like this to take place whilst Ms Chapman was still in post

Following discussions, it was AGREED that Mr Candon would convene a meeting of the sub group that would consist of Ms. Laybourne, Mr. Short, Miss McChesney and Ms. Chapman.

The Chairman advised that he would write to the QCA advising that the syllabus would not be launched before March 2010.

Any Other Business

Independent Advisory Group for Faith

Ms. Chapman reported to Members that a meeting would take place on Tuesday 24 June between 1.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m. at the Quaker Meeting House, 30 Roker Park Road. Members were advised that the meeting was simply a gathering of people of different faiths and Ms Chapman suggested that it would be useful for Members of SACRE to attend, not only promoting the role of SACRE but also to encourage more representatives to join SACRE. This would be extremely useful for the Council's work around the Agreed Syllabus. The IAGF had been established by the Sunderland Partnership as part of their continuing work to develop community cohesion.

Having thanked Members and Officers for their attendance, the Chairman then closed the meeting.

(Signed) C. SHORT,
Chairman.