

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held in Conference Room 1, Herefordshire Council Offices, Plough Lane, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Friday 7 July 2023 at 2.00 pm

Board members present in person, voting:

Mrs Carolyn Ault	Bahai faith
Venerable Tsultrim Tenzin Choesang (Chairperson)	Buddhist
Peter Fawcett	Roman Catholic, Archdiocese of Cardiff
Mark Harrington	
Jonathan Nicholas	Church of England
Councillor Justine Peberdy	
Ruth Stanier	The Quaker Faith
Geoff Sallis	Humanism
Councillor John Stone	
Tracy Westlake	Primary school teacher representative

Others present in person:

Rebecca Bowen	Schools Effectiveness Manager
Henry Merricks-Murgatroyd	Democratic Services Officer
Stephen Pett	Consultant to SACRE
Fiona Williams	

50. WELCOME AND THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

Geoff Sallis delivered the thought for the day.

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Lou Barker, Stewart Debenham, and Alison Naylor.

52. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)

Rebecca Bowen substituted for Alison Naylor. Fiona Williams substituted for Stewart Debenham.

53. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 18th November 2022 were unanimously approved.

54. RESPONSE TO WRITTEN PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)

No questions were received from members of the public.

55. SACRE BUDGET ISSUES

The Chair noted that RE Today won the contract to be the RE advisor from September onwards.

Stephen Pett noted that RE Today applied and won the contract for three years with a possible rollover for the fourth and fifth years rather than having to formally bid again.

The Chair was extremely pleased that RE Today are continuing and commented that the quality of work is very high. The Chair was not informed that RE Today won the contract.

Cllr John Stone thanked Stephen Pett for the work that he and RE Today do.

The Chair noted that she had spoken with John Coleman (Democratic Services Manager) and told the board that SACRE would need to put forward a business case to receive more funding. The Chair confirmed that a new business case would be advanced and asked members for cooperation to help put a business case forward and be ready to be voted on at the next meeting.

Mark Harrington stated that he would support the process.

Geoff Sallis noted that he would also be happy to support the process to put forward a business case.

Mark Harrington reported that he attended NASACRE and noted that budgets across the country were underfunded and discussions were ongoing with government to address declining budgets.

Action: Mark Harrington and Geoff Sallis to assist with business case.

56. SACRE CONSTITUTION CHANGES

The Chair discussed the terms of reference in the Herefordshire Council constitution on SACRE and proposed that 'one free church representative nominated by Churches Together in Herefordshire' be changed to put one representative of the other Christian churches in the county.

Mark Harrington requested that denomination be put rather than churches.

Cllr John Stone agreed that denomination be used instead of churches.

Ruth Stanier noted that Quakers were mentioned twice in the constitution as they are listed separately and belong to Churches together. It was requested that Quakers be only listed once.

57. ADVICE REGARDING NEXT RE SYLLABUS

Stephen Pett explained the situation relating to the next RE syllabus.

1. It was explained that a local authority reviews its agreed syllabus every 5 years where SACRE raises that and then an agreed syllabus conference is held, a separate committee, to look at and put together a syllabus and recommend it to the local authority to adopt.
2. For the last two agreed syllabuses for Herefordshire, there was a license for an RE Today syllabus in which a license fee is paid per school to allow the use of the syllabus and this represents a more cost effective approach than spending the money on trying to develop a bespoke syllabus.

3. Currently, RE Today is working on a revision the current syllabus to build on the current practice and the idea would be to effectively keep the core of the syllabus the same, but to add adaptations, development, some additional elements that might emphasize more about world views, more about Ofsted's ideas of ways of knowing, and the idea of looking at different disciplines as well.
4. There is work being done between RE Today and another local authority on a more radical development of a syllabus which represents a bigger step change.
5. Stephen Pett summarised that the options are for Herefordshire to stick with what it currently has, whether it has a revision to the current syllabus, or whether it goes to a more slightly radical change.
6. There are also other options available which are not RE Today's syllabus which if the board wanted to view, then these could be presented as such options as well.

The Chair asked what the price difference of the different models were.

Stephen Pett pointed out that there is a licensing arrangement per school and they were the same when the different syllabus offerings were presented last time.

The Chair asked what the best method of being able to decide which syllabus is the one to go with.

Stephen Pett noted that updates would be provided at each stage and if discussions are had in the autumn and from Spring 2024, there will be draft options. The final decision will need to be made in Spring 2025 for a summer launch for a September start and there will be examples and example units to look at during this timeline.

Ruth Stanier asked whether it was already established which aspect of the syllabus is going to be changed and which are going to stay the same.

Stephen Pett responded that this was ongoing.

The Chair asked if a bespoke syllabus were chosen, how much it would roughly cost.

Stephen Pett responded that it would depend on how the board would want to create a new syllabus as it would involve teacher groups and the extent of the change that is wanted. Given the challenge of acquiring funding, it would cost more to create a bespoke syllabus because it would need to get teachers together and working parties would be needed, for example.

Cllr John Stone noted that financially, it would be better off going with the suggestions provided by Stephen Pett, on behalf of RE Today.

The Chair asked Tracy Westlake for her thoughts on the next RE syllabus from a teacher's perspective.

Tracy Westlake commented that a bespoke syllabus would require a lot of people who have a lot of time and that this may not be realistic at the moment because people are so stretched. Instead, it was thought that to have something be put together by professionals from across the UK would represent a more realistic option.

Jonathan Nicholas asked if the license fee would be a one-off payment or an annual payment, and whether understanding Christianity would still be part of the syllabus provided by RE Today.

Stephen Pett confirmed that it would be a one-off payment for the five years and that the revision of the current syllabus would continue to have a large number of the understanding Christianity units within it.

Mark Harrington asked if a Westhill award application would be considered in the future where SACREs are funded to put a piece of work together with several produced videos using local faith leaders as a resource for their schools and use that money that way.

The Chair noted that if it was for something other than the actual syllabus, we could.

Stephen Pett added that Shropshire SACRE has a resource which is about local faith community representatives, which was funded through the Westhill grant.

The board agreed and approved that the next syllabus is a revised version of the current syllabus and not a bespoke one.

58. WHAT CAN I DO FOR SACRE

The Chair asked members if they could consider what they could do to help support the board going forward, including the previously discussed issue of SACRE budget issues.

Cllr John Stone commented that he was more than prepared to at least one thing a year to help support the Chair and SACRE.

Peter Fawcett asked the Chair if she could let members know when she needed help that this would be useful as members could then contribute when necessary.

59. RE CONFERENCES

Stephen Pett gave a brief overview of the conferences held in 2023. The principal points included:

1. On the 22nd June, the secondary conference was held and 30 teachers attended including four Herefordshire teachers.
2. It was a good opportunity for teachers to meet up and share ideas as well as be given training.
3. In terms of feedback, the overall value of the conference was rated as 100% excellent.

The Chair noted that the conference was very interesting and that it was fast-paced and relevant to teenage children.

Cllr John Stone stated how pleasing it was that there were four Herefordshire teachers at the conference and that other members of SACRE are encouraged to attend to mix with the teachers who attend and hear about what is going on in the classroom as well.

The Chair reported that Stephen Pett was not in attendance at the primary conference due to illness and that feedback for the conference was not available. However, all the feedback was either excellent or good. The Chair asked Tracy Westlake for her thoughts on the conference.

Tracy Westlake commented that the conference was a great opportunity to get together and share ideas ranging from early years to year six.

Mark Harrington noted that there were good discussions regarding many different world views, covering a diversity of different faiths worldwide and thinking through how that's reflected and whether this is reflected properly, particularly in representing lived experience around the world.

The Chair asked members what they would like to see in the conferences for next year.

Mark Harrington responded that there are several very small schools that have mixed age classes, and it would be useful to think about how the curriculum can fit such classes.

Tracy Westlake noted she would be happy to share ideas on that point.

The Chair pointed out that if a workshop on Buddhism as the focus next year could be held that would be good as she could be involved with it.

Tracy Westlake added that multidisciplinary RE received positive feedback and suggested if this could be repeated at a conference next year.

The Chair asked for an update on the special needs conference opportunity because there was funding to hold one. It was asked if one could be held either in the summer or in the autumn next year.

Stephen Pett responded that RE Today would look into it.

The Chair commented that Tracy Westlake offered Black Marston School next summer to run a special needs conference, meaning that the venue was gifted for this specific use.

Action: Stephen Pett to look into the opportunity of holding a special needs conference next year.

60. NATIONAL SACRE UPDATES

Stephen Pett noted that there were no National SACRE updates to report to the board at this meeting.

Mark Harrington asked if there was training of being a SACRE member.

The Chair responded that National SACRE have started doing a training programme on Zoom and she would look at the pricing for these training sessions and pass on information to members by e-mail. The Chair asked Rebecca Bowen if money is ring-fenced for training, does that mean that that money can be used at any time over the next several years.

Rebecca Bowen answered that she could speak to Malcolm Green to find out and feed back to the Chair.

Action: Rebecca Bowen to contact Malcolm Green about whether finances for training is ring-fenced and whether this can be used at any time over the next several years.

61. NATIONAL RE UPDATES

Stephen Pett presented a newsletter for SACRE to members and recommended the RE Hubs website in which the focus of the RE Hubs is to try and coordinate things that are going on in the region and to make it accessible to teachers and schools to see where things are happening and what's going on.

Geoff Sallis added that the Humanist UK and Future Learn websites are good resources for those interested in learning more about humanism.

The Chair asked members where they have resources if they could pass details onto Tracy Westlake who can also pass them onto other teachers.

62. REPORT TIMINGS

The Chair asked Stephen Pett which reports are needed to be produced and at what time of the year they need to be worked on and then to which meeting they must be brought to SACRE.

Stephen Pett noted that the annual report, which must go to the DFE and National SACRE at the end of December. Therefore, this needs to be put together and approved at the November SACRE meeting before submission.

The Chair asked if any members were involved in education, whether they could send in a paragraph or a couple of pictures to add to the report.

The Chair also requested if an item on the next meeting's agenda could be added to look at feedback from schools on worship.

Mark Harrington agreed that it would be useful to know how many schools have withdrawals from worship and should be able to know from the questionnaires sent out to schools.

The Chair asked Rebecca Bowen if the school's officer sends out any information regarding to RE.

Rebecca Bowen answered that a standard newsletter is sent out to schools fortnightly which encapsulate any updates, but in terms of RE specifically, it was noted that this would be taken away to find out.

63. VOTING OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR

The Chair noted that the position of chairperson is to be voted on every four years after the local elections and after speaking with John Coleman, Democratic Services Manager, the Chair requested that a vote be held in the November SACRE meeting for continuity with respect to the school year. It was added that this would be checked and he would get back to the Chair on this.

The Chair added that this would also be the case for the vice-chairperson position and asked members if any would like to be considered for chair or vice-chair, then they should contact either the Chair or the Democratic Services Officer.

64. AOB

The Chair asked members if there was any other business or news that members wanted to cover before the meeting was closed.

Mark Harrington announced that St Thomas Cantilupe CE Primary School had earned its Silver RE quality mark and is one of the few in the county to attain this award.

65. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

17th November 2023, 14:00-17:00

15th March 2024, 14:00-17:00

The meeting ended at 4.11 pm

Chairperson