

**MINUTES of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford HR1 1SH on Monday 28 March 2011 at 2.00 pm**

**Present:** Councillor WU Attfield (Chairman)

**Mrs C Ault, Revd. P. Barlow, Mrs S Bryant, Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins, Venerable Tsultrim Tenzin Choesang, Mrs A Daniel, Ms. K. Mayglothling, Rev DT Meachem, Sr. D. O'Donnell, Mr Z Pandor and Miss A Taylor**

**In attendance:** Councillors WLS Bowen (Chairman, Children's Services Scrutiny Committee)

**52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor J Stone (Chairman), Mrs L Barker, Mr P Bowen, Councillor Brig P Jones CBE, Mrs G Jutle and Ms C Wolfe.

**53. NAMED SUBSTITUTES**

There were no named substitutes.

**54. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held 22 November 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**55. RESPONSE TO WRITTEN PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No written questions had been received.

**56. SACRE MEMBERSHIP**

SACRE were informed of three changes to the membership.

SACRE welcomed Reverend David Meachem, leader of the Methodist circuit of Herefordshire, to Group A; Mrs Angela Daniel as the full voting Member to represent Primary School Teachers on Group C, and Miss Allyson Taylor, Headteacher, St Mary's Fownhope, as non-voting co-opted teaching Member.

**RESOLVED:** That the changes to the membership be noted.

**57. NEW AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RE - UPDATE**

SACRE received an update on the production of the new Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

The Lead Officer for SACRE reported that on 22 November 2010 the Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus Conference had unanimously recommended the new Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education to the Local Authority. The Local Authority had subsequently agreed the new syllabus for introduction into schools from September 2011.

SACRE wished to place on record its appreciation to everyone that had contributed to the new Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education. SACRE particularly thanked Stephen Pett, the Consultant for RE, for his technical advice and excellent work in drafting the new Agreed Syllabus for RE.

The Lead Officer reported that the new Agreed Syllabus was at the final proof stage and would very shortly be sent to the printers. Due to financial constraints the work had to be resourced from the 20010/11 budget. The Syllabus would be printed as a booklet with one copy being provided to each of the schools. The new Syllabus, together with supporting guidance material, would also be made available via dedicated RE web pages within the Council's website. Schools would therefore have easy access to the Syllabus should they need to download or print sections. She thanked schools for providing appropriate photographs for inclusion, however, they had not been included for technical reasons.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**58. SACRE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2011**

SACRE received an update on arrangements being made for the SACRE Annual Conference 2011 on 8 June at the Queen Elizabeth Humanities College, Bromyard.

The Lead Officer for SACRE reminded Members that in order to support teachers in preparing to plan RE for September 2011 in line with the revised Agreed Syllabus the 2011 SACRE Annual Conference had been brought forward so that the event could be used to launch the new Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education.

She commented that the Queen Elizabeth Humanities College, Bromyard had kindly offered to host the event. The event would open with a four minute 'power meditation' lead by the Venerable Tsultrim Tenzin Choesang.

In relation to resources she reported that the Children's Services Directorate workforce development strategy manager had agreed to provide a subsidy for the event as a contribution to the statutory development requirement. No free places may be allocated other than to official speakers and each delegate would be charged in the region of £100, however, this may be slightly reduced if a high number of delegates register and attend the conference.

On conference day early registration will be essential (8.40am) so as not to interfere with the working of the school.

Arising from debate on the format for the Conference SACRE noted that it was the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the authorised King James Version of the Christian Bible, started 1606 and completed in 1611. SACRE were also reminded that Canon Miles Smith (1554-1624) of Hereford Cathedral was involved in the translation of the King James Version of the Bible and composed the preface which accompanies the authorised version. Mrs Daniel reported that she had submitted a short article concerning the anniversary to the Hereford Times and that many of the diocesan schools would be marking the event.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**59. SACRE BUDGET 2011/12**

SACRE received an outline of the 2011/12 budgetary position.

The Lead Officer for SACRE reported that all Council budgets were under severe pressure and further uncertainty had arisen following recent government changes to reflect budgets for Academies and Free Schools. She confirmed that SACRE would have a budget in 2011/12 but that the actual figure was still to be confirmed. She anticipated that it was likely to be slightly lower than the 2009/10 figure. The 2010/11 figure had been uplifted slightly to take account of the work associated with the new Agreed Syllabus. If that was the case then the limited resources would need to be used to support SACRE's role of monitoring and supporting schools in their delivery of RE and she recommended that this could best be achieved through employing the RE Consultant to work with schools and teacher network groups. There would be very little flexibility to support other activities.

SACRE debated the resources involved in supporting teacher network meetings and how the increased use of websites could reduce the pressure on resources. A comment was made regarding the possibility of developing video conferences for network meetings thereby enabling a wider audience to travel smaller distances to a centre with video conference facility. SACRE noted that only a limited number of schools currently have video conferencing facilities.

**RESOLVED: that**

- a) **the report be noted and it was agreed that the use of the 2011/12 budget be focused on monitoring and supporting schools in their delivery of RE.**
- b) **the possibility of some network group meetings being conducted via video conferencing be kept under review.**

**60. NASACRE/WESTHILL AWARDS 2011/12**

SACRE's support was sought in submitting a funding bid to NASACRE/Westhill Awards 2011/12 for a Local Young Inter-Faith project.

The Consultant for RE reported that the Westhill Foundation Trustees had again allocated a sum of money for further awards to SACREs of up to £5,000 during the academic year 2011/12 for projects comparable to the previous young Inter-Faith projects.

In the very short time available a bid had been compiled by the Herefordshire Multi-faith Development Group, lead by Mrs Joyce Mackley, for funding towards:

- running a conference event to bring together secondary aged students from two predominantly Muslim Birmingham schools (Bordesley Green and Al Hijrah) and at least 2 schools from rural Herefordshire (Wigmore and Fairfield High Schools in the first instance).
- The event would develop compelling learning activities for use in the conference and beyond through using a consultant to work with teachers (i.e. RE subject leaders at the participating schools) and with faith community workshop leaders. The aim would be to develop activities which would:
  - Engage students as they explore things they have in common and recognise differences;
  - Stimulate interaction between students helping to break down barriers; and
  - Enable participants to share insights on the theme of "Where is the meaning in my life?"
- The project would also disseminate the compelling activities and guidance developed in the course of the project to other schools, so that they might organise similar events in their schools.

The meeting noted that in accordance with the requirements of the bid process a provisional outline of the funding requirements had been included. Also as part of the bid Herefordshire SACRE may need to allocate additional consultant time to support the activities as needed, beyond those stated in the bid. The reimbursement of the consultant travel expenses would also be supported to enable his participation in local meetings.

Members commented that due to the predominantly rural nature of the County, students had extremely limited opportunities to engage with other faith communities and therefore this project should be supported whole heartedly.

Comment was made that while there were very knowledgeable people in the faith community they also needed to have the capability and confidence to engage with students. The fact that the project would also disseminate the compelling activities and guidance developed in the course of the project to schools and faith community workshop leaders was also highly commended.

The Buddhist Member particularly noted that Buddhism had not been included in the proposed activities for students indicated in the proposed project details.

**RESOLVED: that the funding application to NASACRE/Westhill Awards 2011/12 be approved.**

## **61. GOVERNMENT EDUCATION STRATEGY- IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

SACRE received an update on the latest position concerning the government education strategy and considered possible implications for Religious Education.

The Lead Officer for SACRE reported that the Secretary of State had set up an expert group to review the National Curriculum. Religious Education had not been included in the remit for the review as the Secretary of State had stated that the exclusion was due to the nature of the programmes of study which were agreed locally. It had also been stated by the Department for Education that in the remit for the review the Government did not intend to make any changes to the statutory basis for religious education. Academies and Free Schools will retain the freedom they have currently to depart from aspects of the National Curriculum but they will be required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum. Current understanding is that this will include the Locally Agreed Syllabus for RE.

The Consultant for RE commented that, from his knowledge, a number of the concerns listed in the agenda report were already materialising. Unless there was clear and unambiguous government guidance, there was a strong temptation for secondary schools and academies to focus on the Humanities subjects of history and geography that would improve their performance outcomes, reported under the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), rather than teach RE since the Secretary of State proposed that RE is not included as an eligible subject. He also questioned whether there was in fact a need to raise the status of Geography and History through the EBacc as was currently intended. The number of entrants to RE teacher training was already down and may reduce further if the status of RE within the curriculum was further eroded. He was aware that within weeks of the government's EBacc announcement a number of schools had plans to reduce their teaching provision for RE from September 2011.

SACRE debated the fact that Religious Studies had not been included in the list of eligible humanities subjects and questioned whether government had missed the point that current day teaching of RE covers, not just what is in the Bible, but makes a

valuable contribution to a person's breadth of knowledge, values and understanding. RE teaching could contribute to a major element of the government's Big Society agenda.

SACRE noted that the NASACRE website contains further information and template letters to local Members of Parliament on the E Bacc issue, requesting that MPs support an Early Day Motion to get the issue debated in parliament and lobby the Department for Education to have the place of RE assured by having it included as an eligible subject in the English Baccalaureate. SACRE agreed that the local MP's be requested to support the Early Day Motion. It was also noted that the Bishop of Hereford was taking a keen interest in view of his position in the House of Lords.

**RESOLVED: that**

- a) **the Chairman write to the local Members of Parliament to request that they support the national lobbying of the Department for Education to have the place of RE assured by having it included in the English Baccalaureate;**
- b) **individual members of SACRE be encouraged to lobby their own MP on the issue; and**
- c) **SACRE be kept informed of any further developments concerning Religious Education arising from changes to the government's education strategy.**

**62. PROVISION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS 2010-2011**

SACRE considered the findings following the School Improvement Partnership (SIP) survey into schools provision for RE.

In presenting the agenda report the Lead Officer for SACRE reported that unfortunately the response rate from schools had been low, however, she appreciated that the School Improvement Partners (SIPs) had needed to cover a wide range of issues when visiting schools and had not always been able to include the RE questions in all the interviews.

In relation to the primary school sector she reported that there was evidence of extremely good RE teaching being delivered, not always by specialist teachers, with most teachers in the survey showing great commitment to the subject.

In relation to the secondary school sector in recent years there had been a high level of entry to GCSE examinations. She had ascertained that of the 13 high schools: one had not responded; one would not be, and one was unclear about, entering students for RE examination. There remains at this stage a high level of commitment to the subject with a good number of committed and dedicated specialist teachers. So far little change in the subject status had been detected at a local level.

A number of schools had changed, or were in the process of changing, to academy status and their commitment to teaching RE would need to be kept under review.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted.**

**63. MINDFULNESS IN SCHOOLS PROJECT**

SACRE noted the Venerable Tsuiltrim Tenzin Choesang's involvement in the 'Mindfulness in Schools Project.

Venerable Tsuiltrim Tenzin Choesang informed SACRE that she is going to undertake a course in The Mindfulness in Schools Project with the intention that she become the local teacher and co-ordinator for mindfulness. The Mindfulness in Schools Project is a non-profit organisation whose aim is to engage, support and research the teaching of

secular mindfulness in schools. She would provide further information on the project to a future meeting.

**RESOLVED: That the report be noted and further information be provided to a future meeting.**

**64. FUTURE MEETING DATES**

SACRE noted the future meeting dates as listed in the agenda.

**65. LATE ITEM - POSSIBLE NOMINATION TO NASACRE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Chairman allowed the late item on the grounds that any nomination had to be made before 20th April 2011.

The Venerable Tsuiltrim Tenzin Choesang requested at the meeting that she be considered for nomination to the Executive Committee of the National Association of SACRE (NASACRE).

The Clerk's representative confirmed that nominations to the Executive needed to be signed by the Chairman and submitted by 20 April. It was currently unclear whether there would be any resource implication for SACRE in making the nomination and in view of the earlier report on the severe resource limitations he recommended that, subject to further investigations and there being no implications for Herefordshire SACRE, the nomination be supported.

**RESOLVED: That subject to there being no resource implications to Herefordshire SACRE the nomination of The Venerable Tsuiltrim Tenzin Choesang to the NASACRE Executive Committee be supported.**

The meeting ended at 3.41 pm

**CHAIRMAN**