

MINUTES of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) held at The Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Monday 29 June 2009 at 2.00 pm

Present: Councillor J Stone (Chairman)

Councillor WU Attfield, Mrs C Ault, Mrs L Barker, Revd. P. Barlow, Mr. P. Bowen, Mrs A Daniel, Mr T Leach, Sr. D. O'Donnell and Ms C Wolfe

In attendance: Councillor WLS Bowen (Chairman of Children's Services Scrutiny Committee)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Brigadier P Jones CBE, Mrs G Jutle, Mrs S McCamley and Mrs K Mayglothling.

2. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no substitutions made.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2009 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

4. RESPONSE TO WRITTEN PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No written questions were received from the public.

5. WELCOME TO CHERRY WOLFE MEMBER FOR THE JEWISH FAITH COMMUNITY

The Chairman welcomed Cherry Wolfe, a representative of the Jewish Community, to her first meeting of SACRE.

The Chairman informed the committee that Mrs Gurmit Jutle had recently completed training in SACRE membership and had been awarded a certificate from NASACRE which would be passed on. The Chairman emphasised the importance of training for SACRE members and offered his congratulations to Mrs Jutle.

6. NASACRE AND QCA UPDATE

The consultant for RE informed the committee that Herefordshire had not been represented at the NASACRE AGM held during June so was unable to provide any feedback.

The consultant for RE then went on to inform SACRE that she had completed a national interfaith questionnaire on their behalf. The consultant also informed Members that she would be attending a consultation focus group in July concerning the ongoing curriculum reviews.

7. FUNDING FOR FUTURE MULTI-FAITH EVENTS

The Chairman informed the meeting that thanks to the initiative of the headteacher of Holmer primary school, there would be a further multi faith event for children this year. The Chairman further informed members that he had contacted the Local Authority's Director of Children's Services to enquire about the local authority contributing to the funding of future events, as funding for the next financial year was not yet secure. He added that a bid (by the Multifaith Group who run these events) for funding had been made to the Faiths in Action Fund.

Regarding the issue of securing funding for the next financial year, the Chairman said that it would be necessary to draft a business plan and submit it for consideration before September as budgets for Children's Services are determined in the autumn of each year.

The Chairman added that he felt it was important to invite County Councillors to a multi faith event so that their positive message is spread throughout the county. The meeting agreed that this was a good way to enhance the profile of such events.

Mrs A Daniel commented that schools found it hard to accept that there was no money available for such a vitally important event and she expressed concern that the Children's Services directorate did not value these events more highly. She added that multi faith events are a cutting edge approach towards delivering the Every Child Matters agenda and significantly promote community cohesion. The committee shared the concerns voiced by Mrs Daniel and were keen to see this funding shortfall addressed at the highest level within the directorate.

The Primary School Improvement Manager said that she would create a business plan to submit to the Director of Children's Services to ask for funding. She added that the plan would need to be robust and would call on members of SACRE to help draft its content. Councillor WLS Bowen, observing the meeting in his capacity as Children's Services Scrutiny Committee Chairman said that he would also raise this matter within the directorate.

RESOLVED That

- (a) The Primary School Improvement Manager drafts a robust and compelling business plan, with input from SACRE, bidding for funding to host multi faith events in future; and**
- (b) Members of Herefordshire Council are invited to attend multi-faith events in future**

8. FUNDING FOR SACRE

The Primary School Improvement Manager explained that in previous financial years SACRE had enjoyed a budget uplift and that this year an increase had not been received. She added that a business plan for the financial year 2010/11 would need to be written to make a case for the uplift to be reintroduced. She informed SACRE that significant funds would be required in order to carry out the syllabus review during this financial year 2009/2010 and in 2010/11.

The Chairman expressed his regret at the budget situation due to the difficult financial context. He said that all Local Authorities are in a similar situation but would again make the case to the director.

The Primary School Improvement Manger informed SACRE that even though the budget uplift had not been received the syllabus had to be reviewed. Therefore the number of days the authority could employ the consultant in RE work would be reduced. This would inevitably impact on what could be achieved in this academic year.

RESOLVED That The Primary Schools Improvement Manager drafts a compelling business plan bidding for funding for SACRE/ RE provision during the financial year 2010/11.

9. RE IN THE CURRICULUM - CONSULTATION DOCUMENTS FOR DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK

The Consultant for RE set the scene regarding the ongoing national reviews of primary education. She reported that one of SACRE's key roles was to advise the Local Authority on RE provision in accordance with the agreed syllabus. She reminded SACRE that RE was the one curriculum area that is required by law but determined and delivered locally and that this provision, through the Locally Agreed Syllabus, is subject to review every five years.

The consultant went on to explain that a national consultation was currently underway on the final report of the Rose Review of the Primary curriculum and the role of RE within it, and on the paper 'RE in English Schools: Non Statutory Guidance 2009' - a review of the government guidance on RE (formerly known as circular 1/94) Changes arising from these will take effect from September 2011. These proposals will impact on the review the Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus to begin in Autumn 09 as the syllabus would need to take account of the new primary school curriculum.

Members were then taken through the detailed consultation responses drafted by the Consultant for RE and various points were discussed. The consultant informed members that the new guidance would replace government circular number 1/94 which was in need of updating.

After a brief discussion, SACRE agreed with the responses drafted by the Consultant and asked that they be formally submitted by the Clerk to QCA who were carrying out the survey on behalf of the DCSF. In particular the discussion focused on how the progression statements in the draft Programme of Learning for Religious Education in the primary school appeared to be dominated by "learning about" religion (AT1) outcomes. SACRE expressed their concern at this.

They also felt that the issue of funding for SACREs, as a statutory body, had not been adequately addressed in the new RE guidance (RE in English Schools: Non Statutory Guidance 2009'). Whilst the document made it clear that Local Authorities were required to 'fund a SACRE and an ASC satisfactorily in line with the duty to convene each of these bodies' it did not make it clear how a Local Authority could do this.

The consultant went on to explain the significance of the new Primary Curriculum for Religious Education. She said that six key area of learning had been identified in the document and that RE was not explicitly referred to in any area. This anomaly was due to the unique status of RE. The report focused only on the National Curriculum subjects. RE is part of the Basic Curriculum required in all schools, but, as it is determined locally, it is not part of the National Curriculum.

SACRE expressed their concern that Religious Education would be overlooked and may be marginalised in the new curriculum and they asked that this concern be expressed in their response to the consultation. SACRE also expressed concern that the statutory position of RE in the school curriculum had not been stated clearly in the report. They agreed that members should inform as many colleagues in the RE field as possible

about the consultation so that this important document is responded to as widely as possible. Members also requested that a strongly worded letter be written to the QCA outlining their concerns as soon as possible.

RESOLVED That

(a) the responses to the two consultations be submitted to the QCA; and

(b) A Letter be drafted to the QCA highlighting SACRE's concerns.

10. FEEDBACK FROM THE AGREED SYLLABUS ALIGNMENT GROUP MEETING

The Consultant for RE informed the meeting that QCA had invited a number of local authorities who are about to review their agreed syllabuses to work with it to demonstrate how the proposed non statutory national guidance for RE can be implemented at the local level in a variety of ways. The RE consultant had attended the first of these meeting on behalf of Herefordshire.

11. RE PROVISION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AGREED SYLLABUS

The Chairman informed the meeting that a request for RE GCSE exam entry levels had been sent out to all secondary schools. He highlighted that there is a statutory obligation for all school aged children to follow a course in RE until the age of 19 (when in maintained sixth forms).

The Primary School Improvement Manger gave a breakdown of the examination courses followed in Herefordshire High Schools. She reported that the majority of high schools did follow either a short or long course GCSE in RE and that some students opted to study towards a certificate qualification in RE. At the time of the meeting there were currently a number of schools yet to provide the information. There was a concern that not all High schools offered accredited courses for all students – as required by the Agreed Syllabus.

SACRE felt that the authority should provide a reminder to schools highlighting the importance of Religious Education to all pupils. The Primary Schools Improvement Manager agreed to send a letter to schools as soon as possible.

RESOLVED: That the Primary School Improvement Manger sends a letter to all schools reminding staff of their obligation concerning the provision of Religious Education.

12. REVIEW OF THE SACRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Primary School Improvement Manger informed SACRE that as the Consultant for RE's days of work were reduced for this financial year she would be undertaking a review of the SACRE Development Plan herself. She mentioned the possibility of convening a working group that would need to meet next spring. This work would be shared with the March meeting of SACRE ready for a draft to be written soon after.

RESOLVED: That the Primary Schools Improvement Manager undertake preliminary work on updating the SACRE Development Plan and report to the March meeting of SACRE.

13. SACRE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2009 - UPDATE

The Consultant for RE informed the meeting that this years Annual Conference would be taking place on 24 September and it was anticipated that promotion for the event would start within days. The event would be taking place at Hedley Lodge in Belmont and all schools would be targeted as potential attendees. The Primary School Improvement Manager said that a "2 for 1" offer on tickets would be offered to encourage a higher level of attendance and this could be justified in terms of cost. The event would run between 8.45 am and 3.30 pm and had been very successful in previous years.

Members agreed that this event should be publicised widely amongst teaching colleagues, school governors and members of the religious community.

14. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DVDS PRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS' OF RE

The Consultant for RE introduced the meeting to the promotional films made by The National Association of Teachers of RE which were available for free download from their website (www.natre.org.uk). She highlighted that the films had been made with the assistance of pupils and staff from a number of Herefordshire schools.

After viewing clips of the DVD films, members agreed that they should be publicised to all county schools as they were a celebration of excellence. The Primary School Improvement Manger added that she would write to schools advising how the DVD could be obtained.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

SACRE noted that the next meeting would be held at Brockington on Tuesday 1 December 2009 at 2.00pm.

Immediately following the next SACRE meeting, there would be the first meeting of the Herefordshire Agreed Syllabus Conference.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm

CHAIRMAN