

**Minutes of the meeting of Standing advisory council for religious education (SACRE) held at Committee Room 1 - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Friday 17 March 2017 at 2.00 pm**

**Present:** Councillor J Stone (Chairman)

Carolyn Ault, Venerable Tsultrim Tenzin Choesang, EPJ Harvey, MT McEvelly, Anna Nugent and Hannah Tong

**Officers:** John Coleman, Lisa Fraser and Stephen Pett

**11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Midge Ault, Sr. D O'Donnell, Mrs G Jutle, Mrs C Wolfe, Mrs M Williams, Mrs S Bryant, Mrs L Barker, Mrs A Daniel, Mrs S Catlow-Hawkins, Ms K Mayglothling and Miss A Taylor.

**12. NAMED SUBSTITUTES (IF ANY)**

Mr. C Ault for Mrs M. Ault.

**13. MINUTES**

Two amendment were requested. In item 5 - the date of 2016 be inserted alongside the conference details relating to the cancelled conference at Whitecross School. At page 9 – to insert the title 'Understanding Christianity' in relation to the major project and project materials that had been launched.

**Resolved:** That, subject to the above amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2016 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**14. RESPONSE TO WRITTEN PUBLIC QUESTIONS (IF ANY)**

None received

**15. CHAIRMAN UPDATE**

The Chairman noted:

That as part of the council's constitutional review, a new process has been agreed in regard to appointing SACRE Chairs. In future, the chairman of SACRE will be elected by SACRE members.

That SACRE had received a freedom of information request on 22 November seeking information on the role of external religious visitors to schools. The central theme of the request related to recognising the valuable contribution external groups and speakers make to educational development. But alongside this, noting that the National Secular Society does receive complaints about groups misusing access to schools for inappropriate proselytization.

The SACRE response was issued within the timeframes required by the Freedom of Information Act 2000. In response to one of the questions, SACRE had provided information on their guidance on Religious Education Visits and Visitors produced by SACRE in 2006.

The chairman invited SACRE members to explore the need to update this guidance. The following principal points were made in response:

- It was broadly agreed that the guidance would benefit from being updated. For example, by including information on the safeguarding responsibility schools have for their pupils.
- It was highlighted that the details in the report of key contacts for places of worship were very likely to now be out of date. Teachers frequently ask for contact lists so there is a need to ensure that accurate records exist.
- It was noted that Worcestershire is updating their guide, there would be helpful benefits by sharing and coordinating effort.
- SACRE members were advised of a request for volunteers being asked for in Herefordshire, this could helpful be included in the refreshed guidance.
- It was noted that there was a small amount of budget that could be drawn upon to assist in updating the guidance from the Children's Wellbeing Commissioning Management Education team.
- The approach to updating the guidance – if it is resolved to do this - could be undertaken by outsourcing the process of updating the guidance to local schools.

**Resolved:**

- a. That the refreshed guidance would be outsourced to a local school(s) for updating;**
- b. That updates to the report should be circulated via correspondence between SACRE members over the coming months;**
- c. That lists of volunteers should be sent through to the Head of Learning and Achievement;**

- d. That SACRE members should meet in late summer to review the updated guidance in preparation to agree and sign it off at the November SACRE meeting.

## 16. PLANS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT 2017

The Chairman thanked Cllr McEvilly for collating a list of local schools attendance records from previous primary and secondary conferences. This has helped to identify and target attendance at the future conference being planned for June 2017.

This year's Primary RE Conference will be themed around '*Thoughtful RE: preparing pupils for life*'. There will be two conferences, one in Worcestershire (19, June 2017) and one in Herefordshire (20, June 2017). Teachers from either county can attend either conference. The conference is designed to support schools in planning and teaching great RE and will focus on practical classroom ideas and strategies exploring ways in which to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain.

This year's Secondary RE Conference will be themed around '*Bringing the new RE GCSE to life*'. It will be themed around providing practical ideas of how to engage students in RE – with a focus on meeting the demands of the new curriculum. It will also deal with tackling Islamophobia, effectively teaching Islam and an opportunity to deepen knowledge in areas such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. It was noted that eighteen teachers had signed up to this conference, with a target of eighty attendees.

The Chairman's thanked colleagues for their continued support and re-iterated the value of the conferences. It was noted that uptake for the 2017 conferences had been slow to date and that it was important to have good attendance. In inviting comments, the following principal points were made:

- The 2015 primary conferences were hugely successful. It was considered that the content of the 2015 conferences were so useful, many teachers may have thought it unnecessary to attend the conferences in 2016. It was queried whether having the conferences every year may be too frequent, would every two years be more appropriate?
- It was suggested that school budgets are becoming ever more pressurised and this may be deterring some head teachers from encouraging attendance. Approaching head teachers, school governors, including the chair, should be considered to reinforce the value of attending the conferences. Making it clear that governors are also welcome to attend.
- A further way to target some schools may be to examine whether they had received weak OFSTED or Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools reports in regard to their religious education. The conferences may prove helpful in assisting those schools to address those weaknesses.
- A question was raised in relation to including information on the conferences with the primary survey, which will be sent out after the second week in Easter. This would helpfully raise awareness.
- A further question was raised as to whether the conferences were open to faith visitors – it was confirmed that they were.

**Resolved that:**

- **Information on the primary and secondary conferences will be sent to the Head of Learning and Achievement (Lisa Fraser) and circulated electronically with the primary survey.**

**17. DRAFT SACRE ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR SEPTEMBER 2015 TO JULY 2016**

The Chairman noted that due to SACRE not being quorate at their last meeting, SACRE members were unable to approve the annual report at the last meeting.

The Chairman moved that SACRE member approve the draft report which Councillor McEvilly seconded. The committee voted unanimously to approve the draft report.

**Resolved that: the draft SACRE annual report for the academic year September 2015 to July 2016 be approved.**

**18. UPDATE ON ANY NEW INITIATIVES IN RE**

The BIG National Advisory of Standing Advisory Councils (NASACRE) RE survey was highlighted. NASACRE have indicated that they would like SACRE's to offer a collective response. There emerging view that local SACREs represent a defunct advisory system and instead a national system on advising Local Education Authorities on the RE syllabus is advocated. The NASACRE position is that the network of local SACREs remain the most appropriate bodies to advise on local RE teaching matters. NASACRE wish to test this assumption through their Big Survey.

It was not proposed to go through the survey question in detail at this meeting, there were some general discussion points that SACRE members were invited to consider. These largely related to whether SACRE members advocate a move a national syllabus or stay with locally agreed advice to LEAs.

The following principal discussion points were raised:

- It was noted that the SACRE view has tended to favour local advice, over national. National syllabus setting has its merits – for example – in creating more consistent approaches to RE teaching. But this shouldn't remove the local influence of SACRE over RE teaching.
- It was suggested that moving to a national syllabus gives responsibility to the Education Secretary. This could leave RE teaching vulnerable to being cut from the curriculum. Currently this cannot be done because the syllabus is set locally.
- A consensus emerged and support offered for the notion that there should be a national core, while keeping local influence. It was suggested that teachers feel more ownership over a syllabus that has been developed locally.
- It was highlighted that SACRE places strong emphasis in bringing different religions together. Keeping a broader view of religion in our local education

system was felt to be important in preparing young people for the world. This was deemed particularly significant in Herefordshire where multiculturalism is less apparent.

- There was a suggestion that SACRE has become less influential as a result of cuts in SACRE budgets. SACRE – it was suggested – is not able to be as influential with less financial resource.
- It was noted that it remains a statutory function for local authorities to support SACRE. SACRE is a permanent body to advise the Local Education Authority (LEA) on matters concerned with the provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship.

**Resolved that:**

- a. The BIG NASACRE RE survey be circulated to SACRE members with proposed comments and responses to the questions being sent to Stephen Pett for coordinating a final SACRE response**
- b. Responses from SACRE members by 3 April**

**19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- A concern was noted that attendance at SACRE meetings was falling. A question was raised as to whether different meeting times might be helpful to consider to accommodate wider work commitments that members may have.
- An interfaith group has been established between Herefordshire and Worcestershire to run a peace service. The first event will be in Herefordshire this year, with a further event being held in Worcester next year.

**Resolved that:**

- **The Chairman would draft an email to members to explore what is preventing them from attending meetings**
- **Details of the interfaith group events would be circulated to SACRE members**

**20. DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

- 17 November, 2017
- 16 March, 2018

The meeting ended at 3.28 pm

**Chairman**