

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Wednesday 13 March 2024

PRESENT:

Present: Cllr Tess Blight (TB, Chair), Cllr Sue Dann (CSD), Cllr Chip Tofan (CCT), Cllr Tina Touhy (CTT), Cllr John Mahony (CJM), Cllr Sally Cresswell (CSC), Dr Judith Beckman (DJB, Jewish Community), Arezoo Farahzad (AF, Baha'i Community), Bhai Gurmit Singh (BGS, Sikh Community), Claire Wills (CW, Special Schools), Dr Ian Jamison (DIJ, Teacher of RS - Plympton Academy), Muhunthiny Sivasothy (MS, Hindu Community), Chaz Singh (CS, Co-optee Sikh Rep), Jasmin Rhead (JR, NEU, All Saints), Deborah Temple (DT, Co-opted Jewish Community rep), Asif Siddique (AS, SACRE coordinator), Ed Pawson (EP, Advisor to Plymouth SACRE).

Attended remotely: Katie Freeman (KF, Vice Chair, Diocesan Board of Exeter), Gwen Hughes (GH, NEU), Kerry Wardle (KW, DHSB), Father David Bailey (FDB, Observer, School Governor), Michael House (MH, PCC Education Officer)

Apologies for absence: Reverend David Evans (DE, Baptist Church), Professor David Salter (PDS, Quaker Community), Nic Gibson (NG, Pagan Community), Sara Wells (SW, PCFCD), Dr Catherine Bowness (DCB, Diocesan Board of Exeter), Giles Freathy (GF, Marjon, RE Lecturer), Lesley Clark (LC, Roman Catholic Diocese), Tatiana Wilson (Church of England).

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 4.10 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

1. Welcome (Chair)

Chair welcomed the following new SACRE members and informed that Ben Kerr (Humanist UK rep) has recently resigned.

Dr Ian Jamison – DIJ has been involved in RE teaching and leadership since 1991. His departments have been recognised as successful examples of best practice. He has written text books, worked as an examiner, as well as representing the Pagan Federation on Devon SACRE. He has also worked on a global dialogue programme - connecting young people for meaningful dialogue on issues of belief and identity across 30 countries. He is currently teaching RE at Plympton Academy.

Jasmin Rhead – JR has taught and led RE for 14 years and is the head of Global Studies at All Saints Academy in Plymouth and the Lead Teach Learn RE secondary hub leader for Plymouth.

Muhunthiny Sivasothy – MS is a Hindu representative and a businesswoman, originally from Sri Lanka and has experience of giving talks on Hindu religion in schools via PCFCD. MS has also undertaken SACRE related training recently.

Bhai Gurmit Singh – BGS is a retired civil servant and chair of Sikh Community Devon & Cornwall. He has previously been a member and chair of the equality & diversity committees in the Civil service along with being a school governor, faith speaker and REC committee member. He is a police diversity and interfaith contact and SACRE committee member for Devon. BGS has also been very

active with refugees, local community and overseas workers/ students in his advisory, support and advocacy roles.

Arezoo Farahzad – AF represents the Bahá'í Community of Plymouth and is also chair of trustees for Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD). In her PCFCD capacity, she collaborates with Sara Wells (Centre Manager), Councillor Sue Dann (fellow Trustee), Dr Judith Beckman and Deborah Temple (Faith Speakers) and Professor David Salter (Voluntary Trustee).

Deborah Temple – DT is a committee member and trustee of Plymouth Hebrew Congregation (The Plymouth Synagogue). For almost five years, DT has been visiting primary schools in the City and surrounding areas, giving talks on Judaism.

Kerry Wardle – KW is joint head of religious studies at Devonport High School for Boys and has been teaching RE there for the last 22 years.

Father David Bailey – FDB is a Parish priest in Honicknowle and school governor at Knowle's Primary School and Shakespeare Primary School. He has been involved in education at various levels from a Christian Church based point of view. During most of his ministry, which is over 40 years now he has enjoyed supporting schools in collective worship, conducting assemblies and supporting religious education.

SACRE members unanimously accepted DT as a co-opted member representing Jewish Community.

EP elaborated on the role of SACRE as a plural body, which represents diversity in all sorts of areas, hence the recent membership drive from various groups taking place. EP also highlighted that nationally, there is a crisis going on about Interfaith Network and it is due to close next month after losing government funding. EP commended SACRE and its breadth, and urged to keep it strong locally. He further stressed that SACRE has a wider role than its role within schools.

2. **Apologies (Asif Siddique)**

As above

3. **Welcome & Introduction to New Members (Chair)**

Please see Agenda Item 'Welcome (Chair)'

4. **Declarations of Interest (Chair)**

No declarations of interest were made.

5. **Review of Previous Minutes & Actions (Chair)**

The Committee agreed that minutes from the last meeting held on 7 November 2023 were an accurate record of meeting.

6. **Chair's Urgent Business (Chair)**

CS joined the meeting at 1.55 pm.

Regarding the removal of government funding for the Interfaith Network CS suggested to writing a letter from Plymouth SACRE to reflect our disappointed.

He enquired if a letter has gone from Devon Interfaith Police Forum. EP said that a couple of letters have already gone out and we can use the same template for the letter. AS to co-ordinate for this letter to be sent out. EP to write to MP too.

7. **Plymouth Agreed Syllabus (Ed Pawson)**

In Plymouth, the launch of agreed syllabus event is going to take place on 19th June (09:30 – 15:15) in the Council House. The final version will be completed by the end of March 2024.

Along with Plymouth, events are taking place in Bideford (North Devon), Exeter and another online event and, teachers across this region can come to any of those events. The event in Bideford will take place on 17th June and the one in Exeter is on 18th June. The price is £110 for teachers to come to that event, but there are reductions for people in smaller schools and also for who are in large school groupings where many teachers are coming from one school or grouping.

There'll be ongoing INSET training, LTLRE events, both local hub meetings and a conference. Plymouth LA has agreed to pay for the syllabus at £35 per school and a significant proportion of this cost is expected to be recouped through the 'paid for' launch events.

Devon education services will be organising the bookings and people can book into any of the three in person events or the online event through the Devon education [website](#).

The syllabus will be sent to all schools on the 20th of June. All schools will have access to the service from the 20th of June. We are slightly late as schools are currently planning and querying about the changes but due to unavailability of RE Today consultants we had to go for the June dates.

MH highlighted that Plymouth SACRE had agreed in the previous meetings to fund the various aspect of the conference.

CW commented that from special schools' perspective that have children with severe and profound learning difficulties, the syllabus must almost be rewritten to cater varied level of needs each special school requires. It is challenging for special schools to strike the right balance from the available guidance in the existing syllabus.

EP suggested to create a working group on special schools. He also informed that there is LTLRE special school hub too led by Rebecca Dacosta (Torbay) who advises on issues special schools are facing.

EP to form a working group from Plymouth, Devon and Torbay to aiming at working together for address key issues special schools have around agreed syllabus.

Members agreed on Plymouth SACRE members attending the launch event free of cost. If attending, Plymouth members will need to confirm their attendance by email to AS before the event.

CSC suggested if SACRE chair could plan for giving an introduction in the launch event to showcase how SACRE has developed into an effective body. Chair to look into it.

8. **OFSTED Inspections Update (Ed Pawson)**

EP shared RE Hub's [website](#) and under the tab '*places of interest*' within *South West*, schools can find the places that are accredited. Plymouth Centre for Cultural Diversity and Plymouth Synagogue are listed there. He informed that a place of worship or a place of interest that schools visit can be added to this list.

He added that there is also a tab for school visitors and again PCFCD is listed there. EP elaborated that here we are listing people who can be validated. Visitors will need to undertake an hour and half training to be visitors in schools and in this way schools will be able to access people who have lived experience. There is also a calendar on the website that shows available courses and events.

EP added that we're building the profile of this website now so that schools can gain much better interactive support and connectivity. There's a whole area on this site called 'upskill' which gives variety of information e.g. about special schools, early career training, interfaith meetings and interfaith issues etc.

9. **Local Authority Update to SACRE (Michael House)**

MH gave updates on SACRE budget position.

SACRE Budget Position – (1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024) – Updated, end of Feb 2024.

Annual resources: £13,105 (£12000 ESG+ £1105 Revenue)

In-Year spend to date: (£3,218 Total)

Planned / Projected spend: £9,887 Total)

Balance: £887 Approx. (Annual Resource – In-Year Spend & Projected Spend)

Please refer to 'LAOtS Update Spring 2024' in the agenda pack for full details.

AS to include expenses claim documents in agenda pack for all future meetings.

If attending, Plymouth SACRE members will need to confirm their attendance for Agreed Syllabus Conference via email to AS so that catering arrangements can be made accordingly.

10. **Regional / National RE Hub (Ed Pawson)**

EP shared RE Hub's [website](#) and under the tab 'places of interest' within *South West*, schools can find the places that are accredited. Plymouth Centre for Cultural Diversity and Plymouth Synagogue are listed there. He informed that a place of worship or a place of interest that schools visit can be added to this list.

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11. **Annual Report & Exam Data / School Monitoring (Ed Pawson)**

EP shared a presentation on [National content standard for Religious Education](#) and explained the need for having one.

- There is no benchmark for RE in England
- The quality of RE curriculum varies widely from school to school
- Academy Trusts, SACREs and others planning RE curriculum need to work to a standard
- To provide opportunities for :

- The positive recognition of high quality RE
- Holding to account, those not providing pupils with their entitlement

EP shared some examples of how schools nationally are teaching RE syllabus differently and with a different approach. The amount of time being spent varies too, especially in different year groups. Therefore, there is a need for having a standardised approach for teaching RE. The local authority agreed syllabus gives that standard but as most schools are academies now, they don't feel bound to follow it. In the absence of a national curriculum in RE, a more generic statement, which talks about the concepts, ethics and themes is needed. He added that the content standard guides us in this regard. It has an element, which looks at the nature, formation and expression of religions. This also talks about values, relationships, customs, traditions and world views. It also talks about leadership, communities, beliefs and practises and how people from a particular group or religion practice the religion or faith differently.

EP stated that we're starting to get the national stakeholders in RE to be able to say this is how we need to be able to judge RE. He added that a wide variety of organisations, associations, trusts and academics have signed up to this.

EP also highlighted that we need to be aware of the bigger picture of how RE is shifting and changing nationally. A final version of original [Worldviews Handbook](#) will be published in May 2024. This is for syllabus writers. We've decided to renew our syllabus before this work has been published.

AF suggested if SACRE could engage with school governors to learn and share from our experiences and for getting something positive as they have a significant role in schools.

Chair agreed with this suggestion and promised to look into this suggestion.

CW and JR commented that it will be more useful if governor's engagement is on strategic level and not on operational level.

On school monitoring data, EP shared slides from the Schools Workforce Survey based on DfE's data. Schools have to fill in School Workforce Survey every year that allows DfE to collect information on what subjects are taught in schools in different year groups by percentages. This enables us to see how much RE schools are doing by each year group. It has been a national expectation since the early 1990's that RE should be approximately 5% of the curriculum. EP said that this data gives him bases for having a constructive discussion with schools in Plymouth and he has been in contact with some schools already.

In a response to a question from CW, EP replied that most schools don't teach RE if they have a post 16 cohort therefore he will not be exploring RE in post 16 years but will instead have a light touch conversation with schools.

DJB enquired if St Boniface's RE curriculum is focused on Catholicism. KW replied that they teach their religions too with a main focus on Catholicism.

CSC and other members highlighted that some schools are not on the list. EP will explore.

CS commented that schools should be addressing RE related issues in a structured way rather than from staff's personal experiences and judgements.

GH stated that Coombe Dean have just appointed a head of RE and the school is going to have an improvement and uplift in that uptake from September next year. She added that Plymstock and Hele's teach substantially more RE, particularly across key stage 3 than the figures shown on the report.

EP also shared the exams and attainment data in Plymouth schools. Members commented that there may be a number of factors behind low scores in a particular school and as such RE should not be directly compared with other popular subjects. In addition, the uptake of RE varies significantly across the City due to socio-economic and demographic reasons.

EP confirmed that the published version of the annual report will not have school data in it.

12. **Collective Worship (Ed Pawson)**

Chair referred to the Time to Breathe document that was shared with members earlier and asked for any comments about it.

Chair said that she was on the online training along with TS and CS earlier in the week. There was a session on time to breathe, and on collective worship. The working group appeared to be doing a great job.

Chair suggested if a monitoring group can be established after agreed syllabus launch, to look at collective worship across the City and how different schools respond to the demands.

KF said that in the past, when we launched our collective worship resource, which was very different to time to breathe, we had an event where all schools were invited to a session where they talked it through and shared some resources.

KF suggested if we could gather some schools to give them some guidance and support and perhaps some materials that they could use in their settings.

13. **LTLRE & RE Hub Update (Katie Freeman)**

KF informed members that JR and herself did work on advertisement and sent out introductory e-mail with latest updates but due to unknown reasons, the e-mail did not reach to recipients. KF and JR will be re advertising and use some more social media channels to get the primary and the secondary schools in the same room rather than being separate.

KF also shared that she and JR went to a day at Emmanuel Church recently with all the other hub leaders from Cornwall, Devon and Torbay to talk about developments in the RE community, nationally and locally. They received some training and information that could be disseminated into hubs. It was great to meet the other hub leaders and share ideas. KF thanked EP for supporting this.

KF announced that after 11-12 years as a hub leader, she will be stepping down and that they will be looking for another primary hub leader. KF still going to be working with LTLRE Re hub but in a different capacity and now that JR is on board things will be in safe hands.

EP extended his appreciation and thanks to KF on behalf of SACRE and recognised KF's contributions for RE in Plymouth over long period of time.

14. **Update from RE Professional Advisor to SACRE (Ed Pawson)**

Already discussed in the other agenda items.

15. **Holocaust Memorial Day Update (Arezoo Farahzad)**

AF gave a brief on Holocaust Memorial Day and stated that it was commemorated on Tuesday the 30th of January this year instead of 27th of January, which is the day that it's commemorated

nationally, but for various reasons and clashes with PCC commitments it was held on the 30th. The theme of this year was 'Fragility of Freedom'. Over 50 guests attended the Council House and contributions were given from a variety of speakers by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust e.g. representatives from Rwanda, speakers from trade unions, gender rights, the Jewish community, people with disabilities etc. The Council House event was very emotive, powerful and thought provoking.

After this, a public commemoration was held in the Peace Garden and flowers were laid at the memorial. A local school contributed to both the Council House proceedings and the public commemoration. AF highlighted that the presentations from the school was so impressive that they were featured on the local news. She added that we can build on it and try to reach out to other schools in future. AF also commented that the data reports EP shared can be used by organisations like PCFCD to see how engaged or not engaged local schools are with RE.

16. **Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity (Sara Wells)**

SW sent written updates on PCFCD and AF as a trustee elaborated on this. AF stressed that having PCFCD is unique to Plymouth and nothing like this exists anywhere else in the country but it needs help because it is incredibly under resourced. AF also added that SACRE could be supportive and creative about how we can make better use of PCFCD.

AF shared that the Spring Term has been/is continuing to be their busiest. They have received over 170 booking requests this term - and they are still coming in. Many requests are for multiple sessions with different classes / year groups, from schools across Devon and Cornwall, but predominantly from the Plymouth area, which so far this term have resulted in over 235hrs of speaker time with students, either in the classroom or in places of worship.

PCFCD is currently short staffed, which at this busiest time of year isn't ideal. The office continues to be manned during school hours by part-time, term-time-only staff and the best form of contact is email (info@pcfcd.co.uk). There are 3 phone lines into the office (01752 254438), so phone calls cannot always be answered if staff are already on another call. All calls (answered and missed) are logged by their IT system however, it is puzzling that schools/SACRE members claim they cannot get in touch, as missed calls are always returned. Any members of SACRE that are aware of specific schools that have tried, but failed to make contact with PCFCD are asked to email SW with the name of the school and a named contact and they will be in touch with them.

Schools will imminently be asked to subscribe/resubscribe to PCFCD for the 2024/25 financial year via the Services4Schools process (once the brochure is sent out - it is delayed again this year) so AF asked that schools are encouraged to do so as subscriptions are their main source of income annually.

MH commented that the delay was due to staffing, resource and capacity. MH will relay the message to the concerned people in the LA and ensure communication is sent out as soon as possible.

17. **Representatives Updates (All)**

BGS gave a brief on the Sikh Community in the area and shared that the Sikh community is very small in Devon and Cornwall. They meet once in a month in Unitarian Church and celebrate Sikh commemorative days along with other commemorative days like Holocaust Memorial, Ramadan and Eid, Black History Month, Gypsy and Roma festivals, Travellers Month and St to Joseph's Day etc. To raise awareness in the community about these events BGS has produced a newsletter that will be uploaded on their website and the website link can be shared with SACRE members. BGS is in the process of putting more resources on the website that can be useful for community in general and for schools in particular.

CS updated that a smaller group of volunteers from the Hindu and Sikh community are now DBS cleared and they will be looking at going into schools wider in Devon and Cornwall.

CS added that a Sikh celebration, Vaisakhi along with a flag raising ceremony will be held in the City Centre, on 13th April. This will be a public event and Lord Mayor will be attending.

CS also informed that there will also be a Sri Lankan event on the day that Lord Mayor will also attend.

18. **Date and venue of next meeting (Asif Siddique)**

The next meeting will be held at 1:30pm on Tuesday 2 July 2024, Marlborough Room, Council House.

19. **Any Other Business (Chair)**

None