

# Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Monday 9 March 2015

## PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, Vice Chair, in the Chair.

Councillors Morris, Singh and Dr Salter.

Bakari Arabi, Catherine Bowness, Penny Burnside, Shelley Catchpole, Katie Freeman, Jatindra Saha and Alison Sturgeon.

Co-opted Representatives: Reverend Gordon Cryer and Dr Clare Hamon.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Drean and Stark.

MarkAndrew Dearden, Martin Edmonds, Barry Good, Pete Grainger, Gwen Hughes, Anna Kelly, Christoforos Mamas and Caroline McVicar.

Also in attendance: Linda Rudge (Project Director, Learn, Teach, Lead RE), Jonathan Marshall (RE Advisor) and Lynn Young (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 1.32 pm and finished at 3.57 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.*

## 25. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Councillors in accordance with the code of conduct.

## 26. **MINUTES**

Members reviewed the minutes and it was highlighted that the list of attendees should read 'Anna Kelly', not 'Ann Kelly'.

Agreed that subject to the list of attendees being amended as above the minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2014 are confirmed as a correct record.

## 27. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

## 28. **MEMBERSHIP**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, advised members that –

- (a) the status of Christoforos Mamas's membership was still unresolved, as he was now eligible to be the UCU rep in Group C, as opposed to the Greek Orthodox

Community rep;

- (b) it had been difficult to find a Buddhist Community rep for Group A following the resignation of Barry Good;
- (c) three Members had recently been contacted due to their non-attendance over the last year; if they did not respond the RE Adviser would seek alternative representatives.

## 29. **SACRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Adviser, discussed the SACRE development plan and advised members that –

- (a) the amount of the SACRE budget for 2015-2016 was not yet known;
- (b) the SACRE Development Plan influenced how the SACRE budget was spent;
- (c) the development plan highlighted three areas of importance –
  - support for teachers to develop some new, creative and interactive schemes of work to support the new syllabus and the new emphases of heritage, diversity and spirituality, to include a review of the syllabus across Plymouth schools during the summer term;
  - SACRE to make available some curriculum project funds for schools to support innovative RE projects with links to and in collaboration with local understanding and good quality RE;
  - SACRE to support promotional events and celebrations of RE, including Holocaust Memorial Day;
- (d) funds had been offered to schools to enable them to develop innovative projects; however take up had been poor, and the money had been used to produce extra copies of the Agreed Syllabus document.

Members were advised that the money that remained in the current budget would not 'roll-over' to the next financial year. A suggestion for spending the remainder of the budget included inviting a high calibre speaker to attend a SACRE dinner/evening meeting.

## 30. **LEARNTEACHLEAD RE PROJECT**

Linda Rudge, Project Director of Learn, Teach Lead RE, provided members with a progress report.

Members were advised that –

- (a) the project was a learning partnership project for Religious Education (RE) with a focus on creating a community of enquiry and professional development

across the south west peninsula;

- (b) the original intention was to support and enhance RE in the south west, boosting provision from Local Authorities, SACREs, teacher training providers, Diocesan Boards of Education and schools;
- (c) the 'unmet needs' of RE teachers were identified and prioritised in the bid for funds;
- (d) the project was launched in October 2012, through funding in excess of £100,00, for a three year period, from the St Luke's College Foundation;
- (e) the funding ensured that Continual Professional Development (CPD) was enjoyed by an increased number of teachers, and was available free of charge for state funded primary and secondary schools;
- (f) 2015 was the third full year of the programme;
- (g) there were 14 Project Leaders of RE (PLREs), leading eight hubs;
- (h) there was scope (if funding allowed) for the formation of other PLREs in north east Cornwall and mid/east Devon;
- (i) there was a current recruitment drive for more PLREs in Torbay (primary) and South Devon (secondary);
- (j) termly hub meetings (affiliated to NATRE) were generating attendance levels of between 15 and 40;
- (k) the 2014 Conference (held at St Mellion Resort) was attended by over 100 delegates;
- (l) PLRE training in January had focused on interfaith dialogue and 'Promoting religious understanding through RE';
- (m) information regarding termly hub meetings and venues was posted on the website and sent to schools through partnership networks and by PLREs. Meetings were usually held in twilight sessions with a change of venue;
- (n) some hubs used a newsletter compiled by the PLREs to keep people in touch between meetings;
- (o) PLREs received regular updates from the Project Director;
- (p) reports of meetings were added to the website;
- (q) agendas this term would share training from the conference and the first training day, as well as addressing local needs;
- (r) PLREs had benefitted from their training and increased confidence in their

subject leadership in addition to sharing their own expertise locally, regionally and nationally;

- (s) Gill Tewkesbury (North Devon Primary Hub Leader) was now an SLE and had won a Hockerill prize (in recognition of innovative teaching in RE), and a Farmington Fellowship (for teachers of Religious Education in UK secondary schools, primary school RE Co-ordinators or other primary school teachers involved in teaching RE, and teachers of children with Special Educational Needs who are involved with RE. Headteachers who wish to undertake research into either Religious Education or Values Education are also eligible to apply. Applicants should have had at least two years in their present post);
- (t) Katie Freeman (Plymouth Primary Hub Leader) was now an SLE (Specialist Leader in Education) and had recently had an article published in 'RE Today';
- (u) other SLEs were Giles Freathy (West Cornwall hub) and Corrine Price (South Devon/Torbay hub);
- (v) funding was available from various sources –
  - The St Luke's College Foundation;
  - SACREs, Local Authorities and teaching schools;
  - Culham St Gabriel;
  - The Jerusalem Trust;
- (w) the success of LTLRE was underpinned by its commitment to teacher development, the effective development and leadership of PLREs and its fundamental commitment to educational research, encouraging innovation to improve classroom practice;
- (x) there were certain 'non-negotiable' principles which underpinned the project's pedagogical model –
  - collaboration between recognised CPD partners, universities and Local Authorities through research and professional development to address identified unmet CPD needs;
  - the creation of a community of learning giving teachers and Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) the ability to improve their practice;
- (y) the Steering Group membership consisted of –
  - Exeter Diocesan Board of Education: Tatiana Wilson
  - Truro Diocesan Board of Education: Irene Pooley
  - Cornwall LA/SACRE: David Hampshire
  - Devon LA/SACRE and NATRE: Ed Pawson
  - Torbay LA/SACRE: tbc
  - Plymouth LA/SACRE: Jonathan Marshall MBE
  - University of Exeter: Dr Karen Walshe

- University of St Mark and St John: Dr Karen Stockham
  - Teacher representative (St Luke's Foundation): Giles Freathy (Specialist Leader in Education)
  - St Luke's College Foundation (Trustees): Dick Powell
  - Project Director: Linda Rudge
  - PLRE representation is by standing invitation
  - *Internal evaluator to the project: Dr Barbara Wintersgill, former HMI*
  - *External evaluator: Dr John Gay, Oxford University;*
- (z) there were plans in place to extend membership of the Steering Group to include Chairs of SACREs (or a nominated member from Group A, C or D) and senior representatives from Teaching Schools;
- (aa) the next two meetings of the Steering Group were planned for 3 March (Saltash) and 4 June (Torbay or Exeter);
- (bb) St Luke's Trustees had already agreed to fund a fourth annual conference in October 2015. The venue and date were yet to be confirmed, but provisional dates were 15 and 16 October at Dartington Hall, near Totnes. Further details would be available on the website and sent through school mailings. Enrolment would begin after Easter, and was usually oversubscribed. The theme this year would be linked to spiritual development and creativity across the curriculum.

The Chair thanked Linda Rudge for her presentation.

### 31. **FEEDBACK/ACTION FROM AWARENESS/TRAINING SESSION**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, discussed the morning's awareness/training session with the members. The following issues from the session were highlighted -

- (a) SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social, Cultural) teaching had advanced since the development of the National Curriculum in 1988;
- (b) there had been an increase in the number of children being withdrawn from Religious Education (RE) lessons, and the British National Party (BNP) were encouraging this through their website;
- (c) there were issues in schools that were beyond the remit of SACRE;
- (d) school governors needed to be made aware of issues surrounding RE in schools;
- (e) it would be beneficial to have a contact list for different religions to check information if necessary;
- (f) faith speakers visiting schools was the way ahead, although some parents could be obstructive;
- (g) a large number of non-specialist RE teachers were not interested in teaching RE;

- (h) there was a lack of support and training for RE; funding needed to be available for training;
- (i) there was no longer a full time RE Advisor post in Plymouth and the surrounding Local Authorities;
- (j) a strongly worded reply needed to be sent to Lord Nash's letter.

32. **PARENTAL RIGHT OF WITHDRAWAL FROM RE**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, discussed the briefing paper and accompanying letter on the parental right of withdrawal of students/children from Religious Education (RE) and its wider implications.

Members were advised that –

- (a) there had been an increase in the number of children withdrawn from RE lessons in school;
- (b) the briefing paper had been sent to all Plymouth schools;
- (c) it was known that the British National Party (BNP) was encouraging the withdrawal of children from RE lessons, especially where Islam was taught;
- (d) parents wishing to withdraw their child(ren) from RE lessons did not have to give a reason, although they had always been encouraged to do so;
- (e) there was no requirement for schools to keep statistics of the number of children who are withdrawn from RE lessons;

Following a discussion, members raised the following points –

- (f) bullet point three of the letter identified one particular religion (Islam), and suggested that some religions could be extremist;
- (g) the letter suggested that particular faiths wished to withdraw their child(ren) from RE lessons;
- (h) it was important that parents who wished to withdraw their child(ren) from RE lessons were invited in to school to discuss their reasons for doing so;
- (i) some parents would have difficulty in understanding the letter;
- (j) the letter was considered to be passive aggressive and overly formal;
- (k) advice needed to be given to headteachers to enable them to produce their own letter regarding this issue.

33. **LETTER FROM LORD NASH, PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCHOOLS**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, discussed the letter received from Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools.

Members were advised that –

- (a) a decision regarding a reply to this letter needed to be made today;
- (b) the advice received from NASACRE was to thank Lord Nash for his letter;
- (c) the responsibility for RE needed to sit with Local Authorities;
- (d) it was important that what had been discussed in the awareness/training session was reflected in the reply to Lord Nash;

Following a discussion, members raised the following points –

- (e) further information regarding the bursary scheme for the recruitment of high-quality RE teachers was needed; the information did not specify that any religious education was required;
- (f) members expressed concern regarding the holder of a first class degree being eligible for a bursary, as trainees with a first class degree would not necessarily make a high quality teacher;
- (g) a number of SACREs were asking their Local Authority to reply to Lord Nash on their behalf; however it was decided that the reply needed to come from Plymouth SACRE, not Plymouth City Council.

Agreed that SACRE draft a response to Lord Nash's letter.

*(Jatindra Saha left part way through this agenda item)*

34. **UPDATE/FEEDBACK ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL RE ISSUES**  
**(i) Holocaust Memorial Day 2015**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, updated members on the recent Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD).

Members were advised that –

- (a) the Plymouth event had received a great deal of press and television coverage;
- (b) Solly Irving, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, once again visited the city, giving talks at local schools and the University;
- (c) Plymouth had received one of the special commemorative candles for

the event;

- (d) a Civic event had been held in the Orangery at Mount Edgumbe House and Country Park;
- (e) it was suggested that two events be held next year, on different days;

Following a discussion, members raised the following points –

- (f) the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) sent details of books and DVDs to libraries that could be advertised for HMD;
- (g) World Book Day could be linked in with HMD; to keep the event fresh in peoples' minds;
- (h) the event held at the University was superb, and involved a large number of children; however another event or display was needed in the centre of the city to attract the general public;
- (i) the event could be advertised on the side of the University, or on the 'big screen' on the Plaza in the city centre.

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, thanked members for their comments and agreed to pass them on to Karl Sweeney, Leadership Advisor (Health, Wellbeing and Citizenship).

**(ii) NATRE Conference**

Katie Freeman advised members that the NATRE Conference had taken place on 31 January, and had been well attended by 170 teachers from around the country. Various workshops had been held, including a session on 'assessment without levels'.

**(iii) Plymouth SACRE website**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, advised members that a 'Religious education' section was now available on the Plymouth School Room page of the Plymouth City Council website, and contained information for teachers, SACRE members and all those interested in and committed to, providing excellent religious education in schools and across the community.

**(iv) Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, advised members that a new administrator for the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) had been appointed. Jonathan took this opportunity to promote the importance of the work of the Centre, and the services they provided for schools. Jonathan advised members that he hoped that the meeting planned for 25 March would encourage more people to volunteer as faith speakers.



35. **DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed following confirmation of the programme of Council meetings at the Full Council Meeting on 23 March 2015.

36. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.