

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Monday 27 June 2022

PRESENT:

Katie Freeman, in the Chair
Councillor Mrs Mary Aspinall, Vice Chair
Cllr Jonathan Drean, Cllr Tina Touhy, Cllr Sally Cresswell, Cllr Chip Tofan

Co-opted Representatives: Dr Judith Beckman, Claire Linden, Sara Wells, Alex Parks, Claire Wills, Nic Gibson, Dr Catherine Bowness, Dr David Salter.

Apologies for absence: Councillor John Mahony, Ed Pawson, Ben Hughes, AnnMarie Allchurch, Gwen Hughes, Emma Butler, Lesley Clark.

Also in attendance: Michael House (Education Advisor), Hannah Whiting (Democratic and Member Support Officer), Jason Pincombe (Democratic and Member Support Officer), Asif Siddique (Democratic and Member Support Officer).

The meeting started at 1.00pm and finished at 3.40pm.

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.

Declarations of interest

None

Minutes from the last meeting

Minutes agreed from the last meeting on 7 March 2022 by Cllr Jonathan Drean and seconded by Nic Gibson with an amendment to the last meeting to reflect that apologies were sent by Lesley Clark.

Chairs Urgent Business

The Chair discussed the SACRE budget and expressed concerns over the lack of information around financial reporting and absence of single point of contact. This makes budget, planning and decision making process difficult and long winded. It is also difficult to access funds if there is a lack of knowledge around the amount of the funds. The Chair believed that some of the funding could be used in salaries, but Michael House did explain that this is not the case.

Katie Freeman and Cllr Aspinall explained that Holocaust Memorial Day is a really good example of where funding could be used and yet SACRE does not appear to be in a position where they can contribute. They added that the available funding is not

an extra ordinary amount and it will be very useful to know what the total budget amount is and how this will be spent.

Michael House explained that some financial information was provided previously on request, but that in order to fund activities for SACRE, there needs to be an action plan, a development plan and some longer term planning for the budget. Some of it is available to enable members to go to conferences and on training courses, and very little has been spent in the past couple of years.

The Chair explained that she did not feel an action plan was needed as it is not something other LA's are doing, and that it is the role of SACRE to advise PCC. In addition, an action plan would make more work for people who are already stretched.

Cllr Drean asked Michael House to provide a financial report to be presented at the next meeting for members and as an item on the agenda for discussion.

With regards to constitution the Chair explained that she has been involved with SACRE for many years and there are more members now that ever have been, but it is important that all groups are well represented and have an active role in SACRE meetings.

Michael House added that PCC can change the constitution but will need to consult with SACRE first with a sub-group, but this is something a new advisor might be able to push forward. Some of the descriptions of the groups might need changing, particularly Group C.

Interim Annual Report/Discussion regarding targets for the SACRE Annual Report

Michael House explained that this has now been superseded by the Annual Report and gave a brief overview of the report so far. Work is nearly complete for the 2021/22 Report and it will be sent to the Chair and Deputy Chair for approval and then sent out to SACRE members, Schools, DFE and NASACRE.

Michael House explained further that Ofsted had identified some challenges in the quality of RE across the city focusing on insufficient time or challenges to the curriculum, what is of best interest of students in the school, what it means to be scholarly, lack of clarity around religion and non-religion, teaching that does not support students to remember and professional subject knowledge are some of the reasons why schools are not meeting requirements. No further Ofsted inspections that have specifically commented on RE.

With regards to the RE and exams, Michael House added that the usual details are not available because of COVID19, but he has sent survey round to schools and is collating responses.

Chair explained that the agreed syllabus is in line with what the research review suggests. Chair has been working with schools to educate them on this. There is work going on to support teachers.

Cllr Sally Cresswell asked for clarification for the reasons behind the statement that only 50% of schools said active worship takes place each day and Michael House explained that COVID19 did impact this, but it is a recent survey with results coming in over the past 2 months, so it is of concern. He added that not all schools had responded to the survey, so the results might not provide an accurate picture, but this was still of concern. Chair added that collective worship is different to RE and is concerned about including the data regarding 50% if not all schools had replied and suggested that it could be put in as a worded sentence qualitatively instead.

Collective Worship – Launching Time to Breathe

Over lockdown guidance was produced with Devon and Torbay on Collective Worship for a support for all schools but particularly Community Schools and it was sent via email.

Cllr Cresswell asked if there were examples of good practice schools which could be shared and Chair explained that that already appears in the document.

Update on complaint made to the DFE

Ed Pawson provided an update via a pre-recorded video link and explained the chain of events to the group and that advice had been taken to make a complaint to the DFE about an Academy Trust with schools in Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall, who is looking to reduce the time for RE on their timetables. No further update at this time, but will keep SACRE updated.

National Updates – The Draft Worldviews Handbook

Ed Pawson gave an update via a pre-recorded video message as he was unable to attend the meeting. He explained that the author of the Worldviews Handbook was awarded a grant to create a high quality syllabus for the next generation. Groups were created to contribute to this, one of which Ed Pawson is a member of. Further updates to come in future meetings.

Claire Wills asked if there would be an adapted version of the syllabus for SEN teaching and Chair explained that there is a group of teachers working on this and that she would connect them.

LTLRE and RE Hub Updates

Chair will send info to SACRE for the Conference as soon as possible.

Cllr Aspinall asked if Council meetings could be considered when planning this as 2022's Annual Conference was on the same day at Full Council.

The Hub is still very well attended and will be moving to half of meetings being face to face and half as virtual meetings.

Update on non-compliance case in the city

Michael House explained that Plymouth High School for Girls is not a maintained school and has joined the Thinking Schools Academy Trust (of which Plympton Academy is also a member). A meeting has taken place with a member of staff at the school, highlighting the barriers at the school for them being compliant. There not enough hours allocated within the timetable.

Chair expressed concern that over time the situation has become worse and this should be escalated further and SACRE would write to the trust. Chair will seek advice from colleague who has supported with another recent complaint for guidance.

HMD updates

Cathy Bowness explained that the theme for the next Holocaust Memorial Day 2023 would be “Ordinary People”, and explained that this theme does bring challenges in that it is quite wide reaching.

Furthermore, in some cases of concentration camps being liberated, it was Russian Soldiers, which could be extremely sensitive with the war in Ukraine at the moment. It will be a challenge to explain to children why ‘ordinary people’ can carry out such acts.

There has been a website launched showing extraordinary ordinary objects, which is a great resource. Cathy Bowness agreed to send to Hannah Whiting to share with SACRE members.

Cathy Bowness asked if SACRE members could help support and promote the day and its theme and that Plymouth is an ordinary city for ordinary people; it is a diverse city.

Chair spoke on the possibility of working with students around the city on a poetry book, and Lesley Clark highlighted the need to provide teachers on additional guidance for such an activity with the sad and sensitive events that have happened in Plymouth over the past year.

Cllr Cresswell explained that on the last Holocaust Memorial Day, it seemed no schools were in attendance and asked if this was due to COVID19 or if there were other reasons for it, as it is a really important, positive and valuable learning experience for primary school children.

The Chair explained that due to COVID19 restrictions schools struggled to come along to the day but did learn about it in school. With poetry planned for the next Holocaust Memorial Day, it is hoped Primary Schools will be more involved.

RE and CW Survey

Michael House explained that only 10% of schools responded has responded to date (70% Primary, 30% Secondary). As issue is that with most schools being Academies, they do respond less to surveys coming from the Council. It is a snapshot.

Michael explained that 50% explained that they used the Plymouth Agreed Syllabus, 20% Diocese 'Come & See', 20% Own, 10% No Syllabus. And that in Primary schools there is an average 1 hour per week, but in religious schools and schools with a religious character it is higher. In Secondary Schools, the picture is more varied and there is not as much curriculum time. He added that the survey is prefaced by explaining that the identity of the schools will be protected, this is to aim get honest answers and 50% said they did not provide Collective Worship. He added that the healthy child quality mark will provide an ongoing litmus test for what is happening in the city, the Schools get surveyed in many ways.

Cllr Mary Aspinall asked if the schools that had not responded could be chased, perhaps through their trusts or governors. Michael agreed to gently push for a response and can point out that it is within the funding agreement for Academies to provide collective worship and religious education, which he would try to include in all correspondence with schools.

Chair explained that there is an issue with the terms used explaining that in some community schools assemblies are collective worship, so it could be possible that some replies are not accurate due to terms used. Chair suggested that in the future SACRE could look at the survey and have input and perhaps use Survey Monkey and have a test group in future.

Cllr Mary Aspinall suggested that following the survey and other schools not being fully compliant, that perhaps they could be made aware of the Plymouth Centre for Culture and Diversity. Chair suggested an event could be held at the Guildhall to empower teachers, encouraging schools to have 2 teachers running collective worship to support each other and Cllr Sally Cresswell suggested that religious leaders could be invited to such an event too.

Cllr Mary Aspinall to consider this event more and when had an idea of dates to contact Asif Siddique and enquire about Lower Guildhall availability.

Agreed Syllabus – what is the picture in schools?

AnnMarie Allchurch was due to provide an update but was unable to attend. This item will be added to the agenda for the next meeting.

Membership Updates

Michael House explained that this is an ongoing issue and will be looked at when the constitution is reviewed with issues such as the language used for Group C and whether or not there needs to be representation from Councillor's who are independent or from the Green Party.

Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity Update

Thanked the Councillors for their Community Grants which continue to support the Centre with their work each year.

The Centre is still looking for new speakers.

Chair explained that when speaking to other areas of the country, people are very jealous of the resource Plymouth has in the Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity.

Discussion and election of new SACRE Chair

Chair, Deputy Chair, Michael House and Hannah Whiting all confirmed that there had been no nominations received for Chair and Vice Chair.

Chair asked that everyone seriously consider putting themselves forward to be Chair or Vice Chair and explained the support that would be available.

Cllr Mary Aspinall put herself forward to be a temporary Chair until the Autumn meeting when this would be revisited. SACRE Members agreed unanimously.

Updates from Members

None.

AOB

Chair explained that SACRE Members need input into the recruitment of a Religious Advisor, and could this be discussed next meeting.

Chair thanked Ed Pawson for his continued support in the absence of an advisor.

The Chair expressed that it has been an honour to Chair SACRE and thanked Hannah Whiting and her colleagues for the support they have provided whilst she has been Chair.

Cllr Jonathan Dreaan thanks the Chair and Deputy Chair for their steerage over the past few years, which have been difficult.

Date and Venue of Next Meeting

1pm Monday 14 November 2022, Warspite Room, Council House.