

# Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

**Tuesday 7 November 2023**

**Present:** Cllr Tess Blight (TB, Chair), Cllr Sue Dann (CSD), Cllr Chip Tofan (CCT), Cllr Tina Touhy (CTT), Dr Judith Beckman (DJB, Jewish Community), Katie Freeman (KF, Vice Chair, Diocesan Board of Exeter), Reverend David Evans (DE, Baptist Church), Professor David Salter (PDS, Quaker Community), Chaz Singh (CS, Sikh observer), Asif Siddique (AS, SACRE coordinator), Ed Pawson (EP, Advisor to Plymouth SACRE), Michael House (MH, PCC Education Officer).

**Attended remotely:** Ben Kerr (BK, Humanist), Nic Gibson (NG, Pagan Community), Giles Freathy (GF, Marjon, RE Lecturer, Lesley Clark (LC, Roman Catholic Diocese)

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr Sally Cresswell (CSC), Cllr Dr John Mahony (CDJM), Sara Wells (SW, PCFCD), Claire Wills (CW, Special Schools), Jim Barnicott (JB, Head of Education, PCC), Dr Catherine Bowness (DCB, Diocesan Board of Exeter), Alex Parks (AP, Marjon), Muhunthiny Sivasothy (MS, Hindu observer), Saranjeet Kaur (SK, Sikh observer)

The meeting started at 1.40 pm and finished at 4.28 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.*

## **Welcome – (Chair)**

Chair welcomed Giles Freathy (GF) as a new member and informed that Annmarie Allchurch has recently resigned from SACRE.

- a) GF introduced himself as a Lecturer in RE at Marjon and in charge of RE content for BEd. trainee teachers and Primary PGCE training. He was previously a primary school teacher in Cornwall and has worked as an advisor for Cornwall on Agreed Syllabus. GF has also worked with Exeter University on Innovative techniques in RE.
- b) EP recommended writing a letter to Annmarie for her great service and contribution to Plymouth SACRE. Chair agreed and AS to coordinate for this.

## **Declarations of interest – All**

No declaration of interest were made.

## **Review of the previous minutes – Chair (Cllr TB)**

The Committee agreed that minutes from the last meeting held on 19 July 2023 were an accurate record of meeting.

## **Actions from the current meeting**

- a) AS to coordinate for a letter to be sent to Annmarie Allchurch thanking for her great service and contribution to Plymouth SACRE
- b) AS to share “Plymouth SACRE November 2023’ presentation on the changes being made to the Agreed Syllabus with all SACRE members.
- c) AS to add the title of ‘Reverend’ to David Evans’ name

- d) All SACRE members to send their expression of interest to AS if they would like to meet to discuss local history and context in relation to RE. AS to Doodle Poll to agree on a suitable date. The meeting should be held latest by mid Jan 2024.
- e) EP to circulate the draft syllabus to SACRE members (not to be shared outside SACRE members)
- f) AS to include expenses claim documents in agenda pack for all future meetings
- g) AS to put 'Time to Breathe', 'Collective Worship' and 'Secondary schools monitoring' on the agenda for the next SACRE meeting
- h) PDS to send AS information on the event being held at University of Plymouth on 14 Nov 2023 to be circulated to all members.
- i) KF to forward on the details on National Teacher Webinar to AS to be circulated to SACRE members
- j) KF to contact SW regarding issues with PCFCD website and phone line

### **Chairs Urgent Business – Chair**

Chair highlighted that since the last meeting, she had written to SW in PCFCD following her bid for additional SACRE money for groups from primary schools to visit a place of worship. The Chair has written to say we could not commit to the money being spent despite its potential. The project is still a fantastic opportunity. However, the priority must be the funding of the Agreed Syllabus. If SACRE has money at the end of the year, this issue can be revisited.

MH added that we have a better understanding of the Agreed Syllabus costs which we did not know that at the time. DDS said that as PCFCD trustee he has not heard about this development and asked about the timescales for the decision to be made.

Chair advised that we are projecting a launch of the new Agreed Syllabus for June 2024 and will know well in advance, in terms of what money we have spare. MH added that this will span over two years of funding from the SACRE budget but it is not massive. Some income will also come back through the conference. The Summer AGM will probably be the point at which we will know what is left over for the following year.

### **Plymouth Agreed Syllabus (EP)**

Ed Pawson presented the report and highlighted the changes being made to the Agreed Syllabus in coordination with Cornwall, Devon and Torbay SACREs. The Syllabus has been well received by Primary and Secondary teachers. Costing is £35 per school. Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation entitled 'Plymouth SACRE November 2023' for full details.

EP went through the changes around Forewords, Introduction, religious and non-religious world views, more visibility for Humanism, non-religiousness, changes to EYFS, addition of more local examples to show more diversity, using updated demographics etc. In response to a question from BK, EP gave a brief note on Humanism definition, perspective, amendments and the content being proposed in the Agreed Syllabus.

KF highlighted the influence of society and community on world views. She also touched on the amendments being made around being religious, non-religious and Humanists and how this should be taught in schools.

KF and BK talked about the importance of teaching about non-religious worldviews in RE, and the way in which Humanism can be used as an example of one type of non-religious

worldview being lived out in practice. EP stated that according to National Census figure there are 10,000 Humanists in the UK but a much larger population who are non-religious and that there is a need for RE to explore more about the views of non-religious population.

DE highlighted a potential amendment on point 3.13 'What difference does it make to more non-religious in Britain today'. This should be changed to 'What difference does it make to live as a non-religious in Britain today'. EP agreed to make this amendment. DDS highlighted that Humanism philosophy is quite broad. He also added that RE should not be mixed up with 'world views' as world views already encompasses religious views. Chair replied that 1988 Education Act says 'Religious Education' so that might be a step too far for our agreed syllabus for June 24th.

EP elaborated on a final report produced by The Commission on RE in 2018 that reflected a shift to a Worldviews approach to RE, away from a World Religions approach. The Commission recommended a new vision for RE, with the suggestion that the subject be reframed as Religion and Worldviews. There's a law which says it's going to be RE so the decision was made to call it 'religion and world views'. The aim is not to change the subject matter but to change the approach and focus on pupil centred world and substantive content will be about world views that will encompass both the religious and non-religious views. EP informed that they are working with the syllabus writer who is also leading the National Project on original worldview approach due to be published in Spring 2024.

KF elaborated that the new syllabus will be more about RE taking world views approach and taking into account lived realities and diversity. This is to enable getting children ready to experience the diverse communities when they become adults. The new syllabus will address the need to avoid generalised views for e.g. all Christians wear a cross or all Muslims pray five times a day. DV and Cllr SD highlighted the importance of local history and context in the RE teachings.

SACRE members to send their expression of interest to AS if they would like to meet to discuss local history, context in relation to RE.

EP stated that we will effectively break even and the new Syllabus will cost approx. £6000. MH informed that the Launch will take place in Council Chambers in June 2024 and there will be some additional costs to cover lunch and tech but no cost for the venue.

EP and KF pointed out that teachers from outside Plymouth e.g. Devon can also attend the conference. EP also confirmed that access to syllabus will be free for all schools in Plymouth via a website and schools can print a copy. There will be more opportunities for follow up training via SACRE, LTLRE Hub and Marjon and schools will be able to use this training for their CPD's. GF confirmed that Marjon will be able to lend their support for RE. Cllr SD stated that the new syllabus will help schools and children embrace this new approach. EP advised that local knowledge, history, demographics and census data will be helpful to deliver RE and this will connect Plymouth Civic aspirations evenly across all schools.

EP recommended SACRE members to sign off the syllabus and agree to write off the funding of £6000. Chair advised SACRE members should look at the budget position first before the above are agreed. MH gave an overview on the budget position.

BK asked if we have more detailed information on the agreed syllabus other than the presentation slides. EP and Chair said that the existing syllabus is the draft syllabus. EP agreed to circulate the draft syllabus to SACRE members but highlighted that this is confidential not to be shared outside SACRE members. GF suggested that perhaps the reasons behind SACRE not being able to write their own syllabus is due to lack of funding. If

this issue gets resolved then the syllabus can be put together with more democratic involvement and representation.

Chair commented that we do have the expertise in the Plymouth SACRE but we might not have the time. She added that we've definitely the best of both worlds in what we're attempting to do now, which is to include those local units that EP talked about. We have a fantastic example of a place of worship in the Jewish Synagogue, which is unique to Plymouth.

AS to share the "Plymouth SACRE November 2023" presentation on the changes being made to the Agreed Syllabus with all SACRE members.

KF joined the meeting at the start of this agenda item.

1:36pm - CS joined the meeting remotely and Chair welcomed him.

### **Local Authority Officer to SACRE Update (MH)**

SACRE Budget Position – (1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024) – Update to 7<sup>th</sup> Nov 2023.

Annual resources: £13105 (£12000 ESG+ £1105 Revenue)

In-Year spend to date: (£1010 Total)

Planned / Projected spend: £11,800 Total)

Balance: £2295 Approx. Annual Resource – (In-Year Spend + Projected Spend)

Please refer to the attached 'LAOtS Update Autumn 2023' document for further details.

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

MH advised that we are on target at the moment.

Chair asked EP to go back to his earlier recommendations to SACRE members to sign off the syllabus and agree to commit the funding of £6000 regardless of the money that comes back by the launch process. Chair reminded members that that each house has one vote. By show of a hand both recommendations were carried unanimously.

### **Ofsted Inspections Update (EP/ MH)**

MH advised that there has been always a reporting lag and there are different types of Ofsted inspections. The more familiar OFSTED Inspection is of the whole school. Additional inspections happen either as a reaction to a parent's complaint or it as a monitoring visit. The outcome of this kind of inspection might 'school continues to be good'.

EP advised that there are different types of reports and he is looking for any comments which might help us understand which schools are doing really well and we might want to write and congratulate or schools that we might want to write and offer support to. There are about 10 primary schools, no secondary schools, which have been inspected recently. When Ofsted inspect the school, they don't have to look at RE, collective worship or ask questions about assemblies or spiritual, moral, social, cultural development in schools. But, they often do notice and make reference to these areas of school life. SACRE might need to communicate with schools about this.

KF advised that personal development is huge focus on SMSC and that Inspectors will talk to the PSHE lead. NATRE has noted the RE leaders are often interviewed as well because they are using the language of SMSC. So, even if RE is not necessarily the focus, Inspectors will look at that and also how collective worship contributes to SMSC.

EP summed up that when schools are being inspected, personal development is key. Another area for Inspectors is teaching and learning. There are few references which say the curriculum in RE is great and pupils are learning a lot about religion and worldviews.

EP updated members on OFSTED Inspections in schools during June - Oct 2023. Please refer to the document titled '2023 11 Ofsted reports Plymouth schools'. Ofsted are now deep diving schools in RE and asked what other mechanisms we could create or make use of to get an informal feedback as to schools' experiences of the deep dives. KF suggested that the schools who had a deep dive could use NATRE platform to share their experiences. GF asked if any schools that have deviated from the agreed syllabus and still did well in the deep dive. KF advised that Hyde Park Junior deviated and they don't follow the Plymouth agreed syllabus. They adopted an RE Syllabus from a London Borough instead.

### **LTLRE and RE Hub Update - KF**

KF advised that they had a successful LTLRE & RE hub conference, which Ed organised with the leaders. Some people came down and did a keynote which was really inspiring and well received. At that conference Jaz (Secondary teacher at All Saints Academy in Plymouth) is now leading the Secondary Hub.

LTLRE did have a hub meeting set for last week, but due to an Ofsted inspection, it had to be postponed until December. KF added that the teachers seem to really like the hybrid offer and we can't really offer that within either of our schools so we're going to do a couple of meetings online and a couple face to face. In addition, they will look at using maps and pictures in the next hub meeting and Jaz is going to do some work on preparing for exams using book clips as well.

### **Updates from RE Advisor – EP**

EP provided updates on National Content Standard for Religious Education and advised that since the last meeting, the Religious Education Council for England and Wales has released a document for all schools and all Multi Academy Trusts, which is called the 'National Content Standard', to identify what RE should look like in schools. The Religious Education Council (REC) has developed a document which has now been authenticated by the Church of England, the Catholic Education Service, the Jewish Board of Deputies and by a number of other Academies and Trusts which give a clear statement about what RE should look like and that's going to allow Ofsted a much clearer description when inspecting schools. It will help SACRE in monitoring schools as well.

KF added that from NATRE perspective, they have adopted it as well, as it is really useful in giving the national picture and will be useful for lobbying and funding purposes. GF also supported the intent of the document and commented that this will also help Ofsted inspectorate.

### **Collective Worship – (EP and KF)**

KF advised that in Lockdown a lot of schools got in contact with KF about Collective Worship to ask what they should be offering. The 'Time to Breathe' document was very useful to many schools.

Collective Worship is hard for SACRE to monitor. SACRE could use its role to promote the 'Time to Breathe' document to school co-ordinators. KF offered to host training at her school so people have a chance to come in and talk about what collective worship might look like and what is the guidance/policy.

EP commented that we spend a lot of time in SACRE looking at Religious Education but don't spend enormous amount of time looking at Collective Worship.

Chair agreed that it is important part of SACRE's role and agreed to add an item on the next agenda to discuss 'Time to Breathe' and 'Collective Worship'. GF commented that this is a good idea and it is important that the advertising and design of it fulfils a school's requirements so that it doesn't feel like a singular view.

EP, KF and GF agreed to look at offering training and trial in KF's school and perhaps trailing in Marjon too. NG enquired if everyone has access to the 'Time to Breathe' document, as she does not work in a school. KF advised that it was sent via SACRE agenda pack. AS will circulate again within SACRE members. BK circulated the link in the chat facility.

### **PHSG monitoring (EP /KF)**

EP advised that he has not been able to look at this agenda item so far. He requested to put this item again on the next SACRE meeting.

KF advised that prior to COVID when Heather was advising SACRE, she shared her concerns about PHSG because in year 9, RE was not being taught. The reason given was that they had to transport the girls to Brickfields for their PE lesson and half an hour either side meant that there was no space in the curriculum for RE. As a Chair, KF wrote to the head teacher but didn't get a reply. Subsequently, Heather did a monitoring visit. Then she had to ring the head teacher and had a conversation with him about timetabling, about how we could tweak things around and get the hours back up. It all seemed really positive. Then COVID happened. MH visited the school as well but the changes have not been made so far.

EP advised that he will put it on the agenda for the next SACRE meeting to discuss. He received some data about other schools that came through recently from Deborah Weston, which looks at the workforce survey. GCSE results will be out by then and the written annual reports will be ready too.

### **Holocaust Memorial Day Update (LC)**

LC advised that there are no updates because in view of the current conflict in the Middle East. She added that the Holocaust Memorial Day is going to be very difficult thing to do this year due to current events. One Multi Academy Trust has sent some communication to all its head teachers explaining what's going on so that the head teachers can answer questions and in a very even-handed way.

Chair advised that Plymouth City Council have produced a statement that is on the website. Cllr SD advised that probably it has to be a wider conversation within the Safer Communities Team and we need wider guidance from Police and Community Connections because of the difficult political context. She highlighted that PCC takes a lead on Holocaust Memorial Day and it is seen as a Civic day.

DJB advised that Holocaust Memorial Day has not been an exclusively Jewish occasion. It commemorates all the hate crimes that have been happening around the world and it's still important to encourage people not to hate. EP added that the theme of the Holocaust Memorial is 'The fragility of freedom'.

PDS commented that it will be possible to go ahead with the Civic event, because that's been a long standing tradition and Police will be willing to make sure that the event is held safely. He referred to the recent King's Speech in which there was a mention of Holocaust Memorial as a tangible memorial and it appears to be on the government's mind to re-emphasise what happened back in the Second World War.

PDS also brought to members attention that at the University of Plymouth, on the 14th of November 2023, there is a lunchtime session with three speakers talking about how do we live well together. HMD has to be addressed because it is important in Plymouth and even more so in other parts of the UK. Chair enquired if this University event is open for public to attend. PDS confirmed that the event is open to public. More information is available on the website of the Pastoral and Spiritual Support Centre. PDS will send the details to AS to be circulated to all members.

KF advised that there will be a flyer coming out soon regarding a national teacher webinar where communities are coming together to form a panel to talk about supporting teachers with issues in the Middle East. KF to forward on the details to be circulated to SACRE members. She added that Jonathan Marshall has also offered to go into schools.

### **Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity - SW**

Chair highlighted that there will be an event on Thursday 16th of November in the Council House, which is one of the inter faith celebrations that PCFCD have.

In the absence of SW, DDS (as a trustee) updated members and informed that 12 months ago there was an interfaith event that was attended by Plymouth Lord Mayor, Lord Lieutenant, Bishop of Plymouth and people from different faith backgrounds. He hoped this year's event will be even more successful. He added that DJB and her colleagues at the Synagogue invited them to view the Synagogue.

PDS added that PCFCD organise a Global Plymouth event which is monthly dinner on the final Saturday of each month at the Sherwell World Church Hall. This aims at welcoming people (not just students) to Plymouth. There's a good opportunity to talk, share different cultures and food. Recently, they had over 120 people from 42 different countries. There are arrangements with PCFCD for schools to pay for visits from speakers. This gives an opportunity for school children to quiz a person from a community they may never have come across before. PCFCD also do cultural events e.g. one of their staff member who is a Japanese, did a presentation on Japanese culture and clothing.

He added that the team is small and getting smaller, finances are very tight. All trustees are voluntary. Jonathan is no longer a trustee and gets paid for his work. PCFCD is a national treasure that began in Plymouth and is unique. Schools need to continue with their subscriptions and keep them at a level which will enable us to continue to function otherwise PCFCD will cease to exist.

KF highlighted that some schools have had issues contacting the PCFCD office and the website appears to be permanently down and phone lines are not working adequately. There are quite a few schools who are interested in subscribing. PDS agreed to report concerns about communications to PCFCD and added that this is down to a difficult financial position. KF agreed to contact SW directly regarding these issues.

### **Members Updates – All**

None

### **Hindu and Sikh representation – (MS, SK, CS)**

Chaz Singh as an observer gave an overview on what he would bring to SACRE as a representative for Sikh community. He informed that there are around 90 people in

Plymouth who identify themselves as a Sikh. Chaz was appointed as a co-opted member through voting.

Chaz asked about the next steps and procedure of a full membership and how long would it take? Chair and EP went through the policies and legalities around new memberships.

The vote to co-opt Chaz was conducted with him present.

The Chair set out clearly that faith members need to be recommended by their faith communities. For Chaz to become a member of Group 'A' he will need to present a letter from a Sikh faith community organisation, delegating him to this role.

### **Any Other Business – Chair**

None

### **Date and venue of next meeting - AS**

The next meeting will be held at 1:30pm on Wednesday 13 March 2024, Warspite Room, Council House.