

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Tuesday 12 November 2024

Present: Cllr Tess Blight (TB, Chair), Cllr Sally Cresswell (CSC), Cllr Kathy Watkin (CKW), Katie Freeman (KF, Vice Chair, Diocesan Board of Exeter), Dr Judith Beckman (DJB, Jewish Community), Arezoo Farahzad (AF, Baha'i Community), Dr Ian Jamison (DIJ, Teacher of RS - Plympton Academy), Jasmin Rhead (JR, NEU, DHSG), Sara Wells (SW, PCFCD), Deborah Temple (DT, Co-opted Jewish Community rep), Michael House (MH, PCC Education Officer), Asif Siddique (AS, SACRE coordinator), Ed Pawson (EP, Advisor to Plymouth SACRE), Reverend David Evans (DE, Baptist Church), Professor David Salter (PDS, Quaker Community), Sarah Lakey (SL, Diocesan Board of Exeter), Martyn Cox (MC, Humanist)

Attended remotely: Kerry Wardle (KW, DHSE), Giles Freathy (GF, Marjon, RE Lecturer), Bhai Gurmit Singh (BGS, Sikh Community), Muhunthiny Sivasothy (MS, Hindu Community), Nic Gibson (NG, Pagan Community)

Apologies for absence: Cllr Sue Dann (CSD), Cllr Bill Stevens (CBS), Chaz Singh (CS, Co-optee Sikh Rep), Selina Day (SD, Marjon)

The meeting started at 1.30 pm and finished at 3.50 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 Sarah Lakey (SL, Church of England) as the new SACRE member. Sarah has been in teaching for 25 years and most of those years were in Plymouth schools e.g. Mount Wise, Morice Town, College Road and Alberton Primary. In West Devon Sarah has been a Senior Leader, Assistant Head, Deputy Head and a Headteacher. Sarah always had a passion for RE and started at Exeter Diocese recently where her role is about Christian distinctiveness and school effectiveness. The Chair informed that Councillor Bill Stevens (CBS) is now replacing Lord Mayor Cllr Tina Tuohy and Tatiana Wilson (Church of England) has recently resigned from Plymouth SACRE on medical grounds.

Declarations of interest - All

Chair and DDS are PCFCD's trustees.
Chair and CSC support PCFCD from Community Grants fund.
SW is PCFCD's manager and AF is the Chair of Trustees.

Review of the previous minutes - Chair

The Committee agreed that minutes from the last meeting held on 2 July 2024 were an accurate record of meeting.

Actions from the current meeting

- a) AS to circulate Powerpoint slides shared by EP in the meeting
- b) GF to contact EP regarding whether Alex Parks will be continuing with SACRE.
- c) AS to put the discussion on SACRE funding for hubs, LTLRE and other financial commitments on the next SACRE planning agenda
- d) All to send feedback on 'RE curriculum review' to EP by email

- e) AS to share NASACRE online webinar program for 2024/2025 with members
- f) DDS to share the details of pre showing of a film depicting Holodomor with members via SACRE
- g) All to inform the Chair or AS by email if they are interested to volunteer for the working group reviewing the RE provision in special schools
- h) SW to email Chair re Services4Schools process
- i) All to inform SW by emailing on info@pcfcd.co.uk if they know any faith speakers, faith groups or cultural contacts
- j) Chair to circulate the funding information via SACRE inbox after this meeting
- k) AS to send the letter (that was sent to schools after recent riots in Plymouth) to SACRE members with the minutes of this meeting
- l) EP to send feedback to government on RE Curriculum review on behalf of Plymouth SACRE
- m) AS to send expenses claim and bank details forms to members with minutes
- n) EP to link in with Marine Academy Plymouth on RE

Chair's Urgent Business - Chair

None

Local Authority Officer to SACRE Update - MH

MH gave updates on SACRE budget position and shared the relevant documents.

SACRE Budget Position – (1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025) – Updated, end of Oct 2024.
Annual resources: £13,105 (£12000 ESG+ £1105 Revenue)
In-Year spend to date: (£4,830 Total)
Planned / Projected Spend: £6,600 Total)
Projected Income: £2,545 Total (£2545.51 Delegate Attendance at Syllabus Launch 19/06/24 (DCC Invoiced, Payment Pending)
Projected Balance: £8,884 (Annual Resource £13,105 – In Year Spend £4830 & Projected Spend £6600 + Income £2545.51 = £8884.49)
Projected Remaining Resource: £4220.51 (Annual Resource £13,105 – Projected Balance £8884.49 = Project Remaining Balance £4220.51)

Please refer to '[LAOtS Update Autumn 2024](#)' in the agenda pack for full details.

MH stated that there is a projected remaining resource of around £4,000 to fund for some projects. This projection is in line with last year.

Plymouth Agreed Syllabus / Training Needs - EP

EP informed that since the three syllabus launch events took place in Devon and Plymouth, another online event took place just subsequent to the last meeting in July 2024. A total of 296 delegates attended these meetings but exclusive figures for Plymouth attendance are not available. A total of 52 people attended the training. He highlighted that feedback was very positive and ongoing training has now been started. KF and EP organised an online session for teachers last week through the [SWIFT](#) teaching school networks. It was well attended and a significant focus was on the new syllabus. Around 40 people attended that online training. EP added that trainings occur from various avenues. LTLRE trainings are free but they are of a short duration. He also added that there will be an input on the syllabus from Plymouth Local hub who are also undertaking trainings.

EP is also running online trainings which are open to Plymouth schools. The trainings will be held online due to low uptake and schools struggling to finance and arrange supply covers.

KF highlighted that the curriculum and assessment review that is being undertaken by the government at the moment, there's a mention of schools struggling to follow the national curriculum and misconceptions about RE. She also highlighted that school leaders are now more interested in RE and wanting to know more about our agreed syllabus.

EP added that in comparison with other areas Plymouth schools are using the syllabus very well despite academisation because Plymouth invested in it five years ago and continued RE support to teachers better than many other LA's.

JR commented that having a resource such as an agreed syllabus available to Primary teachers as a starting point is also really helpful.

EP elaborated that Plymouth schools are going to achieve a balance in terms of affordability and benefits of the agreed syllabus, that is evident from a better RE education in Plymouth.

KF agreed and said that Plymouth syllabus is being well received in Primary schools and they are indeed using it, especially the options to put the additional units and cohorts. She added that as a SACRE we need to promote that the agreed syllabus is flexible enough to allow individual schools determine what works best for them and not to rush through things.

Ofsted Inspections Update - EP

EP shared slides on Ofsted reports in the City since the last meeting. In Primary Schools, Millford and Prince Rock had an 'outstanding' inspection report and Chapel Bridge had a 'good' report and comments made by inspectors are really impressive.

The SACRE members highlighted the positive RE work in Millford. EP also talked about reports on secondary schools e.g. Marine Academy Plymouth (MAP), Eggbuckland CC and St. Boniface. Please see the attached slides for more details.

Members discussed the comments made by inspectors for MAP (Secondary). KF highlighted that MAP has not reported any RE curriculum data to DfE recently. JR added that RE was merged with PSHE in the school. DB said that MAP has great RE provision and there seems to be a disconnect between the primary and secondary phase. MH referred to school's website for further information that may be helpful to learn more about RE provision in the school. EP commented that he may offer a visit to the school.

In response to RDE's questions on what exactly is the statutory obligation on schools to deliver RE, EP replied that it is part of the statutory curriculum both in primary and secondary schools and it is expected that schools spend 5% of their curriculum time (in a week) on RE, but this time limit is not statutory on academies.

CSC talked about the development and use of language in primary schools and its strong connection with RE as a subject. She also highlighted that the situation in MAP may be linked with the higher levels of social deprivation in this part of the City. She also enquired about the availability of GCSE / A-Levels results data to cross-reference with RE attainment.

DIJ stated that teachers are now not as confident managing discussion activities in the classroom as compared to 15 years ago. The knowledge rich environment is fading away; teachers have less time to talk about RE and they feel less confident about managing it.

KF commented that non-specialised teachers teaching RE is also a concern and with some primary schools not teaching RE, and subsequently when children go into key Stage 3 there are cohorts who are well behind in RE as a subject.

MH confirmed that MAP sent a representative to the launch event. He added that Pat Patel who is a governor at the school could be a good link. KF said Martin Edmond could also be a good link in MAP but she is not sure if he is still working in the school.

LTLRE and RE Hub Update – KF and JR

JR informed that a hub meeting has been booked on the 27th of November, awaiting a to hear from SD on meeting dates. It will be an online meeting. SD is to provide updates on a research project about literacy in RE.

EP highlighted that he will be bringing an item to the next SACRE meeting in March 2025 to request SACRE contribute some funding to LTLRE.

He also shared slides on the following points:

- Hub leaders training (2024/5) takes place on 3/10/24, 7/3/25 and 4/7/25
- Plymouth hub is planning to run termly hub meetings this year

KF stated that it was agreed previously (when Jonathan Marshall and Heather Ogburn were involved with SACRE) that money will be given to LTLRE. She enquired why this is not happening now and expected that perhaps it may be a processing issue.

MH replied that we're in a different financial environment as compared to few years ago. Additionally we now also have different requirements on the budget for SACRE e.g. paying to an advisor. He also added that previously most of Plymouth schools were under LA's responsibility but due to academisation very few are now under LA's responsibility.

KF said that LA's are still responsible to deliver local agreed syllabus to all schools and engage on the content standards etc.

AS to put this discussion (SACRE funding for hubs and other financial commitments) on March 2025 SACRE meeting agenda.

The Chair stated that as a Council we have a commitment to support RE in the City, but we're under financial constraints, so we need to balance that very carefully.

EP shared slides on the feedback after the recent annual conference took place on 4th October 2024 at the St Mellion. He said that 91 delegates attended from schools in Devon, Torbay, Plymouth and Cornwall. The feedback and comments were very positive. He added that there was some work on the new syllabus that Katie ran a workshop on and other input on the new syllabus.

EP also shared slide on the ground-breaking work on Religion and Worldview Approach that was discussed in the conference. This also included working through characters like Livvi, Theo and Sophie who represent different disciplines and how these characters are helpful in taking a disciplinary perspective to the subject, and giving teachers tools to understand the subject in different ways.

RDE shared a local story about a Baptist minister in Plymouth who was imprisoned and died in prison for his faith on Drake's Island. EP commented that as a SACRE we need to engage

more with people, places, culture and history. DDS said that it is a challenge to engage people in a meaningful discussions even at university level. He supported the idea of using characters to facilitate such discussions. He also suggested that Livvi may be replaced with an Anthropologist. GF said that they also took research methodologies and personified them as cartoon characters; he supported the discipline of anthropology.

MH highlighted that Plymouth has a place-based plan, that has 6 priorities and one of those is Early Language Acquisition. Another one of the priorities is building a Sense of Belonging. He added that the lead for it is Rob Williams from Ted Wragg Multi-Academy Trust.

CKW highlighted the lack of discussions at home these days and how parents could be encouraged to get involved in RE. The Chair highlighted the importance of a positive debate and discussion especially in the backdrop of the recent unrest in Plymouth.

Updates from RE Advisor - EP

Regarding RE Hubs, EP shared slide on national and regional [website](#). He stated that a number of people from Plymouth SACRE are represent on the website. Locally, schools now can find PCFCD, Plymouth Synagogue and other places in the Southwest. Local accredited speakers can also be found. He added that all of the PCFCD speakers are now linked through this this network and effectively it is a one-stop-shop.

EP shared a slide regarding a webinar on '[Developing a Religion and Worldwide Views in RE in England](#)'. KF also shared an [Interfaith Webinar](#) link. This was recorded by Jonathan Marshall, KF and representatives from the Welsh Interfaith Forum and RE Today. This is a free resource that can be used by secondary teachers.

EP also shared slides on recruitment and said recruitment rose upwards this year. He added that as of October 2024, Plymouth performed better than since 2020-2022. Please see the slides on the attached presentation. He highlighted that this may linked with bursaries and Government funding. He said that the removal by the DfE of the grant for Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses will damage the recruitment of future secondary RE teachers. The amount for RE bursaries is also much smaller than other subjects.

KF highlighted the inequality issues in RE recruitment as teachers often are paid more for training or teaching other subjects. Additionally, a shortage of specialised RE teachers further exacerbate the situation.

EP said that a curriculum review is being undertaken by the government and although RE is not part of the national curriculum, he will send in a response from Plymouth SACRE. He sought feedback from the SACRE members on this consultation. Mixed responses were received in favour of RE becoming a part of the National Curriculum, but the common themes were;

- change the status quo
- RE should be part of the national curriculum
- local voices need to be heard
- standardised content is needed

SW SACRE conference 2025 (online) will be held on Monday 3 March 2025, 1-4pm, open to all SACRE members. All to send feedback on RE curriculum review to EP by email. AS to share NASACRE online webinar program for 2024/2025 to members.

Holocaust Memorial Day Update – AF

AF stated that this year HMD will be commemorating on Tuesday 28th Jan 2025 instead of 27th Jan due to the Full Council on 27th Jan. This will take place in the Council House followed by a public commemoration in the Peace Garden. The invites are currently going out. EP commented that in Exeter a public commemoration is being planned taking Plymouth as an example.

DDS gave a brief on the need for widening discussion on the incidents of genocide. He stated that Ukrainian Community is hoping that Genocide in Holodomor can also be commemorated. He added that on 25 November 2024, worldwide events are being planned (including in the UK) that are supported by UN and many sovereign governments. He further added that at University of Plymouth pre showing of a film depicting this genocide will also take place. DDS to share the details of this pre showing with members via SACRE.

DDS also commented that ahead of the Full Council meeting on 25th November 2024 he has written to Plymouth Lord Mayor asking her permission for a statement to be read in the Full Council before the meeting noting Holodomor. He added that the Ukrainian Embassy has also written to the Council Leader about it but this has not been agreed yet but he hoped this would be considered.

SACRE Task & Finish (Activity)

- a. Review of Constitution (Chair)
- b. Review of Special School Provision for R.E. (EP)

- a. Chair sought for a group of volunteers to review Plymouth SACRE constitution to make sure that it is up-to-date and fit for purpose. 1-2 meetings will be required and updates are to be shared in the next SACRE meeting in March 2025. EP, KF and MS volunteered.
- b. EP gave updates on a review of special school provision for R.E. There is a group of people from Devon, Plymouth and Torbay who are working on this item. The aim of this group to discuss whether the current syllabus is meeting the needs of all pupils rather than pupils in the mainstream schools only. EP, CW is already part of the group. RDE also volunteered to be part of this group. All to inform the Chair or AS by email if they are interested to volunteer for the above groups.

Plymouth Centre for Faith and Cultural Diversity - SW

SW said that PCFCD had a normal quiet start after the new school year but they are anticipating an exceptionally busy period in the Spring 2025. They are looking for more speakers across the board, especially Hindu and will be running training session in Dec 2024. Services4Schools process has improved but PCFCD is still struggling with some schools and the process needs to be sped up. In addition, PCFCD still do not have the final list of the subscribing schools and some schools have not fully paid for this financial year.

SW to email Chair re Services4Schools process.

All to inform SW by emailing on info@pcfcd.co.uk if they knew any faith speakers, faith groups or cultural contacts.

Interfaith Week - EP & AF

AF informed that the current week is the national [Interfaith Week](#). Plymouth interfaith [event](#) will take place on 26th November 2024, 1pm-4pm, in the Council House. The event will

showcase some practical experiences from different faith and cultural groups e.g. meditations, dance etc. Invitations have gone out including to Plymouth SACRE members and elected members. R.S.V.Ps to be sent to info@pcfcd.co.uk.

Response to Recent Unrest in Plymouth / Feedback from PCC 'Motion On Notice'- (Chair)

The Chair informed that in the Full Council meeting on 16th Sep 2024 a [Motion On Notice](#) was passed unanimously. The motion was introduced by Councillor Steel and seconded by CTB (Chair). As a Council it was agreed that a number of actions should be taken in response to the recent unrest in Plymouth. The Leader of the Council requested additional funding from the Home Secretary from the Prevent fund. The Council agreed that Councillors will take part in equality, diversity and inclusion training; much of it has now taken place; the training was provided by Local Government Association.

It was also agreed that a letter should be written to all school about new RE Local Agreed Syllabus from the Cabinet member for Education, Participation and Apprenticeships (CSC). CSC and Chair of SACRE jointly wrote the letter to schools commending the agreed syllabus and encouraging schools to use it as part of their community cohesion and inclusive education strategies.

The chair stated that there are still few things to be addressed. She acknowledged the swift action from the Courts. The Chair also praised the work of council staff in restoring the city to good working order for the next morning.

In response to this motion and the letter, Plymouth received £600K of funding from the Government; £82K has gone to Children and Young People and Schools, £379K has gone to Community Cohesion, and £34.5K for the City to spend on community events. The deadline is 25th November 2024 to apply for a small community grant fund (up to £4K) for community organisations focussing on community cohesion. The Chair acknowledged that this was not very well advertised but she has written to organisations in her Ward very recently. Some of organisation may have been approached directly. The Chair also complimented the media coverage on such a sensitive issue and also thanked the staff who came together at this difficult time and allowed people to feel safe.

DDS said that he heard about this funding via Plymouth Octopus Project and asserted that the concerned people could have a better communication with community groups to ascertain the information is shared and in a timely manner. SW agreed that it was a short deadline indeed. CSC advised that she has not received any feedback from schools since the letter was sent to schools but might have gone directly to Children Services and EPS. EP commented that he also attended a consultation about the unrest led by the Department of Housing and Communities. In the meeting he asserted the importance of RE in this context and advocated about how Plymouth take RE very seriously. RDE commented that religious illiteracy is on a rise and will have unwanted consequences if not addressed.

Chair to circulate the funding information via SACRE inbox after this meeting. AS to forward to all members. AS to send this letter to SACRE members with the minutes of this meeting.

Any Other Business – Chair

None

Date and venue of next meeting - AS

The next meeting will be held at 1:30pm on Tuesday 5 March 2025, Frobisher Room, Council House.