

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Monday 14 July 2008

PRESENT:

Mrs Martin, in the Chair.

Councillor Stark, Vice Chair.

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, Mrs Briggs, Mrs Bowness, Father Carpenter, Rev Chave, Mr Dragden, Ms Griffiths, C Hamon, Mrs Hendley, Ms Hughes, Councillor James, Mr Knight, Mr Lyddon, Miss McVicker, Ms Mitchell, Mrs Pollard, Dr Saha, and Mrs Shelmerdine.

Apologies: Mrs Abubakar, Councillor Drean, Councillor Mrs Foster, Dr Lee and Councillor McDonald.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.50 pm.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by SACRE members.

36. MINUTES

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held in 10 March 2008 be approved, subject to the following amendments –

- minute 28, bullet point 4 and point (ii) – the £1 million would be allocated to Religious Education, with only a proportion of the money provided to SACREs, through NASCRE, for specific House A training;
- minute 32, point (viii) – Mrs P Shelmerdine would replace Mrs D Getley on SACRE as the representative of the Baptist Church.

37. CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS

Welcome

The following new members of SACRE were welcomed –

- Mrs P Shelmerdine, representing the Baptist Community (Group A);
- Clare Hamon, representing the Quaker Community (Co-opted Representative);
- Councillor David James, representing Plymouth City Councillors (Group D).

Thanks

The Chair thanked members of SACRE for attending the meeting and the forthcoming discussion of the Plymouth SACRE Development Plan 2008-2011.

The Vice Chair of SACRE was also thanked for chairing the previous meeting in the absence of the Chair.

38. MEMBERSHIP ISSUES

The Religious Education Advisor updated members on current SACRE membership issues. The following principal points were noted –

- (i) Group A had one vacancy – efforts had been made to appoint a representative from the Roman Catholic Church, but to date no representative had been found;
- (ii) Group C had three vacancies from the unions ATL, NAHT, and NAS – the unions would be formally contacted, along with the Association for Primary School Headteachers, regarding possible representatives;
- (iii) Co-opted Representatives –
 - there was a vacancy for a representative from Special Schools after the resignation of Mrs J Bell from SACRE;
 - there was also a vacancy for a representative from the Plymouth Association of Governors as Rev G Cryer was no longer a member of the group.

39. **DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The Religious Education Advisor introduced the Draft Plymouth SACRE Development Plan 2008-11. SACRE members would be meeting in the afternoon to discuss the Plan in detail, and members were asked to be mindful of –

- (i) what the 2005-08 Development had and had not achieved;
- (ii) the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay syllabus, 'Every Child Matters in RE';
- (iii) the Devon SACRE Development Plan, which had been embraced by the Torbay SACRE;
- (iv) the Plymouth Children and Young People's Trust Plan.

40. **NATIONAL UPDATES**

The Religious Education Advisor updated SACRE on issues arising from the Annual Conference of Religious Education Advisors, Inspectors and Consultants (AREIAC). Members noted the following –

- (i) media played a key role in shaping views on religion, and therefore it was important that children had knowledge and understanding and the opportunity to explore religious issues through RE;
- (ii) the new Key Stage 3 Curriculum –
 - would be rolled out in schools over the next three years;
 - there was concern that RE might be adversely affected under the new curriculum, which would introduce a more personalised approach that would concentrate more on skills and less on content;
 - the statutory requirement to teach RE would remain – Ofsted advised that there should be a sound educational argument for promoting RE, rather than justification on statutory requirements alone;
 - the Key Stage 2 curriculum was also under review;
 - the QCA website had implied that RE was non-statutory – the Chair

had contacted QCA about the matter and the website had been amended;

- (iii) Religious Education Council (REC) Action Plan –
- the REC, represents from 40/50 RE organisations, had put together an Action Plan last year;
 - only £1 million had been secured in funding – it had been hoped to achieve £60 million over three years;
 - leaflets on the importance of RE, produced by the REC, were freely available;
- (iv) the Schools Minister had highlighted the Government's commitment to RE, stating it would play a crucial part in the new curriculum;
- (v) Circular 1/94, which outlined the statutory role of RE, would be updated but would only focus on RE and SACRE, and not on Collective Worship;
- (vi) Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) lead for RE advised the conference that –
- progression with RE and the new syllabus had been patchy and varied;
 - field work and community cohesion – the opportunity to engage with religious leaders had a positive effect upon the education of children;
 - there was a need for balance due to the potential tension between more personalised curriculum with a greater number of vocational subjects at Key Stage 4, and the statutory requirements for RE.

During the discussion, members of SACRE voiced their concern that some schools might not be providing an adequate level of RE under the new curriculum –

- members felt that SACRE needed to be pro-active in dealing with non-compliance;
- although SACRE could contact Ofsted about non-compliance, members felt it would be necessary to gather evidence prior to making any submission;
- SACRE believed it would be more effective to contact school headteachers, rather than Ofsted, and emphasise the need for RE to be included on the new curriculum.

Resolved that the Chair of the Secondary Heads Association be contacted regarding the possibility of SACRE formally addressing the Association at their next meeting.

41. **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AND ISSUES**

The Religious Education Advisor updated SACRE on local development and issues, and the following was noted –

- (i) it was hoped to make the Faith and Cultural Centre more independent of Plymouth City Council and maximise the opportunities afforded by its charitable status – the Centre is looking for assistance from someone who had the skills and relevant experience in business;

- (ii) a DVD about religion and faith issues within Plymouth, put together by local Muslim and Christian girls (through Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund), was now close to completion – it was hoped that the girls could attend the next SACRE meeting;
- (iii) the man charged with carrying out the attempted bomb attack on a restaurant in Exeter in May, was due to stand trial in October – the incident emphasised the need for vigilance and for people to have an accurate knowledge and understanding of different religions and issues that face us in the world today. The South West should not be complacent.

42. **THE PLYMOUTH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S TRUST PLAN**

The Senior Education Advisor for Inclusion at Plymouth City Council addressed Members with regard to the Plymouth Children and Young People's Trust Plan. The following principal points were noted –

- (i) the Local Education Authority used to be responsible for the Children's Trust, but it was now the responsibility of the Local Authority together with Health Services and other partners to move towards an integrated approach of different children's services;
- (ii) under Government guidance, every local authority should have a Children's Trust which included representatives from the voluntary sector;
- (iii) the Children's Trust received finance, through the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Area Agreement, and was responsible for determining how the money would be spent;
- (iv) the visions of the Trust included –
 - high quality and appropriate services;
 - an integrated approach focussed on prevention and timely targeted intervention;
 - a locality delivering structure with specialist services to help decrease health inequalities within the city;
 - promotion of safe parenting and family support;
- (v) the Plan was underpinned by needs analysis based on –
 - the views of children, through young people, parents, carers and professional staff;
 - information from inspectors and service reviews;
 - benchmarked performance measurements to assess where targets were met and where improvements were required;
- (vi) the Plan had ten priorities, SACRE members were asked to consider the relevant priorities when considering their Development Plan.

Members were then provided with the opportunity to ask questions, to which the following responses were provided –

- (a) SACRE might wish to take into account the views of young people and parents;
- (b) the Plan was a high level document and did not go into huge detail, however the full report with all supporting documents could be viewed on the Council website;
- (c) the number of immigrant children moving to Plymouth was relatively small, however SACRE was assured that there were adequate services in place to support them and evidence suggested that the children achieved highly.

43. **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY COHESION**

(a) Corporate Perspectives on Community Cohesion

The Head of Safer Communities at Plymouth City Council, gave a presentation to SACRE on community cohesion. The following principal points were noted –

- (i) integration was a key contributor to community cohesion, and it must take place to enable new and existing residents to adjust to one another;
- (ii) many organisations within Plymouth have done a lot of work to promote cohesion, and Plymouth was used as a Pathfinder area for the Government;
- (iii) a Comprehensive Performance Assessment, carried out in 2006, identified that –
 - the importance of community cohesion was recognised in key Council and LSP documents, and the Council had acted to improve understanding and tolerance;
 - however, the Council's strategic approach to community cohesion and diversity needed developing further, especially in light of the prospective population growth;
- (iv) nationally, 81% of people felt that individuals from different backgrounds got on well in their area (75% in Plymouth 2006), however new and complex challenges required action to bring communities together and tackle perceptions of unfair treatment, to prevent community tensions;
- (v) there was, since last September, a duty upon schools to promote community cohesion;
- (vi) the Government increased support to promote community cohesion and prevent community tensions, in response to an independent report, "Our Shared Future", on integration and cohesion;
- (vii) the LSP was an active and strong voice in promoting community cohesion, and aimed to increase the percentage of people from different backgrounds who get on well together in their local area;
- (viii) future measures to promote community cohesion in Plymouth could include –
 - further improvement to the Faith and Cultural Diversity Centre;
 - more inter-generational work;
 - citizenship ceremonies in schools;
 - greater prevention of community tensions and extremism;
 - faith network/literacy;
 - greater integration.

During the discussion, the following comments were noted –

- (a) it was felt that young people might benefit from attending citizenship ceremonies held by the Lord Mayor – currently meetings were closed, however the possibility of meetings being open in the future would be investigated;
- (b) Bishop John Ford was the faith representative on the LSP, however it was his role to represent all faith communities – SACRE were assured that the Bishop was keen to liaise with other faiths through the Centre and he would be invited to a future SACRE meeting;
- (c) members felt that “tolerance” gave an impression of simply accepting, rather than liking people and getting on with them in the community;
- (d) SACRE members were invited to any meeting which took place at the Centre, and the Religious Education Advisor agreed to inform members of meetings taking place;
- (e) SACRE could help to drive community cohesion and take a lead role;
- (f) schools would be assessed on their efforts to promote community cohesion – RE can play a big role in helping schools to achieve a high standard, however some schools might need help in doing more to try and reach out to the community.

(b) Indian Religious Perspectives on Community Cohesion

SACRE member, Dr Saha, addressed members on Indian religious perspectives on community cohesion. The following key points were noted –

- (i) Increasing understanding of Indian religions would help to improve community cohesion as many aspects of the religions directly addressed community issues and concerns, such as respect for others and the carrying of weapons;
- (ii) a major factor in improving community cohesion was to help people understand their similarities with others;
- (iii) Dr Saha was prepared to meet with RE teachers to help increase their understanding of Indian religions.

The Head of Safer Communities and Dr Saha were thanked for their presentations.

44. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Monday, 24 November 2008 in the Council House, situated next to the Civic Centre.