

# **Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education**

**Monday 4 July 2011**

## **PRESENT:**

Miss Mitchell, in the Chair.

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, Mrs Bradley, Rev Chave, Councillor Gordon, Mrs Hamon, Mrs Hill, Mr Kerr, Dr Saha, Mrs P Shelmerdine, Councillor Singh, Councillor Stark and Mr Lyddon.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Drea and Fiona Hutchings, Philippa Bellows, Mrs Z Abubakar, Father G Carpenter, Mrs V Armitage, Mr P Grainger, Ms T Griffiths, Richard Maudsley, Ben Seel, Anna Kelly and Dr Barbara Wintersgill

Also in attendance: Mr Marshall (RE Adviser), Mr Johnston (Democratic Support Officer) and Kerry Whittlesea (Youth Cabinet representative).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 12.35 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.*

## **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by SACRE members.

## **2. MINUTES**

Agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2011 are confirmed as a correct record subject to Mrs Shelmerdine and Mr Lyddon being marked as present.

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

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

## **4. WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

The Chair welcomed the following members to SACRE –

- Ben Kerr, representing Plymouth Humanists;
- Councillor Aspinall;
- Councillor Singh.

## 5. NATIONAL AND LOCAL RE UPDATES

The RE Adviser provided SACRE Members with an update on national and local updates. Members were informed that –

- (a) RE nationally faced a critical period after the government excluded the subject from the English Baccalaureate (EB);
- (b) as a result of RE being excluded from the EB students and teachers would focus their attention and education on the selected EB subjects which were Maths, English, Sciences, Modern Languages and Humanities (only History and Geography) as results in these topics were what schools would largely be judged on;
- (c) with RE being selected as a GCSE option by fewer students there would be an unintentional but negative implication on the teaching of RE at earlier key stages;
- (d) although RE was excluded from the EB it continued to remain a statutory requirement and, therefore SACRE continued to have a vital role in ensuring that the values of RE were being promoted in schools;
- (e) locally the Education team were going through a restructure; as part of the restructure a full-time RE/SACRE position had been identified;
- (f) the local RE syllabus was excellent with some inspiring guidance documents including the recent RE School handbooks and SACRE had a key role to play in promoting this syllabus and offering guidance and support to teachers ensuring that the bigger picture of RE remained the focus;
- (g) some excellent RE work was happening all across the city and SACRE needed to work proactively in a way that this work could be demonstrated and promoted;
- (h) in order for Plymouth SACRE to promote RE proactively there needed to be relevant local guidance and initiatives which would reflect guidance produced nationally from organisations including the Religious Education Council and the National Association of Teachers of RE (NATRE).

Members commented that –

- (i) the teaching of RE in schools was not always sufficient and there seemed to be no adequate enforcement of the statutory duty to teach RE;
- (j) SACRE's role was not to test the teaching of RE in schools but to proactively promote RE and assist in the teaching of RE, whilst encouraging enthusiasm for all aspects of the subject.
- (k) it was disappointing that RE was not included in the EB and it was

believed that RE should be an option in the Humanities section on an equal footing with both History and Geography.

Agreed that a letter be written to Michael Gove MP stating the disappointment of Plymouth SACRE that RE was not included in the English Baccalaureate, particularly given its potential role in the New Prevent strategy, announced by the Home Secretary, at the beginning of June.

## 6. **THE NASACRE CONFERENCE**

Councillor Chaz Singh attended the NASACRE Conference in May 2011 and informed members that –

- (a) the conference was excellent and focused on issues including Holocaust Memorial Day and the impact of ‘the big society’ on RE;
- (b) a video was presented by Clare Dempsey called ‘whose RE is it anyway’, which demonstrated different concepts of the importance of RE and members should attempt to view the video on the internet as it promoted a very positive image of RE;
- (c) the current situation of RE nationally was a major concern to all at the conference;
- (d) on a more local level there were concerned discussions regarding the imposed reduction in the number of students able to be recruited on to the PGCE Secondary RE course run by the University of St Mark and St John (Marjons).

The Chair thanked Councillor Singh for the update.

## 7. **PLYMOUTH SACRE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011 - 2014**

The RE Adviser presented the SACRE Development Plan 2011 – 2014. Members were informed that –

- (a) SACRE agrees a plan every three years to prioritise its work and at the last meeting members were encouraged to think about SACRE’s processes and self evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of SACRE and then feedback their comments;
- (b) all comments were collated into one document which was forwarded to members to make comments before the final Development Plan was formulated;
- (c) the six key priorities in the plan would be championed by the Group representatives, these were:
  - to seek on-going opportunities to raise the profile of SACRE – Miss Helena Mitchell;

- to establish a planned approach to the development of RE and particularly its contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school – Mr Tim Lyddon;
  - to establish a biennial celebration/exhibition of RE work – Ms Teresa Griffiths;
  - with Devon and Torbay SACREs, revise, as appropriate, the RE syllabus – Mr Jonathan Marshall;
  - to revise guidance and identify key resources for collective worship – Mrs Liz Hill;
  - to maintain and extend further the excellent work which contributes to community cohesion/social integration in schools and across the city – Councillor David Stark;
- (d) the RE Adviser would hold a supervisory position on all priorities observing and overseeing the work undertaken.

Agreed –

- (1) to formally adopt the SACRE Development Plan 2011 – 2014;
- (2) that the Democratic Support Officer would send a copy of the SACRE Development Plan 2011 – 2014 to all members and a list of the working groups asking members to contact the RE Adviser if they wished to be included in the working groups for one (or more) of the agreed priorities. The RE Adviser will then ask the Chairs for each group to contact their respective group members to arrange meetings.

## 8. **NEW PREVENT STRATEGY**

The RE Adviser presented a summary report of the recently published Prevent Strategy and informed members that –

- (a) strategies to counter terrorism had been important in recent times and in the last 5-6 years the Prevent Strategy was a major part of the overall focus on counter terrorism strategies (CONTEST);
- (b) an announcement by Theresa May MP in June 2011 saw the launch of the new Prevent Strategy, which had a slightly different focus to the previous strategy and now focused on the three 'I's – Ideology, Individuals and Institutions;
- (c) the strategy aimed to promote community spirit and vigilance, whilst enabling communities to be more resilient to threat of extremism;
- (d) extremism could happen anywhere and anytime; in Plymouth Nicky Reilly

was a clear example of this.

Members commented that –

- (e) the strategy was clearly one of the government's priorities which made the fact that RE was excluded from the English Baccalaureate even more concerning;
- (f) teaching of the strategy needed to be made relevant to its target audience with appropriate materials provided.

Members were further informed that –

- (g) on Saturday 9 July 2011 there was a protest march in Plymouth by the English Defence League (EDL) and also a counter march in the Jigsaw Garden, Plymouth University called 'love music, hate racism';
- (h) on the Hoe on Saturday 9 July 2011 there was a religious festival being held by the All Nations Ministry, this on top of the EDL march would potentially lead to a large police presence in the city;
- (i) the RE Adviser showed a brief extract from a "Prevent" training session and members discussed the issues raised and implications for schools and especially through RE.

Agreed that a Prevent Strategy training session would be provided to all SACRE members at the conclusion of a future meeting.

## 9. **PLYMOUTH CENTRE FOR FAITHS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

The RE Adviser gave an update on the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity and informed members that –

- (a) the centre, which had a very important role to play in promoting RE in schools, would be celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 20 September 2011;
- (b) new faith trails were being developed which would aim to encourage people to walk throughout the city whilst discovering the many religious institutions;
- (c) a story tent had been created which would be taken into schools and young people would be invited inside to listen to stories from all different cultures;
- (d) in the past year the centre's Faith Speakers had visited 240 different classes, contributed to 50 school assemblies and the Centre had also organised 40 school trips to Christian, Jewish and Muslim places of worship.

10. **UNMET NEEDS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - ST LUKES TRUST UPDATE**

The RE Adviser informed members that the St Lukes Trust had intimated that they would be prepared to consider applications for grant assistance for RE projects over the next 2 – 3 years and that they had funds to support a Devon, Plymouth and Torbay initiative to identify work around “Unmet needs for Religious Education”

An update on a proposed project would be provided at a future meeting.

11. **HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY UPDATE**

The RE Adviser provided an update on Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) 2012 and informed members that –

- (a) the theme for next year’s HMD had been chosen and was ‘speak up, speak out’;
- (b) to commemorate HMD 2012 there would be the traditional civic event in the English Rose Garden, Mount Edgcumbe and an evening event, this year it is hoped, at the College of Art and Design;
- (c) the RE Adviser is working with Plymouth College of Art and Design, who aim to host a whole day of events showcasing art work from College students but also from school pupils from across the city who would be asked to produce paintings, drawings or poems in response to the theme of ‘others’.

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

Agreed that the next meeting of SACRE would be held at 1:00pm on Monday 28 November 2011, and subject to agreement, at the Plymouth Islamic Education Trust centre (PIETY), 19 Greenbank Avenue, Plymouth, PL4 8PS.

13. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.