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Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Wednesday 17 July 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Aspinall, in the Chair.

Ms Penny Burnside, Miss Katie Freeman, Mr Jamie Heselden, Mrs Liz Hill, Councillor Drear, Councillor Stark, Mrs Helena Mitchell, Dr Jantindra Saha, Ms Teresa Griffiths, Mrs Pam Shelmerdine, Councillor Gordon, Ms Anna Kelly, Imam Abdulrahman and Councillor Singh.

Co-opted Representatives: Dr Clare Hamon, Father Gregory Carpenter, Miss Caroline McVicker and Mr Ben Kerr.

Apologies for absence: Mr Martin Edmonds, Mrs Cathy Bowness, Mrs Alison Bradley, Mrs Alison Sturgeon and Dr Barbara Wintersgill.

Also in attendance: Mr Jonathan Marshall (RE Advisor) and Helen Rickman (Democratic Support Officer).

The meeting started at 10.05 am and finished at 12.45 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. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, reminded members of a previous resolution in which the role of Chair and Vice Chair would be operated on a two year rotation system between the partnership of Groups A and C and Groups B and D.

It was highlighted that Group B (The Church of England) should have the Chair for this two year period as, when working in partnership previously, Group D (The Local Authority) held the Chair.

Group B was unable to provide a representative to stand as Chair as only the Groups two newest members were in attendance and were not confident in taking on this responsibility. It was therefore agreed that Councillor Mrs Aspinall would take on the role as Chair for this meeting in the absence of a candidate from Group B who would be provided by the next scheduled meeting.

Agreed that Groups B and D would take on the responsibilities of Chair and Vice Chair until the School Summer Term 2014 in order to align with the Council's municipal calendar.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's Urgent Business.

4. **MINUTES**

The minutes of 4 March 2013 were approved as a correct record subject to minute 70 'Welcome to New Members' which should have stated that Penny Burnside and Katie Freeman were to represent Group B. The minutes should therefore read the following:

'The Chair welcomed Penny Burnside, representing Group B, to her first SACRE meeting and noted that Katie Freeman, representing Group B, had just been appointed. '

5. **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE**

Teresa Griffiths confirmed that this was to be her last SACRE meeting however informed members that she was a member of NATRE (The National Association of Teachers of Religious Education) and that she proposed to seek confirmation from NATRE that Caroline McVicker should be her replacement.

Agreed that Teresa Griffiths would provide confirmation from NATRE to SACRE members regarding the proposal that Caroline McVicker replaces her on this association.

6. **PROPOSAL TO ELECT A HUMANIST REPRESENTATIVE ONTO GROUP A**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, advised members that the wording on the agenda for this item was incorrect; as RE Advisor for SACRE he did not have the power to 'propose' that a humanist representative be elected onto Group A, this was for the panel to decide. Members were informed that, at the last SACRE meeting, Ben Kerr proposed that he, as a humanist, should be formally elected onto Group A as a voting member instead of being a non-voting co-opted representative for SACRE therefore this item was included onto the agenda for this meeting for discussion.

Members were advised that –

- (a) there were issues with electing a humanist onto Group A as this Group was labelled in the terms of reference as having membership for 'Christian and other religious denominations, not including the Church of England' however it could be considered that humanism was not a religion therefore should not be a represented on Group A;
- (b) it was considered that there were approximately 50 to 60 humanist representatives on SACREs across the country however approximately only 20 to 30 were on Group A;
- (c) Group A currently did not have a Buddhist representative or a Sikh representative;
- (d) humanism was represented in the agreed syllabus for RE;

- (e) the panel's terms of reference limited the numbers on Group A to eight members; members were asked to consider if the terms of reference be amended to extend membership to 10 members to include a humanist, a Buddhist and a Sikh representative;

In response to questions raised, Ben Kerr informed the panel that –

- (f) humanists were predominantly added to Group A; this was guidance from the British Humanist Association;
- (g) humanism was different from atheism as it centred around an embodiment of ideas and also opinions on the afterlife;
- (h) humanism was not a religion;
- (i) in the last census approximately 33% of the population were 'non-believers' and to represent non-religious groups was important;
- (j) there were approximately 210 humanists in Plymouth;
- (k) it was important for a humanist to be represented in a Group other than being a co-opted representative as members of Groups were able to vote on issues whereas co-opted representatives were not; it was important to have an official voice;
- (l) he considered that several SACREs across the country did not have a humanist representative because of a circular that was distributed in 2000 advising SACREs to remove humanists from the panel – this advice was later rescinded however not all SACREs reappointed humanist members;

Members considered that –

- (m) if the word 'beliefs' was added to the Group A membership this could then allow a humanist to be included;
- (n) the issue of membership was difficult as Quakers and Orthodox Christians were also not represented in Group A;
- (o) the guidelines were very dated and a way of life ought to be considered when looking at the membership of Groups;
- (p) there was believed to be approximately 200 different faiths and religions; it was difficult to include everyone in Group A;
- (q) Group A was specifically for religious viewpoints; as humanism was not a

religion a representative from this belief should therefore not be on Group A;

- (r) the first humanists were deeply religious and this belief system contained a huge spectrum of people;
- (s) the terms of reference for SACRE was not governed by the Council's Constitution;
- (t) there was a statute law that governed the Groups and their membership;
- (u) the terms of reference for SACRE was last revised in 2006;
- (v) when taking a vote in SACRE only one vote was put forward from each of the four Groups; each member would have the ability to put forward their view however individual votes were not recorded. The agreed spokesperson for the Group would take a final decision;
- (w) it was not possible to include a fifth voting group;

After much discussion a proposal was put forward in which members were asked to vote upon expanding the membership of Group A by altering the terms to reference to read the following:

'Group A – Christian and other religions and beliefs (with the exception of the Church of England).'

Members were concerned that, due to the statutory nature of the SACRE Groups, it was not advisable to amend the terms of reference for Group A until advice had been sought from NASACRE.

The Chair instead asked members to consult with members of their respective Groups in order to vote upon if, in principle, they were satisfied that a humanist should be included onto Group A.

The Groups votes were as follows:

Group A – no
Group B – no
Group C – no
Group D - yes

Agreed that officers would seek advice from NASACRE regarding the membership of Groups on SACRE and who was able to sit in which Group.

(Councillor Drean left the meeting at 12 noon before the vote on this agenda item)

7. THE NATIONAL RE PICTURE

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, provided members with an update on the National RE Picture as a result of his attendance at the Annual NASACRE meeting.

Members were informed that –

- (a) new proposals were being discussed regarding the new national curriculum; RE has its own review via the Religious Education Council;
- (b) it was considered that SACREs could have the opportunity to play a more active role in improving the quality of religious education;
- (c) Alan Brine, the National HMI Lead for RE, and Dr Mark Chater, Culham St Gabriel's Excellence in Religious Education, were speaking at the event;
- (d) every three years there was a long HMI report produced on RE based on direct visits to 180 schools across the country;
- (e) there were concerns regarding the provision of RE at GCSE level and policy changes raised serious concerns regarding the capacity of existing structures to support RE;
- (f) a NASACRE survey suggested that many SACREs were under increasing pressure and there were issue with funding and access to expertise;
- (g) between the 1990s and 2010 SACREs were functioning well; there was a broad consensus about RE and GCSEs were doing well;
- (h) over the past two years it was considered that the national support structure for RE had collapsed and there was a shift in public attitude to religion;
- (i) there were national and local initiatives to support RE which were now threatened;
- (j) there were concerns that SACREs were in danger of being antiquated;
- (k) key stages 1, 2 and 3 were encouraging teachers and children to look at non-religious approaches and thinking;
- (l) SACREs were asked to consider if they should be more creative and innovative locally;

Members raised the following points –

- (m) the Plymouth Teaching Schools Alliance had taken over a consortium of

schools in Plymouth and the schools direct training which replaced the graduate training programme;

- (n) in Plymouth there was no training for church schools and children going in for RE unless the school provides it;
- (o) Katie Freeman was a SLE (Senior Leader of Education) and she worked alongside teacher training colleagues to provide support;
- (p) historically teachers were not provided with adequate training to teach RE;
- (q) members questioned how they could most benefit young people in schools in order to make an impact;
- (r) there had been a drop in RE syllabus exam entries;
- (s) RE remained a statutory requirement in schools;

Agreed that –

- I the Democratic Support Officer would email all SACRE members the e-petition link regarding the RE Subject Review – the draft programmes of study could be accessed on the Religious Education Council website;

8. **ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON RE**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, informed members that Mrs Wintersgill was unable to attend the meeting due to personal circumstances therefore an update would be provided at the next meeting.

Members were informed that a detailed report had been written in which concerns regarding teacher training and support for teachers of religious education were raised.

Agreed that the 'All Party Parliamentary Group on RE' would be added to the agenda for the next scheduled meeting and that a letter would be sent to the local MPs asking them for their views on issues raised within the report.

9. **TOWARDS A PLYMOUTH RE SYLLABUS**

SACRE members were informed that Devon, Plymouth and Torbay had traditionally worked together to produce the agreed RE syllabus however it was recommended that Plymouth should develop its own syllabus to showcase Plymouth's heritage, diversity and spirituality.

Plymouth was unique in that it had a wide Christian diversity as well as the other major world faiths plus Pagans and other groups.

Agreed that Plymouth would continue to work collaboratively with Torbay and Devon to produce an RE syllabus, however Plymouth would develop a distinct Plymouth dimension to tell the unique story of the city's diversity of faith.

10. **COLLECTIVE WORSHIP RESOURCE - LAUNCH ARRANGEMENTS**

Liz Hill and Katie Freeman provided SACRE with an update on the Collective Worship Resource Launch Arrangements.

Members were informed that –

- (a) the Collective Worship Resource had been trialled in some schools in Plymouth and extra resources had been added to the package; this would be a free package funded by SACRE;
- (b) there was a variety of resources including dvds, film clips, drama themes and music;
- (c) information would be provided in a booklet which had a picture of Plymouth on the front cover; the aim was to make the booklet Plymouth themed;
- (d) each school would be given a pack with a theme for the week and five strands of ideas and suggestions that could be used for their collective worship for each day;
- (e) children partaking in the collective worship resource would be asked to evaluate their experience;
- (f) in addition children would be filmed walking into assembly in order to assess how children feel about their collective worship learning experience; this would be used as part of a presentation;
- (g) it was hoped that the programme was designed that non RE specialists could feel confident using the programme;
- (h) the Collective Worship Resource would be launched on 6 and 7 November 2013 at 4pm at Hyde Park Infants School;
- (i) invitations would be sent out to Schools, School Governors and SACRE members;

Members thanked Liz Hill and Katie Freeman for their update.

(Liz Hill and Katie Freeman left the meeting at the end of this item)

11. LOCAL RE UPDATES

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, provided members with an update on local RE updates.

(i) **REC/ Plymouth Centre For Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) Sponsored RE walk**

Jonathan Marshall, RE Advisor, informed members that the PCFCD sponsored walk was a huge success and money was raised.

Clare Hamon advised members that the walk was a wonderful experience that provided a sense of unity and diversity and an article was included in a local newsletter.

Members were advised that there would be an opportunity for members to go for a walk around Plymouth visiting local places of faith.

(ii) **Faith Diversity DVD**

Members were informed that the faith diversity dvd was aimed at key stage 3 and 4 and should be finalised in the autumn of 2013.

(iii) **Holocaust Memorial Day - Plans for January 2014**

Members were informed that the Holocaust Memorial Day was scheduled for 27 January 2014 and would be themed around 'journeys'.

Councillor Mrs Aspinall informed SACRE that full council was due to meet on 27 January 2014 at 2pm.

(iv) **LearnTeachLeadRE**

Members were informed that the second annual conference for teachers would take place in October 2013. A further update was attached with the SACRE papers for this meeting.

12. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next SACRE meeting had been scheduled to take place on Monday 11 November 2013 however this was Remembrance Day.

Agreed that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 13 November 2013, 9.30 – 12.30pm at a venue to be confirmed.

Under this item Helena Mitchell was thanked for her excellent chairing of meetings for the previous two years.

13. EXEMPT BUSINESS

There were no items of exempt business.