

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education held on 6 January 2021 at 6.30 pm

- Committee A:** Mrs S Lawson, Mr A Kariyawasam and Mr T Ojetola
- Committee B:** Mr A Anderson and Mrs L Fry
- Committee C:** Ms Jellicoe and Mrs Pumfrey
- Committee D:** Councillor Kerin
- Apologies:** Ms J Culloty, Mrs H Kaur, Ms Webster and Councillor Collins.
- In Attendance:** Deborah Weston, Associate Advisor for Religious Education
Andrea Winstone, Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and SEND
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being live streamed to the Council's online webcast channel.

13. Minutes

The minutes of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education held on 4 November 2020 were approved as a correct record subject to noting the incorrect spelling of Mr Kariyawasam surname.

14. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of Urgent Business.

15. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

16. What do stakeholders say about RE in Thurrock? Thurrock's Youth Cabinet

The Chair of SACRE explained one of the key responsibilities and duties of SACRE was overseeing, reviewing and issuing the agreed syllabus for the teaching of RE in Thurrock that cycle is about to start again I want the things that we are committed to doing is consulting widely with a whole range of stakeholders who have an interest in RE teaching within Thurrock prior to conducting that review and I'm delighted that some members of these cabinets have been able to come along to our meeting tonight.

He continued by explaining he had hoped to go round the Members of the Youth Cabinet and for them to answer any of the questions within the agenda which they thought they would like to answer.

During discussions Members heard how one Member of the Youth Cabinet spoke about her experiences of RE at Primary and Secondary School both of which were Roman Catholic Faith Schools and how they differed. She explained how she remembered RE in School being taught very cross curricular. She continued by stating she remembered when in Primary School RE was learning through artwork rather than through textbooks.

Councillor Kerin thanked the Youth Cabinet for attending the meeting and commented it was wonderful to hear their perspectives of RE in Schools. He asked from their point of view what how important did they and young people of their age group consider RE to be and their view on the UK becoming less religious but the world was becoming more religious, as he felt it was an interesting contrast.

Members heard how in terms of RE and the younger generation one member of the Youth Cabinet felt it was very dependent on the background young people came from and how religious their family was. She continued by stating as a generation she felt young people were becoming less religious as a society in terms of RE due to a limited focus.

It was commented that perhaps Religious Education was seen as a downfall by some pupils because it was not respected and was perceived as a subject that you had to do instead wanted to participate in, it was felt this could be due to the limited number of practical lessons and trips which other subjects could do.

Councillor Kerin followed up by asking what in the Young Cabinet's opinion did they think could assist in making RE more respected and a subject which young people wanted to study. He continued by linking his question to comment made about your background being important and what the Youth Cabinet thought could be put in place to make RE important regardless of whether you come from a religious background.

SACRE heard how a member of the Youth Cabinet felt if more young people had a religious background, then there would be different cultural backgrounds and perhaps an appreciation for different religions. She further mentioned how in years Eight and Nine they learnt about animal cruelty, sweatshops and Crime and Punishment, during which they learnt about the death penalty looking at different case studies, which made the lesson more interesting for some people as it wasn't just on religion.

The offered clarity for SACRE members in that the experience young people would be have if they attended a school with a religious character would be very different from the experience of those who attend a community school. She continued by explaining a School of religious character didn't follow the same agreed syllabus as community schools.

The question 'In what jobs would you say, you could use your learning in RE?' was answered by a member of the Youth Cabinet observing that being a chef or having a cooking role would be related to RE as there are some religions who don't eat pork or beef, she continued to mention the role of being a Doctor because due to religious reasons a patient might decide against a blood transfusion or surgery.

Another Member of the Youth Cabinet mentioned she also attended a Catholic Primary School, however for her secondary school she attended a School with no religion so it was interesting to see the difference between the two. She continued by stating in the Catholic primary school there was a strong focus on Catholicism, with two lessons on another faith, she highlighted that as Catholic she found the subject easy to learn however for secondary school during GCSE Religious Studies (RS) there were a few similarities but also quite different, where she enjoyed a range of different religions opposed to just Christianity.

SACRE Members heard how one of the Youth Cabinet Members felt it depended on the school you attended as different schools did different things, for example her previous school was a grammar school and her current school was a normal school (community/academy) where they did less trips or practical lessons than in Grammar School. She continued to mention they visited a historical museum in another country which was really interesting where she learnt a lot about the extent of religious studies and the origins in the past linked to religious studies.

Mrs Saul took the opportunity to thank the young people for taking the time today to come and talk about their experience of religious education, she stated she thought it was really important that SACRE heard from their point of view how they experienced RE in school. She continued by explaining she was a headteacher in a primary school, so delivered the curriculum to pupils but commented it was really nice to hear their views having experienced RE in schools and was nice to hear that they enjoyed a practical approach to learning about religion.

Ms Kaur echoed members' thanks to the Youth Cabinet, she then asked apart from Judaism and Islam did anyone study the Sikh Religion and what did they feel was needed to enable young people to feel more stimulated in the RE lessons?

It was discussed how one member of the Youth Cabinet explained she didn't study the Sikh religion in depth, she commented they had one lesson and then went back to learning about Christianity. She further commented she felt it was taught quite late and wasn't sure if the teachers really knew as much about the Sikh Religion.

She continued when more contemporary topics were discussed where a debate could take place the subject seemed really popular. It was highlighted that if given the chance to have discussions and debates into lessons then

young people were more engaged and willing to have their say, rather than just taught the theory side of the lesson.

The Chair of SACRE stated he was going to finish the discussion by asking members of the Youth Cabinet 'If you're in charge of the RE curriculum what would you change?' He asked if there were any other questions before moving on from Members of SACRE.

ask 'what extent you recognise the religious or non-religious beliefs of your own family in the teaching you receive in RE, so if you get taught about the traditions that you recognise whether they be non-religious beliefs or religious beliefs to what extent do you recognise it and what you're being taught'.

It was commented that at Secondary School one member of the Youth Cabinet when studying learnt about Christianity and Catholicism in particular however what she would practice in church and how her family practiced Catholicism, she felt there was disparity in that when being taught at school her religion was taught as quite orthodox and quite rigid, which was not how she experience her faith at home.

The stated it was helpful to hear from the Youth Cabinet as they were the ones who were being taught in the local schools. She queried if the Youth Cabinet thought it was possible the subject knowledge of teachers was that they may be trying to deliver the textbook view of the religion and maybe don't have a deep understanding of the religion when you're having the discussions, so maybe Schools could to look for expertise within the community to invite visitors into schools to talk knowledgeably about different religions because it was important to get the right views and understanding and not to get misconceptions.

Members of the Youth Cabinet were then given the opportunity to ask questions of SACRE during which it was sought, what was SACRE's role and what were they hoping to achieve by speaking to the Youth Cabinet. The Chair of SACRE explained speaking with the Youth Cabinet was one example of how SACRE were trying to listen to young people and to hear their experiences and view on Religious Education. He continued to explain this was the first time the annual youth conference was unable to run, due to Covid 19.

The Chair of the SACRE highlighted one of the reasons Members of the Youth Cabinet were invited to come along and speak with SACRE was because members were about to start the process of reviewing the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus and this was the time their comments could really make a difference.

It was then sought as to what was SACRE's goal for future and what were members trying to get out of conversations with the Youth Cabinet. Councillor Kerin stated he had been really interested in the discussions and asked that moving forward it was made a regular occurrence to invite the Youth Cabinet to SACRE meetings.

The Chair thanked the Youth Cabinet for their attendance and cooperation in discussions.

17. Review of Thurrock SACRE Terms of Reference

The Chair of SACRE Phil Anderson presented the item and in doing so explained the terms of reference were to be amended and updated before being presented the annual council for approval.

During discussions it was highlighted the Free Church Federal Council had an education section known as the Free Church Education Group. Members also decided after reading through the Terms of Reference point 9 quorum to remove the line regarding less than a third of the total membership at present, this meant that as long as one member from each committee was present SACRE was quorate.

The Chair of SACRE sought the views of Councillor Kerin with regards to increasing the membership of Committee D and including substitutions. Councillor Kerin explained since being part of SACRE that appeared to be a struggle to find Elected Members to be part of the Committee. He stated he felt keeping at the membership at three Elected Members covered each political party and agreed that having three substitutes as nominated by Annual Council was a good idea.

RESOLVED

That SACRE agree the revised Constitution of Thurrock SACRE as set out in Appendix 1.

18. Spirited Arts - Local and National Competition 2021

Associate Advisor for Religious Education offered Members of SACRE a verbal update with regards to the spiritual competition. She informed members that Sue Lampkin had set up a portal online for schools to register their interest in SACRE's local competition, with the competition being announced in the Headteacher's bulletin which was circulated to all local schools.

During discussions it was enquired as to whether prizes could be donated by local businesses linked to the arts or a spiritual connection could be sought for winners of the competition. Members also discussed the uses of social media and local media to advertise and highlight the competition to all children in the borough. It was commented but the country was in a national lockdown due to the pandemic this work could be set by schools for children to complete at home.

The Strategic Lead for School Effectiveness and SEND commented the Headteacher's bulletin as discussed would be going out at the end of January (2021) and advised that parents would not be able to access the portal at

present, this would be schools only. The Associate Advisor for Religious Education stated they had asked for two entries per school age group and that the results would be declared at the summer term.

Members of SACRE commented this was a nice thing for schools to engage with SACRE on as well as encouraging remote learning during this hard time. It was queried as to the age groups the pieces of work would come in from. The Associate Advisor for Religious Education confirmed there would be a prize for early years, KS1, lower KS2 and KS2.

The Chair stated he was looking forward to seeing the work produced by the young people of the borough and wish them all good luck.

RESOLVED that SACRE Members noted the update from the Associate Advisor for Religious Education.

19. Update on National Developments and Opportunities

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education presented the report to members which detailed the key national developments impacting on Religious Education and sought SACRE views and suggested actions.

Members heard how on the 10 October 2019, the government announced that Colin Bloom had been appointed as the faith engagement advisor at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and that he was launching a review interfaith engagement. It was commented that his first engagement advisor Mr Bloom was leading a review into how best the government should engage with faith groups in England.

It was advised that before Christmas a consultation had launched to seek views and propose changes for GCSE and A-level examinations. The introduction to this consultation explained that student education had been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education commented that the Lincoln diocese board of education was to hold the RE symposium virtually on 23 February 2021 and this was the first of its kind within the UK to bring RE teachers creative, and policy makers together to focus on the potential impact of creative processes on the development of religious and world views literacy.

SACRE were advised following the disappointing news that bursaries had been cut from most subjects including Religious Education, it was really good news that Religious Education had been selected for funded subject knowledge enhancement courses. Members heard the funding would be available from April 2021 and that hopefully would support those people wishing to apply to teach Religious Education but who did not have a first degree within the subject.

It was suggested that the subject knowledge enhancement courses be shared with all schools for information and this was agreed by Members.

RESOLVED:

That SACRE members:

- **Review the information collected (Appendix 1)**
- **Evaluate the relevance of each section for RE in Thurrock**
- **Consider the suggested actions**

20. What do stakeholders say about RE in Thurrock?

The Chair of SACRE took members through the second part of the report which was to agree which stakeholders SACRE needed to consult with as part of its monitoring work and to inform the revision of the agreed syllabus. The Associate Advisor for Religious Education suggested the following stakeholders as a starting point for SACRE to consult with:

- Schools and Academies
- The Local Authority
- NASCARE
- The Youth Cabinet
- The Regional School's Commissioner

It was suggested that perhaps within schools Headteacher or RE Leads would be good stakeholders to speak with as teachers were on the front line and were teaching the curriculum which was supported by the agreed syllabus. Members further suggested that retired Religious Education teachers also be contacted for their views.

RESOLVED that SACRE:

- 1.1 Engage in a discussion firstly with young people from the Youth Cabinet (starter questions are provided in appendix A) and then with each other about Religious Education in Thurrock and its links to promoting tolerance and respect.**
- 1.2 Agree what other stakeholders it needs to consult as part of its monitoring work and to inform the revision of the Agreed Syllabus.**

21. Annual Report 2019-2020 Thurrock SACRE

The Chair of SACRE introduced the annual report for 2019/2022 to members explaining he had spoken with the previous Chair Rev. John Guest who was happy for the report to be presented in the current Chair's name. He continued by stating he felt it was important that Rev. Guest was

acknowledged within the report for all of his hard work and it was important that SACRE's thanks to him also be acknowledged. The Chair then opened up for any comments and questions on the Annual Report.

The Associate Advisor for Religious Education stated the only issue within the report was that the Department for Education was not publishing exam results for 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, and therefore instead of the results being reported, the number of entries for those students taking RE exams could be noted instead. Members agreed with this and asked that the Associate Advisor contact schools to seek this information.

The Chair commented that in the past Councillor Kerin had kindly offered to present the report on behalf of SACRE at Full Council, and enquired if he was happy to continue to do this. Councillor Kerin confirmed he was happy to present the report to Elected Members at Full Council and would liaise with the Chair and Democratic Services for a convenient date.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That SACRE accept this report as an accurate record of its work for the period September 2019 – July 2020**

- 1.2 Requests that the Assistant Director Education and Skills continues to include discussions about RE provision in the scheduled discussions with senior leadership teams**

- 1.3 Requests that the school effectiveness team include a review of schools' provision for RE and Collective Worship as part of their annual conversations. Specifically, that they consider:**
 - **the impact on pupil outcomes of the combination of subjects such as RE, RSE, Citizenship and PSHE**
 - **the level of training provided to those teaching RE especially when they have no previous experience of teaching the subject**
 - **the impact on pupil attainment of pupils being entered for a GCSE at the end of year 10**
 - **whether or not the amount of time dedicated to RE on school timetables was sufficient for pupils to meet the aims of either the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus or, in the case of academy schools, either the Thurrock Agreed Syllabus or one that is 'equally broad and ambitious' as expected by the DfE and Ofsted**

The meeting finished at 8.04pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**