

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education held on 15 July 2015 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Committee A: Phil Anderson, Free Church Representative

Committee B: Rev. John Guest

Committee C: Phil Griffiths (left at 7.15)

Committee D: Councillor Yash Gupta (MBE)

Apologies: Mrs S Lawson, Mrs M Shepherd, Miss A Ahmed, Mr B Gill, Mr D Bates, Ms A Jellicoe, Ms H Gillman, Ms N Fawell, Councillors Martin Kerin and Tunde Ojetola

In attendance: Deborah Weston - Associate Adviser for Religious Education
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The Minutes from the previous meeting held on 15 January 2015 were approved, subject to the following amendment:

That Councillors Gupta and Ojetola be removed from giving there apologies to being present at the meeting.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

4. Membership Discussion

The Chair of the SACRE invited the Clerk to inform those present of the current Membership status of the Committee, during which the following points were highlighted:

- At the end of the last meeting Mr Epps informed SACRE that he was to retire, however he would like to remain on the committee if possible. The Clerk explained that there was a vacancy on the Committee for a Co-Opted Member, which Mr Epps could be invited to fill;
- Councillor Gupta had passed on contact details of Adisha Kariyawasam to the RE Associate Adviser who was a potential Buddhist representative and another colleague who was a potential Hindu representative. She would enquire if these individuals might be happy to fill the vacancies on the Committee;
- There was also a vacancy on Committee A of SACRE for a Jewish representative. The RE Associate adviser confirmed that she would contact the Board of Jewish Deputies again to seek representatives.
- Committee C now had 2 vacancies for Teacher representatives; the clerk confirmed that she would contact the relevant teaching groups to see nominations.

Resolved:

That the RE Associate Adviser and the Clerk email the relevant nominating bodies, to seek new Members for the Committee.

5. A New Settlement: Religion and Beliefs in Schools

The RE Adviser explained to the Committee that, the attached pamphlet was launched in the House of Lords in July 2015 by Professor Linda Woodhead and the Right Honourable Charles Clarke of Lancaster University. It considered the question of whether the current legal requirements for RE were fit for purpose in 2015.

During the Committees discussion the following points were highlighted:

- It was felt that organised religion appeared to be less important, with an increase in interest in matters of spirituality;
- The Chair informed the Committee that he was to have a meeting with the Headteachers within his area of the boroughs to discuss Collective Worship and would report back to the council;
- The associate adviser pointed out that the research of Professor Linda Woodhead had demonstrated that because a person reported themselves as having no religion on the census did not make them atheist, it meant that they did not consider themselves to be part of an organised religion;

- The Chair suggested that it seemed that collective worship was a normal part of daily life within schools but once it was made compulsory it appeared to decline;
- The teacher representative on the council, stated that collective worship still took place within schools as thoughts, prays and reflection this was usually undertaken during assemblies. It was felt that by doing collective worship in this way it wouldn't offend anyone with or without a faith.

Members continued to discuss the report and debated the question of what was meant by moral values, an example given was that faith schools would have their own individual values to follow. It was agreed by all present that the report should have included an explanation as to what was meant by "moral code".

It was suggested that it may be harder to conduct an act of collective worship if the person teaching doesn't have a religion or a faith. The RE Adviser, explained that collective worship, was an opportunity to worship for a collective of people who may be of different faiths or none.

The council were asked for their thoughts on page 75 of the document within agenda papers, as to whether there should be a national or local SACRE. During the debate it was agreed that a local SACRE worked best, as local context could be taken into account; as well as community cohesion and local schools understand the religions and beliefs within the local area.

The Chair of SACRE informed those present that he felt this item was an important item and should have a further debate with all members of SACRE present. He asked if members would be happy to hold a special meeting in October; the Clerk confirmed that 7.2 of the Committee Terms of Reference allowed the Chair to call a special meeting if it was felt one was required.

Those presented, agreed on holding a special meeting in October, the Chair asked the Clerk to contact all Members of SACRE for their availability and to arrange a meeting for the date convenience for all.

Resolved:

That SACRE discuss the recommendations of the report in relation to the Thurrock context at a special meeting in October.

6. Who Delivers RE In Thurrock Primary Schools

The Chair of SACRE introduced the report, in doing so he highlighted that the council had seen a previous report that suggested that there was a growing trend nationally of RE within primary schools being taught by adults other than qualified teachers.

It was agreed at a previous meeting that an investigation should be carried out to ascertain whether there was an increase in Teaching Assistants teaching RE within schools in Thurrock. Sadly the investigation conducted by the associate adviser was inconclusive since not all schools responded to the original survey carried out by SACRE.

Since that time however, following further responses from schools within the borough and a follow up from the Associate RE Adviser, it was now evident that Thurrock was bucking the trend and had more teachers teaching RE and a smaller proportion of adults other than teachers were teaching RE than was the case nationally.

Through discussions, it was debated as to whether to schools understood the question that had been asked as one school answered by indicating that when a teacher was absent then RE would be covered by a General Teaching Assistant, which equated to 33% of the time.

It was also agreed during the council discussions that point 3.1 be removed from the report as it was deemed irrelevant.

Resolved:

That SACRE Discuss the potential impact of using adults other than teachers to deliver RE on the quality of provision and consider their response to schools in relation to this matter.

7. Annual Report

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education introduced the report to the Committee explaining that the components throughout the year. Councillor Ojetola had offered to present the Annual Report to Full Council.

Mr Griffith enquired if it was possible to make any amendments to the report. The Associate Adviser confirmed that amendments could still be made; however the report was the Annual Report 2013-2014 so any amendments would need to be historical.

It was noted that the only amendments needed were fully name St Cleres School and Stanford–Le–Hope Primary School. The Chair, suggested that it would be interesting to see as to whether the local schools followed the agreed syllabus or their own. It was agreed that the associate RE Adviser would contact the schools within the report to seek which syllabus they follow and would report back to the next meeting.

Resolved:

- **That SACRE accept this report as an accurate record of its work in the year 2013-2014.**

- That Councillor Ojetola be asked to present the report to the full council meeting in September

The meeting finished at 7.20 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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