

# North Yorkshire County Council

## North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2022 at 4.00 p.m.

Group A: Christian Denominations and such other religious denominations as, in the Authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area: Professor John Adams (Humanist), Sarah Beveridge (Society of Friends), Tom Clayton (Methodist) Mohinder Singh Chana (Sikh), Chris Devanny (Catholic), and Nasr Moussa Emam (Muslim).

Group B: Church of England: Reverend Simone Bennett

Group C: Teachers Associations: Tara Askew

Group D: Local Authority: County Councillors Alyson Baker, George Jabbour and Annabel Wilkinson

Officers present: Daniel Harry (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager), Patrick Duffy (Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer), Adrian Clarke, Principal Education Adviser (Support) and Olivia Seymour (Professional Religious Education Adviser)

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### Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

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#### 1. Appointment of a Chair for the meeting.

Patrick Duffy, Clerk to SACRE, opened the meeting by advising that the Committee currently did not have a Chair or a Vice-Chair.

The main Item to be considered today was the draft Development Plan. Chris Devanny has been involved in producing the draft Plan, as a Member of the Task and Finish Group that was set up. Therefore, he had asked Chris Devanny if he would consider acting as Chair, just for this meeting. Chris Devanny had indicated that he would be prepared to do that.

The Committee indicated that they were agreeable to this suggestion and, therefore, Chris Devanny was appointed as Chair for the meeting.

Chris Devanny in the Chair.

#### 2. Welcome and Announcements

The Chair thanked the Committee for appointing him as Chair, which he stressed would just be for this meeting.

He thanked Helen Sellers for all she has done whilst Chair of SACRE. Her experience and knowledge has been a great asset to SACRE and we are sorry to lose her from the Committee. The Clerk has written to Helen, on behalf of the Committee, to thank her and to wish her well.

For the benefit of newly appointed Members, he advised that the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education is a Statutory Committee established by the Local Authority. Its main function is to advise and support the Local Authority on matters related to Religious Education, which follows the locally Agreed Syllabus, and on Collective Worship in Schools.

SACRE comprises representatives from four groups:-

- Group A – Christian Denominations and such other religious denominations that reflect the principal religious traditions in the area
- Group B – The Church of England
- Group C – Teacher Associations
- Group D – The Local Authority

The Membership of the Committee is on the back of the Agenda for today's meeting and the papers for this meeting have been published in advance on the County Council's website.

He welcomed new Members to the Committee.

In terms of Group A:

- Brian Berry had been appointed as the representative of the Jewish Faith just prior to the last meeting, but today will be his first meeting, if he is able to be here.
- Sarah Beveridge has been appointed as representative of the Society of Friends. Sarah has previously been on the Committee, as a Teacher Representative.
- Tom Clayton has replaced Sian Henderson as the Methodist representative. The Chair thanked Sian for her contribution, on behalf of the Committee.

In Group D, County Councillors Alyson Baker and George Jabbour have been appointed to join Councillors Annabel Wilkinson and Robert Heseltine.

The Chair concluded by thanking the departing Council Representatives – Janet Jefferson, Andrew Lee and Patrick Mulligan – for their work on the Committee.

The Clerk further advised that Bill Kimberling had contacted him to say that a change in his role would prevent him from attending meetings and that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints would be represented at future meetings by Dave Haddock who has a good background in education and training. Bill had been a Member of SACRE for several years and would be missed.

The Committee then introduced themselves.

### **3. Minutes of last meeting**

#### **Resolved –**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

### **4 Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

## 5 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:-

Stuart Anslow (Teacher Representative)  
County Councillor Robert Heseltine  
Bill Kimberling (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)  
Gill Simpson (Diocese of Leeds)  
Philippa Smith (Diocese of York)

## 6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

## 7. Development Plan 2022-2024 – Patrick Duffy, Clerk to SACRE

### Considered –

A report by the Clerk, which sought approval to the afore-mentioned Plan.

The Clerk advised that the Group that looked at this, comprised the Chair (Chris Devanny); Olivia Seymour; Heather Russell and himself.

He added that:-

- The Group had met once to consider this and felt that it would be a sensible approach to base the Plan on the five key functions in the NASACRE/Department for Education Self Evaluation Toolkit. For the benefit of recently appointed Members, he advised that NASACRE is the National Association of SACREs.
- The draft was appended to the report. It contained four objectives and a number of actions within each.
- Appendix B to the report, was an extract from the Self Evaluation Toolkit relating to the function “Promoting improvement in the standards; the quality of teaching; and the provision of RE”. This is a function which will be a particularly important part of the Development Plan. The extract states what would be expected of an “Established” or “Advanced” SACRE against the key areas for that function. Following on from the wording in the Toolkit, Olivia Seymour, as the Professional Religious Education Adviser, had inserted a number of examples of work that is already undertaken and asked what could we do in North Yorkshire SACRE to develop this further?
- There are still some gaps - particularly in terms of cost and lead officer - but these will be completed.

The Chair took Members through the Draft Plan and the following points were made:-

### Objective One: To increase Member engagement

With regard to the Action at 1.1 *SACRE to enhance Faith Group representation by working with Faith Groups*, it should not be limited to Faith Groups. This should apply to all Groups.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser responded that the need to enhance Teacher Representation was also referred to under Action 1.2. However, vacancies could be made a more general point if this would help.

She added that bringing people onto the Committee, from whatever Group, is not engaging with communities. Action 1.3 *Implement a programme of Member presentations at each SACRE meeting with a focus on community involvement and how it links into SACRE*, is about making SACRE more visible and this needs to be broken down into a series of parts. The development of a Visitor Policy could help provide clarification here.

Still on Action 1.3, Reverend Simone Bennett cautioned of the need to be aware of Diocesan Boards in this respect so that we do not cross lines. The Professional Religious Education Adviser confirmed that it will be specified that the Guidance relates only to Community Schools as we only have a remit for those Schools.

#### Objective 3: To review the locally Agreed Syllabus

The Chair suggested that, in terms of the Skill Set, this could be raised when the new Agreed Syllabus comes out.

Professor John Adams supported the local input being proposed into the Agreed Syllabus, which has previously been purchased with no local relevance. The Professional Religious Education Adviser responded that this is why the intention is to submit to SACRE a suggested timeline, at its autumn meeting, so as to allow plenty of time for revisions to be made. There is also a need to consider a budget from the Local Authority, which will be required for consulting with Schools, etc.

#### Objective 4: To review and update SACRE Guidance to Schools on Collective Worship

Professor Adams questioned what increasing Collective Worship really meant. It is difficult to approve this when, in his view, it has no place in Schools. Furthermore, the requirement is flouted by many.

The Chair advised that this would be part of Year Two of the Plan. He stressed that Collective Worship is an obligation - even if it is flouted by some – and it remains a key priority.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser confirmed that the wording is taken from the templates. Therefore, our work is directly related to these.

Reverend Simone Bennett understood the challenge for some Schools but felt that if SACRE can review and update the Guidance in a meaningful way this could help Schools – so it can be a positive.

Sarah Beveridge said that, as a Head Teacher in a Community School, she would welcome any support/ideas, as it is valuable for the community of children to get together once a day – or it is a missed opportunity. Her emphasis is the collective – it being an opportunity for children to reflect on their place in the World. When Collective Worship is done well, it is very powerful.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser stated that efforts had been made to exemplify things that we do to raise standards/promote Religious Education - so this is partly about signposting to resources. For example, the Newsletter signposts Schools to help them engage with national conversations and access high quality Continuing Professional Development.

Termly Practice Groups are framed around national curriculum conversations. Ofsted Inspections provide another source of feedback about Religious Education in Schools. Officers are now receiving workforce data about Religious Education in Schools. She would value suggestions as to how we can develop this further.

**Resolved –**

- a) That the draft Development Plan for 2022-2024, as circulated, be approved, subject to:-
  - Actions 1.1 and 1.2 being amended to reflect all Groups on SACRE;
  - the drawing up of a Visitor Policy in connection with any actions relating to visits to Schools and Community Venues; and
  - Cost and Lead Officer information being inserted in any places where this is missing
- b) That progress on the Development Plan be reported to SACRE every other meeting, commencing from December 2022.

**8. Update by the Professional Religious Education Adviser – Olivia Seymour**

**Considered –**

A report by the Professional Religious Education Adviser, informing Members of work undertaken since the last meeting.

The report provided details on the following issues:-

- Training
- SACRE Newsletter
- Religion and Worldviews Project
- White Paper on Education and Religious Education
- REThinkRE Media Release and Report Card on Religious Education
- NATRE (National Association of Teachers for Religious Education) Report on Religious Education in Secondary Religious
- NASACRE Annual Conference

The Professional Religious Education Adviser highlighted that the White Paper has unintended consequences for SACREs. These will be considered further at a future meeting.

Professor John Adams enquired if there were any reasons for the low attendance at the training. The Professional Religious Education Adviser advised that this is due to various challenges faced by Schools on capacity. There is a need to reach out to Secondary Schools directly to make them more aware.

The Principal Education Adviser (Support) added that the Local Authority would like to send information to Subject Leaders direct, rather than via the Red Bag (The Local Authority's internal email communication system.) He added that low engagement is not unique to North Yorkshire. A piece of work will be undertaken to seek to rectify this.

The Chair referred to the following elements of the report which had struck him:-

- There had been some very positive informal feedback from the Primary Religious Education Subject Leadership Course.
- The Newsletter is full of useful information, as always. Hopefully, one or more Members will volunteer to be “spotlighted” in future editions.
- Some of the findings from the Report Card on Religious Education are perturbing. For example:-
  - Almost 500 Secondary Schools are still reporting zero hours of Religious Education provision in Year 11
  - Around 34% of academies are reporting no timetabled Religious Education
- More encouragingly, there has been an increase in provision for Religious Education in Secondary Schools, with 23% reporting an increase.
- Appendix B contains a useful summary of the NASACRE Conference and AGM, held in May 2022.

NOTED.

#### **9. Update by the Local Authority – Adrian Clarke, Principal Education Adviser (Support)**

##### **Considered –**

A report by the Principal Education Adviser (Support) which updated Members on developments on the following:-

- Communication and resourcing
- Support for Senior Leaders and Governors
- Ofsted Inspections

So far, 70% of Schools had responded to the Annual Survey on Religious Education and Collective Worship - an increase of 100% from last year. Detailed responses will be presented as part of the Annual Report. Senior Education Advisers have been asked to remind Schools about the Survey, which has been promoted widely.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Principal Education Adviser confirmed that a draft of the Annual Report would be submitted to the next meeting for consideration. The Professional Religious Education Adviser added that some aspects will be incomplete, as national data on examination results will not be available at that stage. This is quite common and is a timing issue.

In response to a question from Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, the Principal Education Adviser stated that there is no feedback on examinations as yet. The Professional Religious Education Adviser added that there has not been the same level of conversations on national forums about Religious Education as there had been for other subjects.

Tara Askew commented that, in her School, the areas that the Examination Board had said would be tested had been. Students had feedback to her that the questions had been fair.

Mohinder Singh Chana felt it would be interesting to know the trend in results and in the uptake of Religious Education. The Professional Religious Education Adviser responded that there has been an increase in number of pupils taking Religious Education - in part due to Ofsted Reviews. It should be possible to bring to Members workforce data, which will provide useful information about School entries for Religious Education.

The Chair thanked the Professional Religious Education Adviser for her professionalism and organisation and commented that her role and that of the Local Authority is becoming a good collaboration.

NOTED.

#### **10. Rolling Work Programme – Patrick Duffy, Clerk to SACRE**

**Considered –**

The latest rolling Work Programme.

The Clerk stressed that the Work Programme is owned by the Committee; it is their Work Programme. Therefore, either now, or at any stage between meetings, Members are welcome to let him know if they have any suggestions for Items to be added to it.

NOTED.

#### **11. Dates of meetings for the 2022/2023 School Year**

The Clerk advised that the proposed dates are based on previous practice – that is meeting on a Tuesday; four times a year. The difference is that, rather than alternating between 2.00 p.m. and 4.00 p.m., it is suggested that all meetings be held at 4.00 p.m.

He added that it is rarely the case with a group of 20 or so people – as is the case with SACRE – that dates will be convenient to everyone. Therefore, he suggested that if they are convenient to most Members they be accepted on the basis that they are the *best fit*.

He also sought Members views as to whether they would wish to return to in person meetings or to continue to meet remotely. Remote meetings had worked fine and they have tended to facilitate increased attendance, as several people have a long drive to and from a meeting. However, with all Covid restrictions now having been lifted, he asked Members to give some consideration to returning to in person meetings.

He added that it might be that Members would favour a mixed approach, whereby some – not all – meetings would continue to be held remotely.

Daniel Harry, Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team Leader, informed the Committee that, at its Annual General Meeting in May, the Council had decided that Committee meetings should return to being held in person. There is a caveat that where a meeting is non decision making, if it is felt helpful to continue to meet remotely, the Chair can approach the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council to request that it be held remotely. In this case, it is still possible to follow the rules around public access to information but the meeting would not have any legal standing.

A number of Members expressed their view...

- Professor John Adams recognised the benefits of meeting remotely but felt that something is lost from not having the face-to-face informal aspects. He was in favour of a return to in person meetings.
- Reverend Simone Bennett, via the chat facility, asked if the Council had a Carbon Reduction Strategy as that might inform the decision. The Democratic Services and Scrutiny Team Leader advised that there is such a Strategy but it is a legal requirement for meetings to be held in person for them to be legally binding. This is not the case in Wales or Scotland, but remains so in England and there is no intention by the UK Government at present to rectify this.
- Nasr Moussa Emam felt that there should be a return to in person meetings. It is a concern to him to hear that some legality is lost by meeting remotely. There should certainly be some meetings in person. He added that he had not been able to join the meeting at the start due to technical issues and asked that he send in his response to Items on today's Agenda.
- Tara Askew said that her attendance at any in person meeting would be at the discretion of her Head Teacher. Moreover, the School finishes at 3.30 p.m. Therefore, it would be difficult for her to get to a meeting in another part of the county by 4.00 p.m.

No formal agreement was reached in terms of whether meetings be held remotely or in person – the sense of the meeting was that consideration be given to some meetings being held in person.

NOTE: It may be possible for a hybrid solution whereby some of the Committee meet in person and others join remotely.

**Resolved –**

a) That meetings for the 2022/2023 School Year be held as follows:-

- Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at 4.00 p.m.
- Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at 4.00 p.m.
- Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 4.00 p.m.
- Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at 4.00 p.m.

b) That consideration be given to some of the meetings being held in person.

**12. Any other business which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered as a matter of urgency**

There was none. The Chair thanked people for attending.

The meeting concluded at 5.30 p.m.

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