

North Yorkshire County Council

North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Minutes of the remote meeting held on Tuesday, 22nd June, 2021 commencing at 4.00 pm.

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:

Helen Sellers (Baptist) – Chair

Professor John Adams (Humanist), Chris Devanny (Catholic), Sian Henderson (Methodist) Bill Kimberling (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), Sarah Leach (Buddhist), Nasr Moussa Emam (Muslim), Mohinder Singh Chana (Sikh)

Group B: Church of England: Reverend Simone Bennett and Gill Simpson (Diocese of Leeds), Philippa Boulding (Diocese of York)

Group C: Teachers Associations: Tara Askew, Judy Clarke, Rosemary Laverack and Douglas Rice-Bowen (Vice-Chair)

Group D: Local Authority: County Councillors Robert Heseltine, Janet Jefferson and Patrick Mulligan

Officers present: Adrian Clarke (Principal Education Advisor - Support), Daniel Harry (Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager), Patrick Duffy (Senior Democratic Services Officer – Clerk to SACRE) and Olivia Seymour (Professional Religious Education Adviser)

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

244 Welcome and Announcements

For the benefit of any members of the public or the media viewing this broadcast, the Chair advised that the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education is a Statutory Committee established by the Local Authority.

She added that its main function is to advise and support the Local Authority on matters related to religious education for schools that follow the locally Agreed Syllabus and on Collective Worship.

Four groups are represented on SACRE:-

- 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 and Head Teacher Associations
- Group D – The Local Authority

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

The Chair also welcomed three new Committee Members – Sarah Leach (Buddhist) and Sian Henderson (Methodist) had joined Group A and Gill Simpson had joined Group B, as a representative of the Church of England, Leeds Diocese.

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245 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson and Heather Russell (Senior Educational Advisor).

246 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

247 Minutes of the Meeting held on 20th April 2021 and any matters arising

RESOLVED –

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20th April 2021 be agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Matter arising – Min. No. 239: National updates: Collective Worship

Professor Adams said that he was concerned that what he had said was described as offensive. He did not feel that this was respectful of his view. He had hoped to give the Member concerned the opportunity to withdraw the remark, but he was not at today's meeting. Nothing he said was offensive. He was describing SACRE's legal responsibilities relating to education and worship. Worship is not an educative activity.

Professor Adams also disagreed with the view that his use of the term "indoctrination" was improper or incorrect. He wished to place on record his objection to both interjections.

The Chair stated that there was clearly a difference of opinion on this and she would prefer not to have further discussion on it now. SACRE will need to consider this again as it is under review nationally. She asked Members to pause discussion for now.

Reverend Simone Bennett commented that, whilst she understood there are differences of opinion, SACRE has a role to fulfil. She accepts that some Members feel there should not be collective worship in schools but that does not change what our statutory function is.

Nasr Moussa Emam commented that, although he had not been present and was not aware what had been said, his knowledge of Professor Adams meant that he considered his comments were always in the best interests of SACRE and were not offensive.

The Chair noted the comments made and encouraged Members to work together on this when it is next considered.

248 Review of the Constitution - Patrick Duffy, Clerk

Considered –

A report by the Clerk, Patrick Duffy, which asked Members to consider approving a revised Constitution.

He advised that the Constitution was last reviewed in 2019. It felt appropriate to have a fresh look at it after two years.

In liaison with Olivia Seymour - the Professional Religious Education Adviser - and colleagues from Children and Young People's Services, he had compared the

Constitution to those of some other Authorities and, in particular, to the Guidance by the National Association of SACREs – NASACRE.

There are a number of areas where changes are suggested, to align North Yorkshire SACRE more fully with the national guidance. These were included in the report and he highlighted some of them.

The changes primarily provide clarification, rather than fundamentally altering the Constitution.

Councillor Robert Heseltine referred to the suggestion that in the event of a vote ending in a tie the Chair should not have a casting vote and the matter be declared a non-decision vote. What was the thinking here? Patrick Duffy advised that SACRE operates on a basis of consensus and the Chair is a Member of a particular Group. Therefore, it was felt to have a casting vote could put the Chair in a difficult position. Councillor Heseltine said he would prefer the Chair to have a casting vote.

Douglas Rice-Bowen queried whether it is necessary to say, for Group C, “representing Teaching Associations”? Olivia Seymour responded that this is written into the NASACRE Guidance. Often, however, there is a pragmatic response, in terms of recruitment for the Teacher Group and it is noted to which organisations they belong.

At this stage, the live broadcast of the meeting was suspended to enable each of the four Groups that comprise SACRE to consider how they wished to vote. The breakout rooms facility on Microsoft Teams was used for this purpose.

On being reconvened, the live broadcast recommenced and, in accordance with the Committee’s Constitution, each of the four Groups that comprises SACRE exercised a vote on this matter.

At the Chair’s request, the spokesperson for each Group related their decision:-

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) – Approve the revised Constitution.

Group B (Church of England Representatives) – Approve the revised Constitution.

Group C (Teacher Representatives) – Approve the revised Constitution.

Group D (Local Authority Representatives) - Approve the revised Constitution.

Accordingly, it was

RESOLVED –

That SACRE approve the proposed changes to its Constitution and thereby ratify the revised Constitution, incorporating the changes, at Appendix B to the Report.

The Chair decided to vary the order of the business on the Agenda by taking the Local Authority Update as the next Item.

249 Update by the Local Authority - Adrian Clarke, Principal Education Adviser (Support)

Considered –

A report by Adrian Clarke, which updated Members on developments from the Local Authority's perspective.

He highlighted the following aspects:-

- He and Heather Russell had worked with Olivia Seymour on a range of issues to support SACRE
- Training for Professional Practice Groups had been co-ordinated and websites had been audited and updated to ensure information was germane
- Work is being undertaken with NES – the trading arm of the County Council that works with schools – to update services. He will ensure that SACRE are included in this
- The Termly Newsletter had been emailed to all schools via the “Red Bag”
- A generic training feedback form will be available from September 2021 to enable more nuanced responses than is possible with the current generic version
- All training will be included in a wider training brochure and a briefing is to be provided to School Advisers on the work of SACRE
- The electronic questionnaire to be sent to schools about the work of SACRE is almost complete

The Chair remarked that there are positive developments which will raise the profile of SACRE.

In response to a comment from Nasr Moussa Emam about the questionnaires being sent to schools, the Chair advised that SACRE had considered a draft of these and they had been further refined by the Professional RE Adviser, in discussion with Teacher Representatives on SACRE.

Nasr added that he had not received Newsletters. Patrick Duffy was asked to re-circulate recent Newsletters to Members.

NOTED.

250 Report of the Professional Religious Education Adviser, Olivia Seymour - General Update

Considered –

A report by Olivia Seymour, which informed Members of training and support given to schools since the last SACRE meeting and which informed them of national updates in RE.

She made the following points, in particular:-

- Training has continued online. This has been a challenging year for teachers, who are exhausted, and this was reflected in attendance at training during the summer term
- The Secondary Schools Network has been difficult to get going. She has discussed with officers in the Local Authority ways of addressing the needs of secondary schools
- The questionnaires on monitoring of RE will be sent out electronically. It will be important to analyse the returns – not least because of the new template for Annual Reports, which refers to the monitoring role. It is hoped that the questionnaire, along with plans to engage with secondary schools, will enable us to write a meaningful and accurate report on RE and Collective Worship in our schools

NOTED.

251 Report of the Professional Religious Education Adviser, Olivia Seymour - Ofsted Research Review

Considered –

A report by Olivia Seymour, which provided a summary of the recent Research Review conducted by Ofsted. A link to the full report was included and is also set out [Here](#) for ease of reference.

The Review sets out Ofsted's view as to what makes for effective RE. It is the start of a national conversation about standards in RE. A second report will follow in 18 months, which will include results of inspections in schools where deep dives have been completed. This should inform discussions for curriculum development of RE Leaders and the themes will form part of planned training.

Olivia added that she will bring further information on different aspects of the research to SACRE in due course.

The Chair encouraged Members to look at the terminology Ofsted are using, as it is important that we are familiar with this.

Professor Adams mentioned that SACRE has a locally agreed syllabus to reflect different circumstances in different parts of the country. Does Ofsted say anything about this? Olivia Seymour advised that the report makes it clear they are looking at contextualised curriculum and how Authorities have taken what they are required to do legally and adapted this to their school framework.

Professor Adams followed up by saying if an agreed syllabus has a good deal of local contextualising, then Ofsted may comment on how well that is delivered - as compared to ours, which has none. Olivia advised that our syllabus, like many, provides a minimum content and schools can go beyond that. They are focusing on the quality of what people experience in the classroom and whether there is curriculum progression and people's understanding of RE is improving over time.

NOTED.

252 Chair's Report (Verbal Report)

Considered –

A verbal update from the Chair.

NASACRE AGM on 24th May

This was held remotely, via Zoom. It has been an inspiring day. One of the Executive Members, Sukaina Manji, had produced a summary of the day, which will be circulated with the Minutes. The papers are available on the NASACRE website.

The theme of the day has been Authority in RE. She had been particularly struck by the keynote presentation from Denise Cush, who concluded that authority should be seen as an opportunity for service, rather than an exercise of power.

The Chair also referred to the fact that she and officers from the Local Authority had attended the mid cycle briefing of the Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28th May 2021. This had been a useful discussion, outlining the work of SACRE. It is hoped that next year it will be possible to attend the full Committee to help raise the profile of SACRE leading to an increased understanding of its work and purpose.

NOTED.

253 Development Plan - update by the Chair

Considered:-

An update, prepared by the Chair, which set out progress against the Development Plan.

With regard to feedback from teachers and pupils, the Chair stressed that SACRE needs to continue to increase steps being taken and to think about how we can creatively elicit opinions from pupils.

She added that Adrian Clarke will be presenting a report on funding to the September meeting, following on from the recent NASACRE Report.

NOTED.

254 Correspondence - Chair (Verbal Report)

The Chair reported as follows:-

Blog on RE

She had written, via the Head Teacher, to the winner of a competition on blogs for RE, which had been advertised in the Newsletter. The winning pupil is a Key Stage 2 pupil who attended Lythe Church of England, Voluntary Controlled School, near Whitby. She had demonstrated a clear sense of the value of her RE lessons in helping her to understand her own beliefs and those of her classmates.

Douglas Rice-Bowen

She was sorry to report that Douglas, an enthusiastic Member of SACRE and Vice-Chair during the last year, was leaving. She wished him all the best.

Douglas informed Members that he is leaving to train for the Priesthood. He thanked SACRE and urged them to keep up the good work.

255 Date of Next Meeting - Tuesday 21st September 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

This will be on Tuesday 21st September 2021 at 2.00 p.m. to be held remotely, via Microsoft Teams – or at a venue to be confirmed.

256 Dates of meetings for the School Year, 2021/2022

The following dates were proposed:-

(Tuesday 21st September 2021 at 2.00 p.m. – had already been confirmed)

Tuesday 7th December 2021 at 4.00 p.m.

Monday 14th February 2022 at 2.00 p.m.

Tuesday 21st June 2022 at 4.00 p.m.

Having regard to comments from Members, it was

RESOLVED

- a) That the December 2021 and June 2022 meetings be held on the dates indicated.
- b) That officers consider if it would be possible to change the date for the February 2022 meeting.
- c) That a decision as to whether meetings be held remotely or face to face be made when the situation with the Pandemic is clearer and having regard to any requirement there may be for SACRE to meet face to face to approve certain matters and the fact that some Members may struggle to attend face to face meetings.

257 Any other business which the Chair considers to be urgent

Whilst it was not urgent business, as such, Professor Adams mentioned that Baroness Burt had introduced a Bill in the House of Lords, with the objective of replacing compulsory worship in schools with inclusive assemblies. He thought Members might be interested to know this.

The meeting concluded at 5.35 pm.