

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 6 December 2017

Present:

Reverend Roger Bristow (Chairman)

Councillors Robert Evans, Keith Onslow and Sarah Phillips
Mrs D Angell, Ms H Arnold, Mrs S Barnett, Mrs V Corbyn,
Mr S Mahmood, Mr A Nandra, Mr J Stone, Mr C Town,
Reverend S Varney and Mrs E Whitman

Also Present:

Carol Arnfield, LBB Head of Service for Early Years,
Schools Standards and Adult Education

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor David Jefferys, Patricia Colling, Ray Hagley and Sanjay Gupta. Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Sarah Phillips.

Councillor Keith Onslow apologised for having to leave the meeting early due to other commitments.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

14 A) MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12TH JULY 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.

B) MATTERS ARISING

Minute 6: School Visits

The Chairman advised members that, due to his other work commitments, Mr Kieran Osborne had stood down from his role as LBB Educational Advisor. This had therefore impacted on the SACRE, and school visits had not been able to take place during the autumn term. The Chairman had spoken to the Headteacher at Cudham CE Primary School, who had invited SACRE

members to visit the school, and advised her that this would not currently be appropriate until a replacement Advisor with RE expertise was in post.

The Chairman advised SACRE members that in the absence of the LBB Educational Advisor, he would be drafting a letter encouraging schools to engage with the SACRE. This would be circulated in the School's Circular bulletin in January 2018, and would include a copy of the collective worship documents.

Minute 8: SACRE Self Evaluation

The Chairman informed SACRE members that information regarding Birmingham SACRE had proved difficult to source, as there was little information provided on the Local Authority website.

15 ORAL UPDATE & PUBLICATIONS

A) SACRE ADVISOR

The Chairman informed SACRE members that a replacement RE Advisor was needed, and it was intended that Bromley SACRE would have one. There were two options that he wished to put to members so that they could be considered and explored.

The first option was the suggestion that Bromley SACRE could share a RE Advisor with the London Borough of Bexley. These boroughs often worked together, and faced similar financial pressures. Bromley SACRE member, Virginia Corbyn, was the RE Advisor for Bexley SACRE, and the Chairman had spoken with her regarding this suggestion. The second option was to supplement the RE Advisor role, and provide support from elsewhere in the form of secondary RE teachers offering assistance. The Chairman had briefly discussed this with SACRE member, Jed Stone, who said he was keen to take on this role.

As school visits took place during the school day, SACRE members queried if a secondary school teacher could be spared by their school to attend. The Chairman responded that it was proposed that the school would be approached to release the RE teacher for the time needed for the visits to take place. Mr Stone said that he expected this to be possible, but noted that his Headteacher had not yet been approached regarding this.

One SACRE member considered that the precedent had been set by a previous RE Advisor, who had covered the same role for three of four boroughs. There had been a number of mergers of functions across Local Authorities, and they did not see a problem with Bromley and Bexley SACREs sharing a RE Advisor. The LB Bromley should not be looking to economise on the role, they should look to enhance it and offer a boost to the allowance. It was crucial to keep school visits going, and have the ability to offer advice to schools, and therefore both options were supported.

The Chairman advised SACRE members that a major piece of work that would need to be undertaken by the RE Advisor was the revision of the Agreed Syllabus. The Chairman had received an offer from the National Association of Teachers of Religious Education (NATRE), to present to Bromley SACRE what they could offer in terms of a pre-produced syllabus that could be tailored to meet the needs of the LB Bromley. It was suggested that NATRE could be invited to attend the next meeting of the Bromley SACRE, but it was expected that what they would offer was likely to be expensive. Mrs Corbyn informed members that Kent County Council had recently purchased a RE syllabus from RE Today. She felt it was very good, but agreed that it would be expensive for the LB Bromley to purchase as the cost was dependent on the number of schools within a Local Authority. It was noted that the LB Bexley were in a similar position to the LB Bromley, and were also starting to revise their syllabus. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education advised members that the LBB School Improvement Team already had established links with the LB Bexley, and there was the potential to explore and capitalise on these. The LBB Head of School Standards, Julia Andrew, had also previously worked at LB Bexley up until a couple of months ago. Following a discussion, members considered that the offer from NATRE to present their syllabus was free, and that it would be a good idea to see their views. However, it was noted that NATRE were likely to share only a very small amount of information.

Another SACRE member said they would like to see Mrs Corbyn acting as RE Advisor to Bromley SACRE, as she had the knowledge and experience. However, they questioned if she would have the time to fulfil this role, and felt that what she would be required to do, would need to be clear. With regards to reviewing the Agreed Syllabus, it was suggested that the current syllabus should be looked at, to consider if it was fit for purpose. It had only been produced five years previously, and it would be a surprise if it was wholly unsuitable, and therefore the need for a new syllabus would need to be demonstrated. The Chairman responded that the previous RE Advisor had canvassed the schools regarding their thoughts on, and use of, the Agreed Syllabus, but had received little feedback. The feedback that had been collected indicated that the Agreed Syllabus was fit for purpose, but was cumbersome and needed streamlining.

Mr Mahmood noted that a previous RE Advisor had brought people together for round the table discussions, rather than just communicating via letters. This was felt to be much better for input and contribution, and it was suggested that a conference for Bromley teachers could be organised, which would allow the Local Authority to consider whether the Agreed Syllabus was fit for purpose. Councillor Evans suggested that a questionnaire regarding the use of the Agreed Syllabus could also be included in the letter that the Chairman was drafting to schools. The Chairman agreed that he would be happy to do this, and said that he liked the idea of getting teachers together to discuss what was happening in RE.

ACTION: Chairman

Mrs Corbyn informed members that an RE Advisor role consisted of two strands of advice, for primary schools and secondary schools, which both had

a different set of needs. As RE Advisor to Bexley SACRE, she covered the primary school strand, and secondary RE teachers did a lot of the secondary school work. Mr Stone advised members that there would be a meeting of the secondary school RE teachers taking place in February 2018, and he invited the Chairman to attend. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education enquired if there were any similar meetings for primary teachers to attend. In response, the teacher representatives said that the previous RE Advisor had facilitated groups for clusters of teacher to share ideas. It was noted that primary teachers were not RE specialists, and valued the sharing of ideas and gaining of experience. Mrs Corbyn said that a large amount of time in her role as RE Advisor for Bexley SACRE was taken up by organising primary teacher meetings and that the need for them remained.

(Councillor Keith Onslow left the meeting at 7.00pm)

B) HUMANIST REPRESENTATIVE

The Chairman advised members that Bromley SACRE had been contacted by Humanists UK with an offer to find a Humanist representative to sit on the SACRE. There had also been an approach from a member of the Baha'i faith who was interested in joining the SACRE. The Chairman asked SACRE members if they felt Humanist and Baha'i representatives were required, and if they should be appointed to Bromley SACRE.

Members questioned what proportion of Bromley residents were members of the Baha'i faith. It was felt likely that it would be very minimal, but that it should be explored and considered further. With regards to a Humanist representative, one member said they felt it was important to look at what Bromley SACRE needed in terms of representation. When the request for a Humanist representative had been made previously, a number of questions were raised; what is SACRE, and what is religion. It was considered that not having a faith meant Humanism was not a religion, and they therefore felt it was not appropriate to bring someone on to the SACRE as it seemed contradictory. Another SACRE member expressed that whilst they accepted this, the needs of young people should be considered. They needed an overview of more than just religions, it was about choices in life, and therefore there was a role on the SACRE for a Humanist representative. Members responded that this was correct, but felt that there were other forums for this such as PSHE.

(Councillor Sarah Phillips arrived at 7.05pm)

In response to a question, the Chairman confirmed that SACREs could co-opt people with specific opinions if they felt necessary. The request had come following Sue Polydorou standing down as a Humanist representative, prior to which she had been a Councillor representative on the Bromley SACRE. The Chairman agreed that he felt the reason for not requiring a Humanist representative was in the name of the SACRE, highlighting the 'Religious Education' element. Humanism was a world view and position, not a religion,

and it would be unusual for a SACRE to specifically want to appoint a Humanist representative.

In response to a question, the Chairman advised members that the law stated that SACREs should have a membership that consisted of the major faith groups from the local community, and did not specify if they should, or should not, appoint a Humanist representative. It was noted that most SACREs would have members fulfilling other roles that may not hold a religious faith, and would therefore not have a specific need for a Humanist representative. Members considered that this was a decision that needed to be taken with great care, as it may invite other societies to want to join the membership of the SACRE. There needed to be clear guidance from Government regarding their role on SACREs; if it was just to hear their views, and without them having voting rights.

Following a discussion, members were reminded that this was just a consultation, and that they should not jump ahead. It was felt that in a couple of years' time other changes to legislation may be suggested. After this, decisions could be made, and it was agreed that Bromley SACRE should not be trying to break boundaries to be different. The Chairman advised members that similar comments had been made at the NASACRE AGM, where it had been felt that the Government were not focussed on making changes to RE in schools. Its current focus was on Brexit, and as a result there was little chance of policies being changed before 2019, but that the consultation may inform future policy changes. It was therefore agreed that a Humanist representative was not currently required on the Bromley SACRE.

ACTION: Chairman

RESOLVED that:

- (i) the Chairman would advise Humanists UK that a representative was not currently required for the Bromley SACRE.**
- (ii) the Chairman would contact the member of the Baha'i faith who had been interested in joining the SACRE to advise that the need for a representative would be explored, and considered further.**

C) SACRE ANNUAL REPORT

SACRE members were informed by the Chairman that the SACRE Annual Report 2016-2017 was in progress. The report would be completed and submitted within the first three months of 2018. In response to a question, the Chairman advised SACRE member that the annual report would be submitted to; NASACRE, who would also publish it on their website; the Secretary of State for Education; and other relevant parties. The Chairman noted that the Commission on Religious Education's 'Interim Report: Religious Education for All' suggested that 'the Government should publish all SACRE annual reports publicly on a dedicated website'.

D) COMMISSION ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – INTERIM REPORT: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Commission on Religious Education was established to review the legal, education, and policy frameworks for RE in schools in England. The review was designed to inform policymakers, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality and rigour of RE, and its capacity to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. The Commission had now published its interim report, 'Religious Education for All', which set out initial recommendations alongside a range of issues on which Commissioners would seek to consult further before drawing any conclusions.

Members had been encouraged to respond to the consultation before the deadline on 4th December 2017. Commissioners hoped to receive feedback from as wide a range of people and organisations as possible, and the consultation would help to inform the final report of the Commission, due to be published in 2018. The Chairman advised SACRE members that the report was worth reading and considering, however it was noted that it was unlikely to produce legislation in the near future.

E) REC / NATRE – THE STATE OF THE NATION: A REPORT ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROVISION WITHIN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

The State of the Nation report looks at the extent to which schools in England meet their statutory requirements to teach RE. It provides a comparison between schools where the RE curriculum is determined in three different ways:

- 1) Schools, including some academies, following an RE curriculum determined by their religious character;
- 2) Academies and other schools such as Free Schools where the RE is determined by their funding agreements;
- 3) Schools where a locally agreed RE syllabus must be followed.

The report argued that it is vital that students receive high quality RE. It stated that it was neither educationally, morally or legally justifiable for schools to provide minimal time on the school timetable for RE, or to expect teachers with insufficient training or expertise to deliver the subject. It was also felt that it was not acceptable for any young person to leave school without the knowledge and skills delivered through RE which would allow them to understand the beliefs and values of the diverse British society, without which they would be ill equipped to take their place in the modern world. The Chairman advised SACRE members that as this was a lengthy document, a link had been provided to enable them to view and read it online.

16 SCHOOL VISITS

School visits had been discussed under minute item 14 B) Matters Arising.

17 SACRE DRAFT ACTION PLAN

SACRE members were provided with a copy of the SACRE Draft Action Plan for 2017-2018, which included suggested amendments discussed at the meeting on 12th July 2017. The Chairman asked members to consider how the objectives could be achieved, as it was noted that discussions regarding a replacement RE Advisor were still to take place. SACRE members were asked to go away and think about what they could do personally to facilitate the SACREs objectives, and contact the Chairman to advise him. Members would need to be available for school visits; and if a conference for RE teachers were to be organised, who could co-ordinate it and who would be willing to attend.

With reference to objective number 6 – *‘Provide information on curriculum to schools’*, teacher representatives queried the use of the Fronter system. Their schools did not use it, and felt it was becoming defunct, and it was therefore not the best channel to provide information. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education asked if there was another platform that the schools used that would be preferable. Teacher representatives said that if schools were part of Academy Trusts, they were likely to have their own hubs, so it was felt that information should be circulated directly to schools for them to decide where it should be stored and how it was accessed.

Teacher representatives said that the Revised Agreed Syllabus needed to be easy to access in all schools, and suggested that it should be published within a specific SACRE area of the Local Authority website. The LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education said that this would be explored – either within the LB Bromley website, or linked to the My Life website. Another alternative to websites could be a Google platform, which allowed data to be stored, and schools could be provided with membership details to access it. The Chairman noted that the current Agreed Syllabus had been provided to schools on a CD-ROM, and it was agreed that this would not be done in the future.

ACTION: LBB Head of Service for Early Years, Schools Standards and Adult Education

18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Mahmood advised members that the prize giving for the Islamic Competition had taken place at Darul Uloom on Thursday 9th November 2017. The event had been as successful as ever, and the Mayor of Bromley had attended to present the prizes.

Thirty pupils, aged 11 and 12 year olds, from five schools; Hayes School, Harris Academy Orpington, Bullers Wood School, Bishop Justus CE School and Watford Grammar School for Boys, had taken part in this years' competition. The school projects were based on the concept of 'The True Meaning of Islam'. As this year had marked the 20th anniversary of the

competition, Mr Mahmood had invited previous winners back to attend the ceremony. Students from Bullers Wood School (2014), Hayes School (2015) and Harris Academy Orpington (2016), delivered mature presentations on the theme 'My Reflections about Islam'. The students were awarded with a special certificate for their contribution to the evening.

Mr Stone said that it had been a splendid evening, and the best prize giving he had attended. Mr Mahmood was thanked for making the competition such a success over the years, and members expressed their gratitude for a lovely event. This was echoed by the Chairman, who said it was a wonderful welcome from Darul Uloom. It had been good to hear what previous winners had gained from the project, and what it had taught them in their approach to, and reflection of, their learning.

The Chairman questioned why there was only one school faith event that took place across the borough. Mr Mahmood commented that in the time that he had been a member of Bromley SACRE, he could only recollect one other competition that members of the Jewish Community had organised for primary school aged pupils. It was noted that it took an enormous amount of work to organise school competitions, and they relied on enthusiastic teachers to encourage their students to be involved.

SACRE members suggested that as the Islamic Competition was for pupils in Year 8, an essay competition could be introduced for sixth formers to write a detailed and philosophical piece on 'the place of religion in the modern world'.

Reverend Varney informed SACRE members of some work that he had been involved in as part of Bromley's Three Faiths Forum. This was an active inter-faith group that had representatives from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths, who had met throughout the year. In terms of practical work, they had been collecting hampers for distribution through Citizens UK, to refugees that had been settled within the London Borough of Southwark.

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 28th February 2018

All meetings to start at 6pm

The Meeting ended at 7.38 pm

Chairman