

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Thursday 3 March 2022 at 1.30 pm**

Present:

P Welch (Chair) In the Chair

Church of England

Canon L Burton, K Passmore, C Weir and Walker

Other Religious Denominations and Faiths

S Baker	- Roman Catholic
W Gray	- Buddhism
F Johnson	- Methodist Church
C Spencer	- Bahá'í Faith
D Van der Velde	- Judaism

Teachers Associations

V Bain	- NEU
B Dunn	- RE Curriculum Group

County Council Representatives

Councillors D Haney, S Townsend, M Walton and B Kellett

Co-opted Members:

S Walker	- Humanist
----------	------------

Education Durham Support and Provision Lead

J Rimmer

1 Appointment of Vice Chair of County Durham SACRE

Following deferral of the item at the previous meeting the Chair explained that the term of office for the current Vice-Chair of Durham SACRE had expired. Nominations were sought from Members for the appointment of a Vice Chair of Durham SACRE.

Resolved:

That Mr B Dunn be appointed Vice-Chair for a four-year period.

2 Introductions, Welcome and Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from A Barron, N Dodd, Reverend R Fisher, A Hartley, B Rasa Dasa, S Lupton, M Turner and Councillor C Varty.

Councillor B Kellett was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor C Varty.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of interest, if any

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

6 Roles and Responsibilities of SACRE

The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education received a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which provided an explanation of the duty placed upon local authorities under the Education Act 1996, to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, including which groups must be appointed a members of the council, and who can be co-opted (for copy see file of Minutes).

The Chair welcome K Clayton, Legal Manager Childrens, Adults & Health who was in attendance to present the report and offer support and advice to SACRE on any proposed changes to the membership.

She explained that the Constitution was last reviewed and amended in 2003. There were currently 5 vacancies in group a) and 3 vacancies in group c). There had also been a request to appoint a humanist representative as a full member in group a), rather than being a co-opted member.

SACRE was therefore invited to provide views to the local authority on the current membership, whilst noting that any decision to change the membership would require an amendment to the SACRE's Constitution, further requiring Cabinet to approve the proposed amendment.

C Spencer asked whether under group (a) there was a legal definition of which religions could be appointed or was this up to SACRE to determine. In response K Clayton advised that she would need to look at the legislation in more depth to be able to provide an answer to that query. S Walker commented that it would be

unwise to seek to define the word religion and noted the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

W Gray, commented that she felt it important that SACRE had a broad range of representatives, which included and represented all faiths in County Durham. She further asked whether any further clarification could be provided on paragraph 7(i) and (ii). In response K Clayton advised that both of those paragraphs had been lifted directly from the Act and unfortunately there was no further guidance to expand upon that.

K Passmore noted that that the situation had changed around us drastically since the Act was introduced in 1996, SACRE determined the religious education and felt that a lot that was contained in the Act was open to interpretation and how much weight was placed upon various aspects should be done so with the appropriate legal advice.

The Chair also noted that there was little worship undertaken in community-based schools and the Education Act 1996 did not necessarily meet the reality of what was practiced in schools. K Clayton agreed that the legislation was old and didn't in some circumstances fit the current situation, she further noted that some amendments had been made in Wales to reflect this, however there were no signs at this stage that this would be amended in England.

J Rimmer, commented that 'advising' schools was an interesting word as she felt 'influencing' was a more appropriate word for the role of SACRE and it's input into Religious Education, given the changes in the number of maintained schools and the development of academies since the Education Act was passed. She further referred to changes in expansion of academies in the Levelling Up (2022) White Paper and the possible implications of local authority responsibilities for education in the expected Education white paper government white paper, and furthermore acknowledged that what was happening on the ground was quite different, but how SACRE fulfilled the spirit of the Act was important.

W Gray referred to paragraph 8 of the report and asked whether world views would be considered in the reviewed syllabus. The Chair at this point noted that the current syllabus did introduce world views. He did however feel it was really important to get views from schools first and whether they felt that world views had yet been fully embedded within their schools. K Passmore suggested that it would be helpful to also obtain a national perspective on this issue.

J Rimmer added that this was an ongoing conversation and one which could have continued dialogue within SACRE. A sub-group for example could be helpful as part of a self-review process, alongside curriculum thinking.

Further discussion took place regarding infant education and the differences and difficulties faced in introducing world views at a primary age. As previously discussed, primary representation on SACRE was important and it was noted that this would be picked up in the following agenda item.

The Chair therefore suggested that a working group be established which would look at where schools were at in terms of introducing world views into the classroom and how effectively this was being embedded.

L Burton asked whether it would be possible to seek the input of Catherine Robson, Independent Educational Development Advisor into the working group. In response J Rimmer advised that she would need to seek funding from Education Durham, however in theory yes that would be possible, and agreed to follow this up.

Further discussion took place regarding the budget for SACRE, noting that there were some queries around how funding was allocated to SACRE which required addressing. J Rimmer noted that this had been an ongoing issue and the council had faced severe budget pressures for a number of years, the issues relating to funding for SACRE were not unique, however she was supportive of the request and agreed to seek further information in this regard.

Councillor M Walton agreed to look to obtain further information regarding the budget allocation and report back to the next meeting.

Resolved:

That the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

- i) Note the outline of SACRE's functions
- ii) Note the current membership arrangements
- iii) Including a Standing Item on each agenda on evaluation of impact of the Agreed Syllabus
- iv) Establish a working group to consider world views and relevant advice and guidance to schools

7 Chairs Comments

The Chair at this point took the opportunity to apologise for his non-attendance at the previous meeting due to a family bereavement. He thanked all SACRE members for their well wishes and thanked L Burton for stepping into the role as Chair at short notice.

He went on to provide his views on the post-covid situation in schools and how that the quick move to online learning had transformed the way in which education could be delivered. He added that this did not come without its challenges however and noted that the families in poverty could be harder to reach and engage due to lack of access to resources or other barriers. He did however note that the situation in schools was now normalising, however teachers continued to see the same pressures around workloads.

He further highlighted the ongoing situation in Ukraine and the well-placed role that RE teachers had in schools to sensitively help children make sense of the world.

It was noted that there were also various briefings online regarding the Ukraine and Russia which may be of value, and these would be circulated following the meeting.

8 SACRE Membership Review

Following a request at a previous meeting the Chair advised that he wished to review the current vacancies on SACRE. He asked for an overview of the vacancies and the groups in which they fell to be outlined in order to determine how best to seek to fill those vacancies. He added that some reflection may be required with further discussion at a future meeting.

Discussion ensued regarding suitable persons who may be interested in taking up vacancies. P Welch asked that the Clerk contact the United Reformed Church with a view to seeking a nomination. He also asked that any other suggested nominations for any of the other category groups be forwarded to him.

With regards to the wider issue of the composition of SACRE, further discussion took place regarding how other SACRE's operated and noted that some statistical information on County Durham's current demographics may be helpful in determining a way forward. A further suggestion of looking at the British Attitudes Survey, which published regional information may also be informative to discussions.

The further matter of the timing of meetings was raised. K Clayton added that whilst it was acknowledged that SACRE felt that evening meetings would better allow for attendance of teachers, it would not be possible to introduce any changes to time or dates of meetings for the forthcoming municipal year as these had already been published online. However, should this be something that SACRE wished to pursue in advance of the next cycle of meetings that could be explored at that time.

As a point of clarification K Clayton advised that any changes to the make up of the current membership would be required to be made via a change to the Constitution and furthermore agreed by Cabinet.

Resolved: That the item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting and further information be sought and provided to that meeting regarding prominent religious groups in County Durham.

9 Humanist Membership Request

The Chair advised that this item had been placed on the agenda following a request from S Walker, a humanist representative to become a full member in group (a), rather than being a co-opted member.

K Clayton again advised that should SACRE wish to allow the co-opted member to be appointed under group (a), then an amendment to the SACRE's Constitution would be required with Cabinet to further approve the proposed amendment.

Resolved:

That SACRE request the local authority to consider amending the Constitution to allow a Humanist Representative to be appointed as a full member under group (a).

10 Education Durham Report to SACRE

The Chair advised that due to the previous items overrunning this item was tabled for information.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

11 SACRE Self Evaluation Process

The Chair advised that this would be picked up at the next meeting and further arrangements would be made outside of this meeting with the members who had indicated that they wished to be part of a more focused working-group.

12 Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting would take place on 9 June 2022.