

WEST BERKSHIRE STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2023

VENUE: MEETING ROOM F2 COUNCIL OFFICES MARKET STREET NEWBURY

Present:

Group A – Other Faiths Members

Dilip Ladwa (Hindu), Mobasshir Mushtaq (Muslim), Rabbi Zvi Solomons (Jewish) and Revd David Taylor (Thatcham Baptist Church)

Group B – Church of England Members

Val Bolan (Church of England) and Mary Stagg (Church of England)

Group C – Teaching Association Members

Amanda Bedding (NEU), Clare Hawkins (NASUWT) and Chris Ward (NEU)

Group D – WBC Councillors

Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor Billy Drummond and Councillor Tony Vickers

Also Present: Revd Angela Brennan (St Mary's Church) Rose Carberry (Principal Adviser for School Improvement), Robin Launder (Humanist), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), and David Rees (Professional Adviser)

1 Membership - Sadie Owen

Robin Launder (Humanist) and Revd Angela Brennan (Church of England) were welcomed as guests with a view to joining SACRE in the future.

Councillor Tony Vickers was welcomed to his first meeting of SACRE. Councillor Vickers noted that there was still a West Berkshire Council Member vacancy on SACRE and it was suggested that this should be raised at Full Council.

It was noted that a further member was required from the Church of England.

2 Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2023/24 academic year - Sadie Owen

Sadie Owen invited SACRE to nominate and vote on the position of Chair for the coming year.

RESOLVED that Reverend David Taylor would continue as Chair of SACRE for the 2023/24 academic year.

The position of Vice-Chair would be discussed with Amanda Bedding and Clare Hawkins prior to the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the position of Vice-Chair would be decided at the next meeting in February 2024.

3 Minutes - Sadie Owen

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6th June 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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4 Annual Report 2022-23 - Amanda Bedding

(Amanda Bedding joined the meeting at 4.42pm)

Amanda Bedding drew attention to the Annual Report on page nine of the agenda pack. The main area for focus in 2022/23 was the review of the Locally Agreed Syllabus (LAS). The possibility of West Berkshire leaving Pan-Berkshire LAS and choosing a different syllabus had been discussed at the previous meeting. The Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) LAS had been considered. A decision was required on what approach would be taken.

Councillor Vickers queried what had led SACRE to consider a local West Berkshire syllabus. David Rees reported that the BCP syllabus was recent and up to date and there was an option to consider using it in West Berkshire. Other authorities had bought the ability to use it and make it their own. Through the Hub a variety of different syllabuses had been considered.

5 Contact with Schools - David Taylor

The Chairman introduced the item and reported that staff responsible for collective worship in schools had been emailed a number of questions and the document (on page 11 of the agenda pack) had been updated with any responses received. The Chairman thanked SACRE members who had visited/contacted schools.

Dilip Ladwa commented on the difficulty to obtain information from schools, due to uncertainty around who was collecting the information and for what purpose particularly in reference to GDPR. It was felt that engagement might be improved if an email was circulated beforehand from an official source, setting out the purpose of the exercise and endorsing those who would be in contact with schools, highlighting that a private email address might be used. Dilip Ladwa added that the number of schools saying they were unaware of SACRE was also quite high.

Rose Carberry commented that emails had caused some concern amongst headteachers who were understandably cautious. Rose Carberry stated that headteachers that had contacted her had been reassured and the process had been explained to them. Information had also been circulated on the head teachers' WhatsApp group. Rose Carberry suggested in the future that she could include information in her weekly kit email to headteachers, setting out who would be emailing them on behalf of SACRE. This would helpfully improve the response rate.

Councillor Vickers commented that he supported Councillors visiting schools within their Wards whether on behalf of SACRE or other purposes. It was acknowledged that schools were currently under a lot of pressure. It would be good to know that before schools were approached that they were aware of the existence and purpose of SACRE. Councillor Billy Drummond commented that he had been in touch with two schools.

Councillor Dick commented that he had been a primary and secondary headteacher for 30 years so was aware of the system. It was important to know how and who to contact within schools. Staff turnover was particularly fast in primary schools. Councillor Dick reported that he had used his West Berkshire email address and followed any emails up with a phone call. He felt it would be helpful to have a short paragraph at the bottom of emails providing detail about SACRE and how it was looking to celebrate the good work within schools.

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Mary Stagg commented that she had been in touch with two schools she had connections with. Nothing had been heard back from schools where there was no personal connection. Val Bolan commented that she had also had success with schools she already had a relationship with.

The Chairman referred to the second set of questions for RE leads (page 12) and suggested that this feedback be submitted to those involved in producing the new syllabus. It was agreed that increased teacher feedback was required.

The Chairman commented on the challenges of SACRE meeting only three times a year and queried when the new syllabus needed to be published by. David Rees was of the understanding the current syllabus was due to end in 2023 so the aim would be to have a revised one in place as soon as possible following this. The Chairman suggested that the deadline for feedback to the questions should be the date of the next meeting in February 2024. David Rees stated it would also need to be decided who would lead on putting the new syllabus together.

Councillor Vickers raised a query about the funding and the Chairman confirmed the funding in the current year's budget was to pay for someone to carry out the work on the new syllabus. Councillor Vickers proposed that the funding be slipped to the next financial year to ensure it was not lost.

RESOLVED that:

- SACRE members would continue with efforts to connect with schools. All information needed to be feedback by the next SACRE meeting on 20th February 2024, ready for submission to inform the new syllabus.
- Information regarding the purpose of SACRE to be added to bottom of any emails sent to schools.
- Rose Carberry to introduce SACRE via the kit email with head teachers going forward.
- It should be proposed that funding for producing the new syllabus be slipped to 2024.

6 New Agreed Syllabus - David Rees

David Rees updated SACRE on the situation with the new syllabus:

- The Pan-Berkshire Hub consisted of the six Berkshire SACREs working together to produce a syllabus.
- Consultation on the new syllabus had been carried out by the Hub. Further feedback was required from West Berkshire. The majority of SACRE's had voiced that they wished to keep the syllabus local.
- Page 13 onwards of the agenda pack provided suggested content and structure for the new syllabus that had been discussed by the Hub. It was important not to focus only on theological debate but rather ensuring it was fit for purpose for schools.
- SACRE Members needed to consider the document and suggestions from other SACREs and feedback as soon as possible so that a timeframe could be put in place. A decision was also required on who would write the syllabus.

Clare Hawkins suggested it might be helpful to share the information regarding the syllabus with the Hub Team that she was in contact with, which coordinated the teacher network. Clare Hawkins confirmed she would be happy to progress this and ensure information was emailed to teachers ahead of time.

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Amanda Bedding reported that her next schools network meeting would be focusing on the questions for the new LAS. They would also use it as an opportunity to view the Bournemouth LAS and feedback and thoughts.

Robin Launder acknowledged the complexity of the process for agreeing a joint LAS. He queried if this process anticipated the potential change in direction from June 2024. David Rees clarified that in June 2024 funding was being provided to RE representatives to provide three different RE curriculums. David Rees stated that although some SACREs had chosen to wait for this work to take place, he did not feel this was necessary. Most SACREs were continuing with renewing their LAS and when the information was available would have to option to adopt parts of it and blend it with their own LAS.

The Chairman reported that he had been asked to by the Hub to seek increased feedback from representatives from other faiths. Mobasshir Mushtaq reported that he would view the document and feedback following the meeting.

Councillor Dick commented that although it was important to consult teachers, he expressed caution regarding the impact this could have on the size of the LAS. He queried when there would be draft ready to share that had local support and acknowledged that some difficult decisions would be required to reach this stage. Councillor Dick suggested that with the new syllabus was being launched, it would be good opportunity to bid for further funding so that it could be resourced. The Chairman stressed that this was the challenge of working collectively with six areas and felt that this was something that needed discussing at the Hub.

Councillor Vickers queried if academies had to follow the LAS. The Chairman confirmed that although academies did not have to follow the LAS, most chose to.

Questions were raised by SACRE regarding who would write and lead on the production of the new syllabus. This was an area of challenge, which required discussion at the next Hub meeting and a decision was needed quickly. Clare Hawkins reported that she was due to meet with Anne Andrews the following week and could raise coordination/writing of the new LAS and feedback to SACRE.

Further questions were raised regarding the process for commissioning the LAS and it was confirmed that the Hub would be responsible for the commissioning process. It was noted that further thought on this would be required if West Berkshire decided to have its own LAS.

David Rees reported that other LAS had been viewed and used to create the suggested content included in the table from page 13. He suggested SACRE members view the text highlighted in yellow and feedback. Any comments could then be fed back to the Hub to help ensure the syllabus was suitable for West Berkshire.

RESOLVED that:

- Clare Hawkins and Amanda Bedding would take the information regarding the LAS to their local headteacher networks.
- SACRE members to feed back on the suggested content for the new syllabus to David Rees.
- Clare Hawkins to raise the issue of coordination/writing of the new LAS with Anne Andrews and report back to SACRE via email.

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David Rees drew attention to the action plan on page 19 of the agenda pack and briefly went through each of the areas listed. It was noted that secondary networks meetings would take place on Teams on 15th November 2023 and 14th March and 11th June 2024.

Councillor Paul Dick suggested that contact links with schools be checked and updated. David Rees noted this point as the RE leads changed quite often.

8 **Schools**

David Rees confirmed the network meetings had not yet taken place, with the secondary network meeting due to take place on 15th November. Clare Hawkins and David Rees were planning to attend this meeting. Amanda Bedding confirmed that her network meetings was due to take place on 14th November and would focus on the suggestions for the new LAS. Amanda Bedding would also try to attend the networks meetings referred to by David Rees.

Regarding point 9.2 on the agenda in reference to academies, the Chairman confirmed that most chose to follow the agreed syllabus.

RESOLVED that David Rees would feedback to SACRE following the primary and secondary network meetings.

9 **Newsletter - David Rees**

David Rees drew attention to the newsletter on page 21 of the agenda pack, which was released on the second week of each term. SACRE members were invited to send anything for inclusion in the newsletter to David Rees.

10 **2024 Meeting Dates and Venues - Sadie Owen**

The suggested meeting dates for 2024 were noted as follows:

- 20th February
- 14th May (22nd June to be removed). To take place at Calcot Junior School.
- 22nd October.

11 **Equality and Diversity - David Taylor**

This item was not discussed.

12 **Any Other Business - David Rees**

David Rees reported that there was a National Association of SACREs (NASACRE) event taking place on 17th November from 6 until 7.30pm for SACRE Chairs, Vice-Chairs and interested parties.

Councillor Vickers reported that a Community Forum event was taking place on 5th December at Chieveley Village Hall (Hybrid) from 6pm until 8pm. It was hoped the different faith groups would attend. The event was focused on hearing about social rural issues from people who worked and lived in the area. SACRE members were advised to get in touch with Sadie Owen (Democratic Services) if they wished to attend.

Rose Carberry confirmed that Mel Higgs from Aldermaston Primary School would be joining SACRE as the new Head Teacher Advisor.

RESOLVED that David Rees would circulate more information on the purpose of the NASACRE event following the meeting.

13 **Support for Individual Schools**

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SACRE considered an exempt information with regards to support for individual schools.

RESOLVED that the information was noted.