

Public Agenda Pack



Minutes of a Meeting of the SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) held at Broughton House, Taunton, on Wednesday 12th June 2024 at 2.00pm

Present:

Group A

Rhona Burfield
Mike Keogh (virtual)

Group B

Penny Jerrard (virtual)

Group C

Niel Apps (Chair)

Group D

Cllr Sarah Wakefield
Cllr Frances Nicholson
Cllr Tim Kerley
Alison Jeffery (Vice-Chair)

Additional attendees

Shell Sullivan
Rebekah Guy
Bernie Kerr (Co-opted)
Pippa Triffitt (Clerk)

Absent:

Pat Ebdon
Leonard Daniels
Jessica Witchell
Jude Clements
Rachelle Billington
Peter Elliott

1. Welcome/Apologies

The Chair welcomed the committee members to the meeting and noted that apologies had been received from Mark Caney, Eleanor Delaney, Pauline Dodds, and Mary Lockwood.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting on 13th March 2024

Rhona Burfield highlighted Action 2 on Page 4 and noted that she was a representative of the Forefront Community Church rather than a Congregational church.

Cllr Kerley praised the inclusion of committee member introductions on Pages 1-3.

The minutes were otherwise confirmed as a correct record.

3. Public Question Time

No public questions were submitted.

4. Worldview of a SACRE Member

The Chair invited Shell Sullivan to give an overview of her faith and what brought her to SACRE.

Shell informed the committee that she was brought up in Spain, where she attended Catholic schools. She was baptised but had little religious background as her parents leaned towards atheism or agnosticism; she herself was an atheist for many years. Shell converted to Catholicism after her son received his first communion and she remained a practicing Catholic for many years. However, the effect of Covid restrictions on her attendance at church accelerated the process of her disenfranchisement in recent years. Shell would now describe herself as a theist, albeit not a practicing one. However, she has a great interest in the teaching of RE and has been an RE Advisor for many years, hence why she was drawn to SACRE.

The Chair thanked Shell for her contribution.

Shell requested that all committee members reintroduced themselves before the meeting proceeded:

Niel Apps – the Chair of the meeting and a member of Group C as the trade union representative.

Bernie Ker – a middle school teacher at Danesfield and a co-opted member of SACRE as a representative of the Bahá'í Faith.

Pippa Triffitt – the Clerk to SACRE and a member of Democratic Services at Somerset Council.

Cllr Tim Kerley – a unitary councillor for Somerset Council. Tim had experience in teaching RE and was keen to see more teachers and students engaging with the subject.

Cllr Sarah Wakefield – a unitary councillor for Somerset Council and a practicing Christian.

Rhona Burfield – a former RE specialist and had taught literacy for many years in Malaysia.

Rebekah Guy – a Somerset Council officer and the RE Advisor for primary education.

Cllr Frances Nicholson – a unitary councillor for Somerset Council, a practicing Christian, and a school governor. Frances was keen for RE to help broaden horizons for pupils.

Alison Jeffery – the Vice-Chair for SACRE and the Service Lead for Literacy and Curriculum. Alison also had experience in teaching at the primary and early years level.

Action:

- 1. For the Clerk to organise the creation of nameplates for all committee members.**

5. ASC Update

The Chair invited Shell Sullivan and Rebekah Guy to give an update on the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC).

Rebekah informed the committee members that two ASC meetings had taken place so far. The members had proved positive and enthusiastic and had conducted extensive research into potential RE syllabi. Due to time restrictions, Somerset were looking to edit and adjust an existing syllabus for its own use, with the view to creating a new syllabus from scratch for the next review.

The first syllabus was called Big Ideas, and it was based on six key concepts that formed a golden thread throughout. The pedagogical background was extensive, and it utilised a multi-disciplinary approach. In addition to aligning with the recent Ofsted review, it aligned with the ASC's own aims for RE. It also had plentiful resources. However, it did not place importance on lived experiences and may have proved difficult for non-specialist teachers to engage with; it was ASC's responsibility to provide the overall syllabus, but there was no expectation to provide the specific curriculum or resources.

Cllr Kerley emphasised the importance of choosing a syllabus that had plentiful and engaging resources to assist non-specialist teachers, noting that RE was a subject often given to supply teachers and non-specialist teachers. He asked whether training would be provided for such individuals. Shell informed the committee that training was a requirement for all teachers, therefore it would need to be provided regardless of the syllabus chosen.

The second area of research was the Norfolk/Cumbria syllabi, which were two very similar syllabi currently in use. They incorporated the worldviews approach and emphasised the multidisciplinary approach. Its aims aligned with ASC's aims for RE and the enquiry approach meant it was easier to plan across lessons. However, its resources were more limited than those for Big Ideas, and it would be difficult to show progression throughout the year with its assessment plan.

The REC toolkit was the third and final area of research. It was released a month ago and its handbook was previously trialled in three settings over two years. It was used by Jen Jenkins and her team to create the agreed syllabus for Warwickshire/Coventry. From it, they formed seven key concepts not unlike those used in Big Ideas, but it also included the multidisciplinary focus of Norfolk; therefore, it was a merger of the two syllabi. It also had a staggered progression model through the key stages. The Warwickshire/Coventry agreed syllabus was unique as it included local examples, such as the Coventry Blitz, but these could be edited as necessary to suit the area.

The ASC committee concluded that the REC Warwickshire/Coventry model was the most promising syllabus. It could be adapted to suit Somerset in the medium term until a new syllabus could be created. The committee was tasked with researching resources that could be signposted for teachers to use for each key stage.

Shell confirmed that she would be contacting the developers of the Warwickshire/Coventry agreed syllabus to ask their permission to use the syllabus and to ask whether the units are already fully resourced. After it is launched, it would be in motion for a year, during which time edits and adjustments could be identified ahead of the next review. It was emphasised that all RE syllabi were reviewed every five years. The Chair also noted that nationally there were calls to create a national syllabus for RE, which needed to be considered before Somerset created a new syllabus from scratch.

Cllr Wakefield asked how different the Warwickshire/Coventry agreed syllabus was to what was currently taught in Somerset schools. Shell confirmed that the Warwickshire/Coventry syllabus was the most up to date syllabus available, whereas the majority of RE currently taught in Somerset schools was based off old syllabi that lacked depth, had little academic pedagogical force, and did not take progression into account. Bernie Kerr added that teachers often lacked a disciplinary understanding of RE, and that lessons often focused on tangible aspects rather than the exploratory aspects of RE.

Cllr Nicholson agreed that the current AMV approach was outdated and was pleased that the syllabus was undergoing review. It was noted that voluntary-aided schools were not obliged to use the agreed syllabus, although most did choose to do so, sometimes with their own additions. It would be preferable to ensure that schools did not deviate from the agreed syllabus, therefore it was important that the Diocese was included on ASC. Shell confirmed that this was the case. Alison added that many of the members of ASC were RE teachers, and they had already provided valuable insights.

Cllr Kerley suggested that the syllabus needed to be appropriate for use by non-specialist teachers who lacked experience with the multidisciplinary approach. Shell confirmed that teachers would be given a breakdown of the units and signposted to resources to assist them.

Action:

- 1. For the Clerk to circulate the PowerPoint slides.**

6. RE Advisors Update

The Chair invited Shell Sullivan and Rebekah Guy to provide the update.

Rebekah highlighted the SACRE newsletter, the Summer Term edition of which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Rebekah had conducted virtual meetings with four different primary schools that had requested support with the RE curriculum for the next academic year. Further meetings were booked in July and later in the Autumn.

Shell confirmed the secondary schools were supported with their curriculums, and that teachers appeared to be keen for them to be improved.

The RE Advisors had attended the Learn Teach Lead RE (LTLRE) hubs training in Bristol where they met other hub leaders in the area for continued professional development. Since the symposium in the Autumn of 2023, it was evident that more RE teachers were engaging with the hubs.

It was noted that the Association of RE Inspectors, Advisors and Consultants (AREIAC) were holding a conference the following week in Birmingham.

The Devon RE agreed syllabus was due to launch online over the following weeks. The RE Advisors were invited to attend the launch conference in July.

7. Diocesan Report

The Chair invited the committee to note the report. It was acknowledged that Pauline Dodds had sent apologies, and that questions should be directed to her replacement in post, Louise Jenkins.

Pauline was thanked for her time on SACRE and for all the valuable contributions she had made.

Action:

- 1. For LA officers to investigate appointing Louise Jenkins to Pauline Dodd's former post on SACRE as the representative of the Diocese.**

8. Budget Report Update

The Chair invited Alison Jeffery to present the update.

Alison informed the committee that the budget for SACRE had recently been set. The overall budget had increased from £15,000 per year to £30,000, as half of this would be allocated to ASC. The request for funding was submitted annually, and Alison was hopeful that the funding would be approved for the next financial year.

Shell advised the committee that it usually cost between £45,000 and £55,000 to produce an agreed syllabus from scratch, including the required training.

The Chair requested an update on expenditure at each SACRE meeting.

Action:

- 1. For Alison Jeffery to provide an update on expenditure at each SACRE meeting going forward.**

9. Faith and Belief Worker

The Chair invited Alison Jeffery to present the agenda item.

Alison informed the committee that there was the opportunity for an interfaith worker to join SACRE; they would act as a conduit, linking individuals and communities and expanding the opportunities and resources available. It was suggested there should be a vote on whether Somerset SACRE should add the faith and belief worker to the committee.

Cllr Nicholson noted that the individual could only be co-opted onto the committee, and only then if they had a view not currently represented. It was suggested that this applied to the interfaith worker.

It was noted that SACRE's Draft Constitution stipulated that there needed to be two members from each Group present at the meeting to meet quoracy requirements. The continued low levels of attendance from SACRE members meant quoracy was difficult to achieve under these guidelines. The hybrid format of the meeting also needed to be reflected in the Constitution, and clarity was required to determine whether those joining virtually could vote and whether co-opted members could be granted voting rights.

The Chair suggested a review of the Draft Constitution was added to the agenda for the next meeting so that an updated version could be submitted to the local authority for approval.

The committee suggested inviting the interfaith worker to the next meeting as an observer with a look to co-opting them onto the committee.

The committee also suggested the start time of SACRE meetings was delayed until after 3:30pm to making it easier for teachers to attend.

Actions:

- 1. For the LA officers to investigate moving the scheduled meetings and room bookings to a later start time.**
- 2. For the LA officers to invite the interfaith worker to the next meeting as an observer.**

10. Any Other Business

It was noted that in addition to Pauline Dodds, Kate Daunton was also leaving SACRE. Both were thanked for the valuable contributions they had made to the committee.

Action:

- 1. For the Clerk to contact the committee members who had not attended to remind them of the importance of their attendance at all meetings.**

11. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was scheduled for 11th September 2024 at 2pm at Broughton House, Taunton.

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