

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES – MR L GRUNDY

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

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STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION - CONSTITUTION

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Cabinet Member of the role and responsibilities of SACRE and to seek approval to the adoption of a revised constitution for SACRE.

Background

2. The local authority has a statutory duty under the Education Acts of 1988 and 1996 to establish a permanent body called a Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE).
3. The broad role of a SACRE is to support the effective provision of RE in schools in order to enrich the experience of RE for all pupils. A SACRE must:
 - advise the LA on RE given in accordance with an agreed syllabus, and on matters related to its functions as it may see fit;
 - publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative groups, specifying any matters on which it has advised the LA, broadly describe the nature of that advice, and set out reasons for offering advice on matters not referred to it by the LA;
 - send a copy of the report to the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCA); and
 - meet in public unless confidential information would be disclosed.
4. A SACRE should also:
 - monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to its agreed syllabus together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus;
 - provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus; the SACRE cannot do this unless there are clear arrangements to provide it with the information it needs concerning the up-to-date situation with regard to RE in the schools using the agreed syllabus;
 - provide advice to the LA and its schools on methods of teaching, the choice of teaching

- material and the provision of teacher training;
 - in partnership with its LA, consider whether any changes need to be made in the agreed syllabus or in the support offered to schools in the implementation of the agreed syllabus, to improve the quality of the RE and the learning of pupils; and
 - offer schools and the LA advice concerning how an existing agreed syllabus can be interpreted so as to fit in with changes in wider education.
5. SACRE's constitution, particularly its composition, is in need of review following developments in the RE curriculum and the publication of new non-statutory guidance for RE in English schools by DCSF in September 2009.

Main Considerations for the Council

6. The LA is required to appoint representatives to each of four groups representing respectively:
 - Group A - Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations
 - Group B - The Church of England
 - Group C - Teacher associations
 - Group D - The local authority
7. For a SACRE is to be effective, its membership needs to be as inclusive as possible and to reflect the priorities for RE and for education more broadly in the twenty-first century. SACREs are local bodies and so should ensure that the religions and beliefs of the local area are represented.
8. Membership of SACREs must be as required by law, comprising four committees or groups mentioned in paragraph 6 above. A SACRE may also include co-opted members who are not members of any of the four groups, although it is often useful to attach, informally, co-opted members to one of the SACRE groups. Members of a group may well wish to take into consideration the views of co-opted members before taking a vote.
9. SACREs should also make sure that their membership reflects, where possible, the breadth of study of religions and beliefs referred to in the non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education (the Framework) thus embodying a commitment to a RE which is inclusive, broad and balanced. It is therefore desirable that membership of a SACRE (through group membership or co-options) should include representatives who reflect both the diversity of religions and beliefs identified within the local agreed syllabus, and local commitment to inter-religious dialogue and community cohesion.
10. The LA must also appoint an occasional body called an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to review the agreed syllabus for RE adopted by the LA. Its role is to produce and recommend an agreed syllabus for RE which meets legal requirements and is educationally sound, and then review it every five years. An ASC can specify what must be taught through the locally agreed syllabus but it may not require schools to allocate particular time to RE in the curriculum.

11. The ASC may have common membership with the SACRE but is a separate entity and must therefore be separately convened. The LA can appoint the members of SACRE to serve as the ASC.

12. The Agreed Syllabus in Wiltshire is due to be reviewed in 2010.

The SACRE Constitution

13. The revised constitution has been prepared by the RE Today, the council's appointed RE Advisory Service with regard to best current practice. Representation is intended to reflect the breadth of religious practice across Wiltshire and the breadth of study in the RE Framework. A copy of the revised constitution is attached as Appendix A.

14. It is proposed to revise the composition of SACRE as follows:

	Membership 1997-2009	Proposed
Group A - Christian denominations and other religions and religious denominations	3 representatives of the Free Churches Group 2 representatives of the Roman Catholic Church 1 representative of the Muslim community	1 representative of the Buddhist community three representatives of the Free Churches Group 1 representative of the Roman Catholic Church 1 representative of the Jewish community 1 representative of the Muslim community 1 representative of the Sikh community 1 representative of the Hindu community
Group B - The Church of England	5 representatives of the Church of England, at least one of whom should be a representative of the Diocese of Bristol Board of Education	5 representatives of the Church of England, at least one of whom should be a representative of the Diocese of Bristol Board of Education and at least 2 of whom should be representative of the Diocese of Salisbury Board of Education
Group C - Teacher associations	5 representatives of the teachers' associations	3 representatives of the teachers' unions with a recommendation that these represent primary, secondary and special schools.

		1 representative of primary headteachers 1 representative of secondary/special school headteachers
Group D - The local authority	5 elected representatives of the Local Education Authority	4 elected councillors as nominated by the political parties represented on the council. The Corporate Director for Children and Education or his/her representative The Equality and Diversity Manager or his/her representative.

15. When established, the new SACRE will be able to co-opt members to represent different interests and religious groups as appropriate to support its work.
16. All the members of the outgoing SACRE, and their appointing bodies, have been consulted over the draft constitution. Three responses were received and their comments have been incorporated into the proposed constitution.
17. The constitution provides for the Agreed Syllabus Conference to have the same composition as SACRE. However, there is no provision for co-opted members, although some individuals may be invited to all meetings of the conference and its groups in order to give their advice.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

18. None known

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

19. The proposed constitution for SACRE seeks to increase the representation of minority faith groups and to recognise the contribution which SACRE can make in working with inter-religious bodies to enhance the important contribution that the study of religion and belief can make to community cohesion and the combating of religious prejudice and discrimination

Risk Assessment

20. The council is required to maintain a SACRE. It is important that its membership and governance is kept under review for it to be able to meet its obligations effectively.

Financial Implications

21. None.

Legal Implications

22. None.

Conclusion

23. The revised constitution for SACRE seeks to recognise the importance of Religious Education and the contribution that representatives of different denominations, religions and beliefs can make as members of SACREs . This gives them opportunities to help make sure the RE curriculum deals accurately and sensitively with their own religious or belief tradition, and that any concerns about RE are raised and considered. They may, for example, raise awareness of sensitive issues when a SACRE is engaged in giving advice to schools on resources recommended for use in RE lessons. Membership of a SACRE or an ASC gives community members a chance to raise and respond to questions from their own community as well as to contribute to wider public understanding of its beliefs, practices and values

Proposal

24. That the revised constitution for the Wiltshire Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education be adopted with immediate effect and the appropriate bodies be asked to nominate members by the end of February 2010.

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Unpublished documents relied upon in the preparation of this report:
None

Once the 5 day period has expired and the decision has been signed off, the report is re-issued with the '**Intention to make decision**' above changed to '**Decision Made**' with an explanation as to what decision has been made with the following footnote:

This decision was published on (*Date) and will come into force on (date – being a minimum of 5 working days following date of publication – these dates will be inserted by DMS).