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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Town Hall Main Road Romford
26 March 2015 (7.00 - 8.15 pm)**

**Representing other
Christian and religious
denominations
(Group A)**

Dr John Lester
Mrs Jenny Fox
Pastor Aloysius Peter
Saddhabhaya
Mr John Smailes
Mr Kevin Walsh
Mr Kamal Siddiqui
Mr Tariq Mahmood
+Ms Natalie Kehr

**Representing the
Church of England
(Group B)**

Mrs Susan Freeman

**Representing the
Teaching
Profession
(Group C)**

Mr Nick Hills
Ms Linda Munday
Mrs Kirsty Fanning

**Representing the
Local Authority
Councillors
(Group D)**

Gillian Ford
Alex Donald

Ms Susan Sutton representing Hsis in the absence of a Primary Advisor was also present.

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE & NEW OR SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Meg Davis, Jason Frost and Dilip Patel, Mrs Christine Seymour (+Mrs Natalie Kehr substituted) and Mr Sansar Narwal, Revd Dorothee Bührma of the United Reformed Church, Mrs Pamela Coles and Mrs Stephanie Ellner tendered apologies after the meeting.

19 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2014 were agreed and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising from that meeting.

20 UPDATE ON SCHOOL ACTIVITY

The current position was that the Senior Advisor was on extended leave and until other arrangements could be put in place, there would be no – or very little - information for SACRE concerning this area. Since Mrs Payne's retirement, Ms Sutton would provide members with updates on the activities of Hsis in relation to Primary education. Mrs Fanning said that she would be willing to consider the role of Secondary Advisor during Daniel's absence and this was welcomed by members.

Primary / Secondary:

Ms Sutton informed SACRE that the RE Networks would be meeting on 28th March and the central subject being considered would be “Preventing Extremism”. It would be held at St Ursula’s and feature Kate Christopher who had a widely published background.

She confirmed that the Joint Agreed Syllabus was on track for completion this summer and that a launch date had been proposed – 25th September and this would be a time for both Havering and Redbridge SACREs to join up. She reported that over the previous couple of months there had been a rise in interest in RE. Training for school governors was including RE and Mrs Jackie Keylock (Hsis) had run the programme and 25 governors had attended. Ms Sutton added that the course would be re-run in the Summer Term.

Ms Sutton then informed SACRE that there was to be an audit of RE skills across both the Primary and Secondary sectors. Whilst there was a good deal of positive developments in the Primary Phase, sadly there was no interest in taking the Primary Lead.

Concerning SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) development, some 30% of schools had shown interest. Councillor Ford observed that RE in schools was being criticised. There were reports about racism from parents and she wondered whether this would be something SACRE could become involved in: providing information to parents about the importance of RE. Ms Sutton said that this could be tried through the Primary Panels and she thought it could be taken forward by them. Councillor Ford wondered just how much RE was being promoted and Ms Sutton replied that schools had to make an RE statement on their websites, though Mrs Fanning said that she had not seen much of that.

The discussion continued with Councillor Ford arguing that any meaningful change had to be started at Primary level and whilst this received general agreement, it was observed that in order to address some religious-based issues, it might be prudent to target resources at schools which had problems rather than across all of them. All agreed that this would be a subject that would be returned to often in the future.

21 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the absence of Mr Hugill, Mrs Fanning stated that she considered that reformed RE studies could be the answer to current pressures. Pupils would have to study two religions. This would be more contextual with less emphasis on philosophy and ethics and could be a positive way to explore the subject. There was some discussion about whether this was the best way to promote RE, but in general, members were of the opinion that despite a sense of national unease, RE study was being positively promoted in local “pockets” of excellence and that these needed to be encouraged and adapted to the needs of other localities. The answer might lie in networking.

22 UPDATE ON THE JOINT AGREED SYLLABUS CONFERENCE WITH REDBRIDGE

It was reiterated that the launch was certainly scheduled for September and that it was being proposed for both SACREs to meet in June to consider and adopt the draft Joint RE Syllabus, which would then be presented to both Councils ahead of the launch. The Chairman stated that it would be good if the joint meeting happened ahead of the summer meeting and if the Syllabus was adopted by both SACREs, members could have an opportunity to consider it in more detail at its own meeting.

23 THE MICHAEL EDWARDS AWARD - WHAT NEXT?

Members were uncertain about whether the Michael Edwards Award really had a viable future. A new generation had grown up which had not known him and the pressures within RE at the Primary phase and the fragmentation in the Senior Phase with the proliferation of Academies, meant that the earlier cohesiveness which helped promote the ideals of the award, no longer existed.

Some members expressed a sadness about this change, but all appreciated that things do not stay the same and on being told that Michael's widow was moving away from the area, there was a general feeling that it might be time to move on.

A suggestion was made that once the new curriculum was in place and the general picture of RE settled down, something else would suggest itself and SACRE could promote that and if it could be associated with Michael Edwards's memory (if appropriate) that decision could be made then but for the present the Award would no longer continue.

24 THE ANNUAL REPORT - 2014

Members were invited to comment about this year's Annual Report and some comments were made about the content of the tables and Mr Hills observed that Secondary schools only had an hour a week for RE and this was barely sufficient to teach the GCSE Short Course. He observed that the three-year RE GCSE (full-course) was being offered in September and he feared that weaker students would be put off and that this would not be beneficial overall.

Whilst some members had some misgivings about the general state of RE within the school curriculum and the way it was perceived, they considered that the Annual Report as a whole reflected what was happening and what SACRE had done during the past year and approved it unanimously..

25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nick Hills announced that this was his last meeting as he was leaving the borough and going to the Anglo-European School in Essex. He was wished well by members.

The Chairman mentioned that the AGM of the Interfaith Group would be taking place on the 23rd April and Kevin Walsh reminded members that the Passion Play would take place again this Easter on the green outside the Queen's Theatre in Hornchurch and urged members to support it by attending.

Saddhabhaya said that he would be very happy to visit schools to talk to staff and pupils about Buddhism.

26 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were asked where the summer visit should be and on a request from the Chairman, Mrs Fox said that the Salvation Army would be pleased to host the meeting. This was welcomed and agreed, though no date was set as she would have to confirm availability. Members were also asked about an autumn date and the 22nd October was provisionally requested.

Chairman