

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
Nelmes United Reformed Church Hall, Nelmes Road
Hornchurch RM11 3JA
6 June 2013 (6.45 - 8.25 pm)**

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

Mrs Pamela Coles
Dr John Lester
Mr Kamal Siddiqui
Mrs Christine Seymour
Mr Kevin Walsh
Mr David Weston

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

Mrs Susan Freeman
Mrs Alison Seaman

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

Mrs Anne Masters
Ms Linda Munday

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

Gillian Ford
Damian White

Councillor Wendy Brice-Thompson (co-optee), Mr Daniel Hugill (Secondary Advisor) and Mrs Judith Payne (HSIS – Primary Advisor) were also present. In addition, Ms L Pool and Ms N Kehr plus other members of the Havering & District Humanist Society were present as observers.

The Chairman thanked the Humanist Society for welcoming SACRE and that members were looking forward to learning more about the Society.

Mrs Seymour provided SACRE with a presentation about the background and practices of the Humanist Society. The underpinning basis was that Humanists do not believe in things spiritual. Their philosophy looks forward, not back. Humanism has its foundation with the ancient Greeks and was known via the Arab influence, in the Renaissance.

A significant date was 1755 – the Lisbon earthquake which led to a huge tsunami – in the aftermath of which, Humanism received a fresh impetus. The movement came more to the fore during the Age of Enlightenment (another Eighteenth Century phenomenon) which continued into the Nineteenth Century with thinkers such as Hume writing about the world in non-religious terms. During this period, a number of ethical and secular societies were founded. Unlike religious foundations, Humanists did not build large places for assembly, the “movement” – if it could be called such – was mostly local, small-scale and private (as even in the Nineteenth Century non-religious thinking and purely secular activities were treated with suspicion – if not outright hostility).

Havering’s Humanist Society is celebrating its fiftieth birthday, although it has (two years ago) amalgamated with the Essex Humanists. The 2011 Census revealed that some 25% of the population stated that it had “no religion” (unfortunately, that was not synonymous with those claiming that, being Humanists). Mrs Seymour wondered whether Humanism was growing. The official terminology was rather

vague, so there was no way of really saying with any certainty beyond the numbers who attended Humanist meetings.

Mrs Seymour wondered what the next Coronation might look like. Prince Charles was known to have “broad sympathies” and the Church of England now only accounted for around 5% of the population according to the same Census. There ought to be changes to the Coronation Oath – in much the same way as changes had been made in court or - say – the national Remembrance Day ceremony. In the United States of America, courts administered a general “do you swear to tell the truth?” oath. There was no religion there despite Americans generally considering themselves to be very “Christian”.

The Humanists in Havering were engaged in two charitable works – supporting Humanists schools in Uganda (the Uganda Humanist Schools’ Trust – providing Secondary places as there is no State support for the secondary phase at present – though primary education is funded) and a homeless charity based in Southend-on-Sea (HARP = the Homeless Action Resource Project). In order to raise funds, Humanists engage in activities such as organising “Friday Thirteenth parties”. There was also a Humanist choir.

Mrs Seymour added a personal note, informing those present that her father had been an Agnostic whilst her mother had been a Unitarian so her gravitation towards Humanism, though not straightforward, had some foundation. She concluded by observing that the British Humanist Association was a registered charity whilst the National Secular Society was not – even though they were now doing very similar things. There were differences of opinion however between the two: one of the aims of the NSS was to remove religious education from the school curriculum.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Seymour for the presentation and also thanked those members of the Society who had prepared such a lovely buffet. She then invited members to re-assemble in order to commence SACRE’s business, inviting members of the Society to stay as they would be most welcome to observe proceedings.

73. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE & NEW OR SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paul Rochford, Paul McGeary and Pam Light. Mr Om Dhir and Mr Sansar Narwal also sent apologies. There were no substitutions.

74 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2013 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

75 UPDATE ON SCHOOL ACTIVITY

Neither Primary nor Secondary representatives had anything to report since the May meeting.

76 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. Mr Hugill informed members about NATRE's 2013 on-line survey and referred to the link in his e-mail of 1 June. This was the third survey in Secondary schools. About a thousand schools had taken part in the survey last year, and NATRE hopes for a similar number this year. It is hoped that trends can be identified across the survey data.
2. A report relating to a Primary sector survey was due to go to press the following week. It showed that Primary teachers had only four hours' worth of RE training over a four year period. RE co-ordinators change about every two years on average and the longest any fulfil that role is five years. There had been no comment from the Department for Education on this.
3. The RE Review: Working papers had now been drafted to be considered alongside the National Curriculum. It might be appropriate to re-draft Havering's curriculum in the light of this review. Mr Hugill urged SACRE to engage with the REC Curriculum Review and the clerk was asked to ensure that members were sent the link as there would be a consultation concerning the Review which was due to take place around mid-July. The task of writing the final document around this RE Curriculum Review had been advertised by the RE Council.

77 UPDATE ON THE MICHAEL EDWARDS AWARD

SACRE members were passed copies of the Michael Edwards' Award application from the Sacred Heart of Mary's Girls' School. The matter had been raised in the May meeting and, in support of it, Mr Hugill stated that a huge amount of work was being undertaken at the school and, on the strength of its application and based on what he had seen, would SACRE endorse his recommendation that Sacred Heart should be given the award – especially as no other school had submitted anything to challenge it.

Councillor Ford raised a query about whether the work was being undertaken by staff or pupils at the school. The Award was clearly meant for the activities of children and Sacred Heart's application appeared to indicate that this was something being envisioned and driven by adults.

Mr Hugill replied that children were fully engaged in project work and that this involved the community. After some discussion, SACRE approved the

award unanimously. It was hoped that the presentation could take place during what remained of the Summer Term.

Mrs Payne wondered whether students should not be approached with a view for them to join SACRE. This would provide it with the student voice – it would also be good to involve students directly in SACRE's work.

Members decided that this area should be explored as it would make sense to involve not only students, but also to encourage representation from teachers in academies.

78 ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

The version presented to members was unanimously approved – once a minor amendment (4.4) had been made.

79 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Dr Lester informed those present that the Interfaith Conference would be taking place at the YMCA on 18 July. It was proposed that perhaps the Agreed Syllabus Conference should be an item on the October agenda. It was also suggested that perhaps someone from the Sacred Heart could be invited to the meeting – or even someone from Redbridge (if it was agreed that a joint Conference could be undertaken).

80 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were reminded that at its previous meeting, SACRE had decided to hold the Autumn Meeting on **Wednesday 9 October 2013** and the start time would be **7.00pm**. Members were also reminded that this would involve the elections for the Chair and Vice Chairmanship

Chairman