

Local Members Interest
Nil

Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 23 March 2022

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) - Annual Report 2020/21

Recommendation(s)

I recommend that:

- a. To formally receive Staffordshire Standing Advisory Council's on Religious Education's (SACRE) Annual Report for 2020/21.
- b. To raise any questions and/or make particular observations on the work of SACRE, as set out in their Annual Report 2020/21.

Report of Chairman of SACRE

Report

Background

1. Staffordshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) is a statutory committee of the County Council. Its membership consists of representatives from four constituencies: the County Council itself, the Church of England, other faiths and denominations, and teacher organisations. The County Council has the right to appoint the SACRE Chair. If the Council does not exercise this right, the SACRE elects a Chair annually from among its own members.
2. To record a formal vote, each of the four groups contributes a single block vote. The Chair has a casting vote if the vote is tied, but in practice SACRE works by consensus and would avoid moving to take a formal vote if it was known or suspected that there was serious disagreement over a proposed action or motion.
3. The role of SACRE is to inform and advise the County Council on all matters relating to Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship in maintained schools within the County. To this end, it gathers information from schools through a variety of channels: annual surveys and questionnaires, Ofsted inspection reports, external exam results, and anecdotally.

4. By statute, SACREs must meet at least once each term, and must produce an Annual Report on their activities. The Annual Report is primarily a report to the County Council. It is also sent for information to all maintained schools in the County, to the Department for Education, and to the National Association of SACREs (NASACRE).
5. The work of SACRE is supported by a full range of clerking and venue services provided by the County Council, and by the appointment of a part-time Adviser in RE via Entrust. A ring-fenced budget allows for up to 12 days' work a year from the Adviser to service SACRE meetings and develop SACRE initiatives. The Adviser also offers in-service courses for teachers which schools buy into, and which fund additional Advisertime.
6. The County Council's support for Staffordshire SACRE stands up well compared with the support given by other local authorities to their SACREs and approximates quite closely to the 2% of the aggregate central education grant recommended by NASACRE.

The "Agreed Syllabus" in Religious Education

7. An important responsibility of the SACRE is to ensure that its local authority locally agreed RE syllabus in place, and to support and monitor the implementation of that syllabus. The syllabus must be followed by all maintained community schools and by Church of England Voluntary Controlled Schools within the County. While Academies and Free Schools are not obliged to use this syllabus, they are encouraged to do so for the sake of continuity and planned progression, and for ease of transition between schools.
8. In order to create or revise an Agreed Syllabus, the local authority must set up an Agreed Syllabus Conference. Since the required composition of such a Conference is effectively identical to that of the SACRE, in practice members of the SACRE can serve also as members of the Agreed Syllabus Conference, and meetings of the two bodies can be held in tandem.
9. The 1988 Education Act set out the fundamental principles which should apply in drawing up an Agreed Syllabus: any such Syllabus must *reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the teachings and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain*. These principles still apply in law and underlie Staffordshire's current Agreed Syllabus.

10. Local authorities must revise their Agreed Syllabus every five years. Any proposed new or revised version of an Agreed Syllabus requires a vote in favour from each of the four stakeholder groups, followed by the agreement of the County Council via the appropriate Cabinet Member. The current Agreed Syllabus was adopted in 2016. An Agreed Syllabus Conference was duly convened in 2021 and has been engaged in carrying out a review of the existing Syllabus, including feedback from schools and general up-dating, with a view to launching a revised Syllabus in September 2022.

11. Staffordshire's 2016 Agreed Syllabus was at the forefront of RE Syllabus development nationally and has been popular with schools and RE specialists. The revised Syllabus will build on this, while taking note of current debate about a fuller inclusion of non-religious world views in RE syllabuses and referencing the latest Ofsted buzz words for shaping the curriculum in general: Intent, Implementation and Impact.

The Westhill/NASACRE Award Project

12. In 2017 Staffordshire SACRE successfully bid for a £4,000 Award to fund a project to develop the 2016 Agreed Syllabus's three core themes Explore, Engage, Reflect. The project enabled groups of Key Stage 2/Key Stage 3 pupils to have side-by-side interactive encounters with a Christian presentation and a Muslim presentation, and to reflect on this experience. The Christian presentation was provided by the Stafford Churches' organisation Youthnet, and the Muslim presentation by Muslims on the school support staff of Entrust.

13. Pupils and schools responded very enthusiastically to the interactive encounters. SACRE has therefore sought to continue the project with more schools, as far as funds will allow, and to build up a powerful legacy from the project. This work necessarily had to cease for the best part of two years during lockdown but has now resumed. It should be noted that both Entrust staff and Youthnet charge a fee for their involvement in this initiative.

Link to Strategic Plan

14. The County Council's Strategic Plan sets out their ambitions and priorities for the years ahead. It outlines what they want to achieve and how they intend to achieve it over the next four years (2022 to 2026).

15. The Plan's Vision is that Staffordshire is an innovative, ambitious and sustainable county, where everyone has the opportunity to prosper, be healthy and happy.
16. As a result of this vision the Plan outlines three priority outcomes which the Authority will keep at the heart of what they do and how they aim to achieve them.
17. The County Council's second priority outcome is:- "Staffordshire people will live in thriving and sustainable communities" and the work of SACRE contributes to achieving this ambition by promoting, through education of young people, faith, goodwill and respect for others amongst residents.

Community Impact

18. None from consideration of SACRE's Annual Report 2020/21.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Report of Michael Metcalf (Rev Prebendary), Co-opted Member Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee, dated 10 March 2022

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