

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

21st June 2017

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities An Update on Key Issues

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To present members of SACRE with a brief update on key issues that have developed or arisen since the last meeting of SACRE.

2 Summary

2.1 Members of SACRE will receive a brief report on a number of key issues. These are matters which have either been raised at previous SACRE meetings and which have moved forward, or matters on which it is appropriate to brief members of SACRE.

3 Recommendation

3.1 That members of SACRE receive the report and note the contents

4 Background

4.1 Since the summer term meeting of the SACRE there have been developments in a number of areas which had previously been agenda items for SACRE or which have local or national importance for RE.

4.2 Members will be briefed on these key developments.

5 Equal Opportunities

5.1 This report has been prepared in accordance with the County Council's policies on equal opportunities.

6 Financial implications

6.1 Financial implications may be raised by individual items. These have been dealt with elsewhere, or will be raised at future meetings of SACRE.

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Manchester Arena Attack - Statement from the Co-Chairs of the Inter Faith Network for the UK and Moderators of the IFN Faith Communities Forum

A response to the Manchester Arena attack is attached for members to read. The interfaith network has also provided information and guidance for the wider community:

Looking After One Another: the safety and security of our faith communities.

The document provides short guidelines for faith community organisations working together to respond to inter-community tensions and to attacks, or the threat of attacks, on places of worship or other faith community property. This document is available for members to read online: <https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/looking-after-one-another-the-safety-and-security-of-our-faith-communities>

The Great Get Together

On 22 February, the Jo Cox Foundation launched The Great Get Together to commemorate the murder of the MP as a way of bringing communities together to build better community cohesion. The events took place over the weekend of 17 -18 June 2017. Were any SACRE members involved/have experiences to share?

Religion or belief: dress codes and religious symbols

In March, the European Court of Justice advised the Belgian government that companies, and in this case G4S, could have a policy that forbade the wearing of religious symbols in the work place. The Court recognized that companies had a right to project a neutral image and that they were within their rights to have policies which upheld that right. This was not deemed to be discriminatory. The advice can be used by judges in EU member states to inform decisions that they make where it has alleged discrimination has taken place, direct or indirect.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has stated: 'Following a ruling from the Court of Justice of the European Union, employers can ban staff from wearing visible religious symbols, but must have a relevant policy in place before doing so.'

Religious dress and schools

The Department for Education, based on case law here, is quite clear that schools in England can determine their own dress codes and that they should do this in consultation with parents. It is not expected that this will change. What may be affected is the right of staff to wear religious dress in school, where a school wished to project a 'neutral' image.

SACREs and the ruling

SACREs may be asked for advice on this matter, especially where there are no interfaith groups that might be consulted. SACREs are advised to look closely at the Equality and Human Rights Commission website for the latest advice from them.

The ruling and Brexit

It is not clear what will happen to such a ruling when the UK leaves the EU in just under

two years. The European Court of Justice is an EU institution, as opposed to the European Court of Human Rights which is a Council of Europe Institution, and there will be some adjustment made in terms of its impact on UK law when the UK leaves the EU.