

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday 16 February 2023 at 6.00 pm in The Telford Room, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford, TF3 4NT

Present: Councillors Lord Sahota (Chair), I T W Fletcher, J Jones, A D McClements and K T Tomlinson.
Co-optees: S Fikeis

Also Present: Councillor S A W Reynolds (Cabinet Member: Children, Young People, and Families).

In Attendance: R Carey (Team Leader: School Performance), A Cooke (Service Delivery Manager: Alternative Provisions and CIC), S Marston (Service Delivery Manager: Skills), J Osmund-Smith (Chair of SACRE), R Phillips (Service Delivery Manager: Legal & Democracy), S Wellman (Director: Education & Skills) and S Yarnall (Democracy Officer (Scrutiny)).

Apologies: Councillor B Wennington.
Co-optee L Fowler.

44 Declarations of Interest

None.

45 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

46 The Role of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

The Team Leader: School Performance and the Chair of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) provided a summary of the role of SACRE. SACRE supported the legal obligation of teaching Religious Education (RE) in schools. RE taught more than various religions but also concepts of spirituality and how to be a good citizen. The main role of the SACRE was to support teachers in the teaching of RE through exemplar modules and materials, SACRE encouraged schools and pupils to engage with complex questions such as climate change and to use the teachings of RE in an attempt to understand them. One of the ways this was achieved was through the annual conference, which was student led to address complex issues in more depth. A requirement of SACRE was to produce an Annual Report which would be available to the public. SACRE consisted of four sub-committees which represented different religions, the Local Authority and

teachers to ensure that the advice they provided to schools was representative.

Following the presentation Members asked the following questions:

How did the SACRE contact faith representatives to get them involved in SACRE?

Representatives from different religions were contacted through a number of means, ranging from phone calls and emails to see if they were interested in joining. The Local Authority supported to encourage representatives from schools to attend.

Was the curriculum flexible enough to all the materials to be taught to all ages?

The curriculum allowed for flexibility to adapt the materials to ensure they were appropriate for each age group, such as faith representatives talking to young people in schools about their religion. There was support given to teachers to ensure that the material taught was appropriate for the school.

How had the SACRE brought other cultures and topics to the teaching of RE?

SACRE worked with young people in schools and their teachers to identify topics of interest that could be used alongside RE, for example, at the latest SACRE conference young people had identified concerns over climate change and used what they had learnt at the conference to address the topic. SACRE also worked collaboratively with the Local Authority Multi-Cultural team to ensure that many cultures were represented and celebrated, such as Ramadan and Chinese New Year.

Following the emergence of more publicity surrounding the Windrush generation, had SACRE approached other religious representatives who might have otherwise be underrepresented?

There was work currently being completed to recruit further representatives to increase equality and diversity.

Were there benchmarks that SACRE and schools must meet?

Each Local Authority had their own SACRE and each one operated independently to create a curriculum and themes which best suited their area, along with their own benchmarking. There was a National Association of SACRE where each body could get support and advice. In terms of benchmarks in schools it differed across primary and secondary schools. Secondary schools were heard to have benchmarks based on results and the numbers of children that sat RE GCSEs. For primary school the benchmarks were examined on the core principles taught and the engagement that the schools had with them.

For communities and demographics where there were separate churches, how were they engaged with?

There was work being done to engage with communities that do not currently engage with SACRE.

With a large focus in schools on achieving results, how had SACRE worked to get the importance of their work across to schools, parents and young people especially around themes of kindness?

Children were taught prejudice through social means but with RE as part of the national curriculum; this helped to promote the values of SACRE specifically kindness and love rather than specific religious values. There were links with other subjects and policies. There was training for school staff to provide accurate advice to ensure that the schools were equipped to teach RE. The curriculum allowed for flexibility to allow for variation to the teaching of RE regardless of whether a school was faith based.

How were relationships with the Local Authority and SACRE?

SACRE had a close working relationship with the Local Authority, especially with the Multi-Cultural Team, to ensure that their advice and material were equal and recognised diversity.

Members thanked officers and the Chair of SACRE for providing an overview and summary on the role of SACRE to the Committee.

47 Belonging Strategy

A summary on the Belonging Strategy was provided and an update given to Members. The Strategy aimed to make every young person felt like they were loved. The five priorities of the strategy were outlined and summarised and explained in relation to schemes that had been implemented. Some of the schemes included the implementation of days out with organisations like AFC Telford, mental health and wellbeing support and Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) indicator to identify at risk young people. Support for young people from the Local Authority, schools and partner organisations were utilised to deliver ongoing support for young people and included support for transition post-education and many of life milestones. The next steps were focused on expanding the strategy and to continue to support schools across the Borough.

Members asked the following questions:

Were there still inclusion units in schools?

There were still inclusion units in some schools but these were more supportive and offered support in areas such as mental health, learning and behavioural support. Inclusion units were used to support young people to reintegrate into mainstream education where possible.

For those young people who attended outreach services such as AFC Telford, how would they travel to those locations?

This would be dependent on the child's particular circumstances, however, local bus routes could be used or taxis in some cases.

Had academies bought into the strategy?

There was funding available for schools and academies and support for young people would be available whether they were in a maintained school or in an academy.

How did the Team work with young people with learning difficulties or additional needs who could not integrate into mainstream education?

There were programmes to support young people with learning difficulties and additional needs and the service worked with schools to support their transition especially regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

How did schools engage with the strategy and had the strategy relieved any pressures from schools?

Officers were working with schools to ease the pressures on them and work with the young people to ensure that the relationships were correct to ease the pressures. This was to ensure that young people had a better transition into education and were identifying and dealing with issues sooner.

Was there support for teachers as there were concerns that teachers were required to be experts in areas beyond their specialty?

There was wellbeing support for teachers.

Had the strategy supported teachers to ensure that young people were supported and allowed them to continue to teach with minimal disruption in classes?

The results highlighted that early intervention and support had worked with the young people to minimise class impact. Schemes such as the 'Pre-Exclusion Hotline' helped to make a difference and supported with periods of transition and to ensure the correct support was applied before the point of exclusion.

Cllr A D McClements left the meeting at 7.16pm.

48 Chair's Update

Members were informed that there would be an online briefing session on the 6 March 2024, focused on the Family Safeguarding Model.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm

Chairman:

Date: Wednesday 5 July 2023