

MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standing Advisory Council for Religion, Values and Ethics (SAC) held at Council Chamber - Council Chamber on Wednesday, 14th June, 2023 at 3.00 pm

PRESENT:

COUNTY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES

County Councillor Martyn Groucutt (Chair)
County Councillor Paul Pavia
County Councillor Louise Brown
County Councillor Angela Sandles

FAITH AND BELIEF REPRESENTATIVES

Sue Cave
Suzanne Gooding
Maddie Sareirah
Chris Francis
Rebecca Morteo

TEACHER REPRESENTATIVES

Charlotte Rhodes
Neil Jenkins

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sharon Randall-Smith	Head of Achievement and Attainment
Wendy Barnard	Democratic Services Officer
Hayley Jones	Curriculum Partner (SACs and RVE)
Geraint Edwards	Solicitor

APOLOGIES:

Ali Szwagrzak

1. Confirmation of the appointment by Council of the Cabinet Member for Education as Chair of SAC

The appointment by Council of the Cabinet Member for Education as Chair was noted.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

County Councillor L. Brown was appointed as Vice Chair.

3. To note the record of the last meeting held on 8th March 2023 (not quorate)

The record of the last meeting (not quorate) was noted. Item 3: An amendment was made to correct the statement "Additionally, Humanism is part of the RVE syllabus" to read "Additionally, non -religious philosophical convictions, of which Humanism would be an example, is part of the RVE syllabus".

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The minutes of the meeting held on the 26th October 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

A Member questioned if a draft version of the Constitution was circulated to the SAC prior to presentation to Council. It was confirmed that a draft report containing the proposed amendments was circulated prior to the inquorate meeting held on the 8th March 2023.

4. SAC New legal status: Geraint Edwards, Solicitor

The Legal Adviser confirmed that today's meeting is the first properly constituted meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for religion, values and ethics (SAC). He explained there were legislative changes made to sections 390 to 392 of the Education Act 1996 as a result of the Curriculum and Assessment Wales Act 2021. The effect of those changes was that the requirement that a local authority has to constitute a SACRE has been repealed and been replaced, subject to a transitional period until 2026, by requirements to constitute a SAC (Standing Advisory Council on religion, values and ethics).

The brief of SAC is broader than that of SACRE covering all the responsibilities of SACRE and adding Religion, Values and Ethics reflecting the RVE elements of the new Curriculum for Wales framework.

The composition of SAC differs to that of the former SACRE in that the law now requires the representative group for Christian denominations and other religions and denominations to include representation for persons who hold non-religious philosophical convictions (NRPC).

At Monmouthshire County Council's AGM on 18th May 2023, Full Council reviewed, updated and approved the Monmouthshire County Council Constitution.

The changes to the Constitution included replacement of the SACRE terms of reference, with one for SAC instead. These are substantially identical to those of the former body noting only the inclusion of values and ethics within its scope, and provision for an NRPC representative.

Additionally, there is provision that SAC will be responsible for handling the legacy SACRE responsibilities for the duration of the transitional period. The terms of reference of SAC include a provision that the NRPC representative cannot vote on SACRE legacy matters because no legislative provision was made previously for an NRPC representative on SACREs.

Doubts have been raised as to whether that provision is lawful following the recent judgment of the High Court in the case of R (Bowen) v Kent County Council [2023] EWHC 1261. The Administrative Court in London quashed the decision of Kent County Council to refuse to consider a Humanist for membership of Group A of its SACRE.

Considering the judgment raises some doubts as to the lawfulness of the restriction in the terms of reference of our SAC, discussion will take place with the Chief Officer's representative and the Monitoring Officer and others to consider this issue and make any amendments as necessary. It is understood that Kent County Council still has the right of appeal, and should this occur, it will be necessary to await an outcome.

A Member pointed out that the legislation in England and Wales differs and in England SACREs remain in place. The Member requested an opportunity to look at the judgement. The Member referred to the debate at Council that the advice of Welsh Government wasn't being followed to allow SACRE and SAC to coexist, but noted the changes to the constitution were accepted. The Member said that SACRE/SAC members had not been consulted on the changes.

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The Chair commented that the Monitoring Officer is of the opinion that the Council is working within the advice of Welsh Government. He confirmed that he had received advice that the judgement referred to may have an impact in Wales but it will be necessary to await further information.

5. Membership and Future Recruitment Arrangements

The Chief Officer's representative presented the report to consider a formal recruitment process for new members of SAC that is transparent, consistent, and robust to challenge. Not having a formal process presents a risk that it could be perceived that SAC has not been constituted properly. It is for the local authority to appoint SAC members.

Group 1 or A: Faith and Belief representatives. It is proposed to establish a similar process to appointments for local authority school governors by way of an application form to collect information on their role and experience, which is endorsed by the Faith or Belief Group they represented.

Group 2 or B: Teacher representatives. They are nominated by trade unions in a formal, recorded process that is open to all.

Group 3 or C: Local authority representatives. These are elected members appointed by the Council.

A 4-year term is proposed to provide flexibility to reflect changing demographics.

A Member expressed concern about the late circulation of the report and suggested a deferral. The Officer pointed out the need for a clear, consistent and transparent process for recruitment. There was no reason to stop SAC deferring a decision, the need to work on filling vacancies was highlighted.

A Member noted that the report is different from the report put to Council in May 2023 in that there should be six local authority representatives and the Chief Officer should be an adviser not a representative. The Member was thanked for raising the point and the report will be amended to reflect six representatives (voting) and the Chief Officer as a non-voting adviser. It was also noted that the SAC should be responsible for the appointment of up to two Co-opted members not the local authority and this point will be amended in the report.

In terms of appointment of teacher representatives, it has previously been seven members, proposed by teaching associations and if there are no nominees, approaches can be made to head teachers. There is no provision to divide representation between local authority and church schools

Regarding appointment of religious and non-religious philosophical convictions representatives, it was previously specified which groups would be represented e.g. Church in Wales, Catholic Church, four Free Church representatives etc. It was questioned who would sit on the panel to make these appointments. Clarification was provided that the panel would consist of cross

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party elected members who would consider application forms endorsed by the nominating organisation.

Following a vote in the respective groups the report recommendation to accept the future recruitment arrangements for SAC as set out in the report was ratified subject to the amendments agreed.

It was agreed that a briefing paper would be circulated to all SAC Members to provide further details on how the appointments panel will be constituted and will operate.

6. Qualifications Wales Full 14-16 qualifications offer consultation

The EAS RVE Partner noted that the closing date for the consultation to consider the 14-16 new wider suite of qualifications proposed to sit alongside the GCSE qualification that starts in September 2025, is today. A response on behalf of SAC has been prepared. The proposals are comparable to the short course that is not available at present. There will be a gap in provision because the new wider suite of qualifications won't be implemented until 2027.

It was pointed out that as there is no short course qualification for GCSE, there is a considerable need for additional qualifications to support the compulsory element of RE or RVE. Qualifications Wales have offered to add some units to the Skills for Life and the Foundation offer. Concern was expressed that this was insufficient as schools can opt in or out of certain units.

The consultation is important as it will measure the need for specific RVE qualifications to fill the need for pupils not opting for GCSE RE, to use as part of the wider suite of qualifications and possibly the mandatory element of RVE. The Foundation qualification (part of the Foundation Qualifications Suite of Qualifications) will consist of between 30 and 60 guided learning hours to fit the criteria of an hour week of RVE to help learners have good provision of RVE at KS4 that may encourage them to take the subject at A Level. The concern is that if there is limited provision of RVE the decline in the uptake on RVE qualifications may continue.

SAC Members were encouraged to respond to the consultation, particularly questions 47 to 49 as there is a risk that schools will opt not to teach RVE.

A Member pointed out that the units are optional and should be mandatory. SACs ensure that RE and RVE are taught in schools and if the units are not included as part of the qualifications, they may not be taught. Where there is a gap in provision between 2025 and 2027, Welsh Government should reconsider the short course on RS because that covers entry level one and two which may assist pupils to progress to A Level.

It was suggested that entry level one and level 2 should be taught on a mandatory rather than optional basis to cover the statutory obligations of Christianity and other principle religions, and non-religious philosophical convictions. It is important that the status of the qualifications is high

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enough to be recognised

The Chair urged Members to view the video provided by WASACRE and to respond to the consultation. A Member asked that the point about statutory obligation is included to the response from the SAC.

7. Monmouthshire Inspection Reports (Summary)

The Head of Achievement, Attainment and Extended Services reported on Monmouthshire Schools Inspection reports.

It was noted that 11 schools have been inspected during the period since the pandemic. The summary is based on the 9 reports that have been published. The schools inspected are:

Monmouth Comprehensive School
King Henry VIII Comprehensive School
Llanvihangel Crucorney Primary School
Llanfoist Primary School
Castle Park Primary School
Gilwern Primary School
The Dell Primary School
St.Mary's Roman Catholic School
Dewstow Primary School,

In nearly all schools, it is reported that spiritual, moral and social skills are developing well and pupils have beneficial opportunities to develop good understanding of spiritual and ethical beliefs through assemblies, reflection time, comparing different faiths and beliefs.

There are no recommendations relating to the development of spiritual and moral education in any schools within this group. This element is reported in care support and guidance section.

The extracts from each school will be circulated after today's meeting and these reflect where spiritual and moral development was seen during the inspection.

The Church in Wales representative updated SAC on inspections of voluntary aided schools. These inspections are under review, so there are no section S50 inspections taking place and it is estimated that they will start again next January. It is understood that Catholic school inspections have restarted.

The Schools were congratulated on the positive comments made.

8. EAS RVE Partner Update

It was reported that the EAS is working on a new suite of professional learning and an informal collective worship conversation is starting next week to look at what's happening in schools to highlight and share practice, and emerging practice and identify how to support schools. Phil Lord will be guest speak to enhance the conversations and SAC Members are welcome to attend, and also to contribute. The links are on the EAS website.

The RVE curriculum design program is starting on 27th June for schools to think about what RVE look like, what does progression look like within RVE and to start looking at how to plan it. This will be for primary and secondary schools then later possibly split into primary and

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secondary sessions. This is fully booked already with a waiting list, so a second event may be arranged.

There are separate primary and secondary termly Humanities meetings.

Plans are in hand to organise a faith and belief encounters workshop following some Church in Wales training that some schools in our region have had the opportunity to be part of. This focuses on talk about lived religions and people who have faith and belief share their experiences and offer what they can to schools.

Also, in development is work on developing inspiring pedagogy in RVE which will be over two days in December to follow on from the initial sessions on curriculum design to look at specific pedagogy.

There is ongoing work with Central South Consortium with the Muslim Council for Wales to create some videos to share with schools. The first is on the Mosque and there discovering Muslims in Britain projects and resources to share with schools.

The new RVE resources are all on Hwb and there is an insight event to promote these.

In terms of Welsh Government, there has been the agreed syllabus review. WASACRE was commissioned to look at all the agreed syllabi in Wales and the quality, consistency and that they are in the spirit of the Curriculum for Wales is to be reported back with a view to share good practice.

The Welsh Government has requested case studies from schools to exemplify the What and the How of RVE. Monmouthshire schools were encouraged to provide examples of work in any format.

Welsh Government is proposing a NAPFRE/WASACRE free conference open to SACREs. A working group is taking this forward.

The new GCSE discussions around awaiting final proposal from Qualifications Wales to go to WJEC should be ready by 26th June. This will not include the course content just the high level planning at this stage. Hopefully a specification, self assessment materials and teacher guidance will be produced ready for September 2024 for the examinations in 2025.

Advert for WJEC for colleagues to help produce material and resources for Religious Studies (not RVE).

It was commented that Curriculum for Wales made it clear it was possible for schools to teach on a subject basis as opposed to multidisciplinary basis. With regard to collective worship, the Member asked if this could be more locally based and asked to be involved in professional learning events, and also commented that our own faith schools should be part of professional learning for collective worship for a balanced approach as it is important to be locally based. It was confirmed that the Church in Wales has used Phil Lord in its schools for advice and guidance on collective worship, and it was also pointed out that there are very few subject specialists to draw on.

9. Planning for the Annual Report

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It was noted that WASACRE has been asked to submit proposals to review the criteria for inclusions in the SACRE/SAC Annual Report to reflect the changes of the Curriculum for Wales. Until any changes are announced the EAS RVE Partner will work on the existing report criteria.

10. Arrangements to review the progress schools are making towards delivering RVE

The Chief Officer's representative explained that there is little progress to report partly because primary schools are deploying action short of strike therefore engagement with the authority and EAS is limited to statutory elements of work.

11. WASACRE Business

The minutes of the WASACRE meeting held on the 21st March 2023 were received.

Members were invited to attend as a representative of SAC, the summer WASACRE meeting on 19th June 2023. CC L. Brown has registered to attend and any other expressions of interest should be directed to Wendybarnard3@monmouthshire.gov.uk

12. Any Other Business

It was noted that the new start time of 3.00pm is not necessarily convenient for all members. The time had been altered to encourage attendance by teacher representatives.

A message will be sent to all members to canvas view on timings of meetings.

It was noted that the September and December meetings are the day before the County Council meeting which limits time availability for elected members to attend group meetings and prepare for Council. It was requested that the dates are moved back a week to 20th September and 13th December 2023.

13. Dates of Next and Future meetings

It was agreed to move the dates of the following meetings:

13th September 2023 to 20th September 2023

6th December 2023 to be changed to a date to be confirmed.

The meeting ended at 4.35 pm