

Briefing on the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 28 June 2006

Richard Partridge, Assistant Director of Law and Performance Management, gave a briefing on the status and implications of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act.

The Act received royal assent in February 2006, but is not expected to come into force before the Autumn. Home Office guidance on its implementation is currently being drafted.

The Act is very short, and amends the Public Order Act. Only the Police will have the powers to enforce it, and prosecutions will need the consent of the Attorney General. The Act says:

- Those using threatening words, behaviour or material are guilty of an offence if their intention is to incite religious hatred.

CRE guidance clarifies that this constitutes behaviour which is threatening or abusive and aimed at inciting hatred against **people**. This would include religious extremism.

The offence can be committed in a private or public place, but **not** in a private house.

In the context of the distribution of written material, plays or broadcasts, the **intention** must be to incite religious hatred.

In view of the high onus of proof required, very few convictions are anticipated except in extreme cases. In the context of schools, therefore, it is unlikely to apply. Moreover, were an offence to be committed in one of the county's schools, corporate liability could only be proved if it were shown that the offence was committed with the consent of the County Council.

It was agreed that the Act would be put on the SACRE agenda as soon as Home Office guidance was published. Richard expressed his willingness to talk again at a future SACRE meeting.

Minutes of the meeting of the East Sussex SACRE, held on 28 June 2006

Present: Ms J Bell (NUT), Rev D Bishop (Sussex Baptist Society), Mr K Fossey (Buddhist Community), Mr P Frere (Unitarian Church), Councillor J Garvican, Mrs C Gravestock (external RE consultant), Mrs M Hughes (Diocese of Arundel & Brighton), Mr M Lloyd (C of E), Councillor M Lock, Mrs P Lock (C of E), Mr M Relf (New Churches), Councillor R Stogdon, Mrs R Stutters (Baha'i Faith Community), Dr B Vance (URC), Councillor T Webb

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1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Rev D Bastide (C of E), Dr T Durgahee (Sussex Muslim Society), Councillor R Martin, Mr R Saunders (C of E), Rabbi V Silverman (Jewish Community) and A Tindall (Religious Society of Friends).

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2006

2.1 The minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.

3 Matters for report

3.1 NASACRE Annual General Meeting

3.1.1 Charlotte Gravestock clarified that the East Sussex SACRE has opted to affiliate itself to NASACRE, the national association. An AGM is held once yearly which provides delegates with the opportunity to meet officers from the QCA and the DfES, and gives a wider perspective to the work of SACREs. Charlotte had attended this year's AGM in April.

3.1.2 Charlotte reported on one of the proposals at the AGM for schools in different local authorities to complete and return self-evaluation questionnaires, the results of which would be recorded in a national database maintained by Culham College. As these self-evaluations would not be moderated and the cost for each participating SACRE would be around £5,000, Charlotte had not expressed enthusiasm for this idea, and had the impression that other delegates felt similarly.

3.1.3 It was agreed to notify members in good time of the date of next year's AGM.

3.2 Update on Faith Communities Partnership project

3.2.1 Charlotte referred colleagues to the County Council funding of £5,000 for the project, which was now available and set aside separately from the SACRE budget for the duration of the project.

3.2.2 A very positive start to the project was reported, with the initial two meetings looking at possible areas of study. A range of people were involved, with Muslim and Hindu representatives yet to be identified.

3.2.3 It was hoped to provide pupils with an added dimension to the RE

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curriculum which they would not normally have access to. Interest had already been expressed by a number of Primary and Secondary schools.

3.2.4 Diversity **within** faiths as well as **between** faiths would be explored.

3.3 RE resources centre

3.3.1 Charlotte reported that RE resources were now housed in The Magnet, courtesy of the Diocese of Chichester, and took the opportunity to express thanks to the Diocese. A twilight meeting had been arranged recently to show schools the resources available; about 15 teachers from local schools had attended.

3.3.2 Charlotte referred colleagues to the database on Ezone which provided information on The Magnet as well as an updated list of resources.

3.3.3 The value of publicising The Magnet amongst the Excellence Cluster schools was agreed.

3.4 Training for teachers

3.4.1 Charlotte tabled details of RE/SMSC courses for 2006-07. The courses were open, free of charge, to any SACRE members wishing to attend, and colleagues were asked to notify Charlotte beforehand if they wished to attend.

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3.5 RE/SMSC self-evaluation

3.5.1 Charlotte referred to the discussion at the last meeting on the new Ofsted Inspection framework and how SACRE could monitor and evaluate RE in future in the context of the framework. She reported on the proposal to give a small number of East Sussex schools support in their self-evaluation prior to Ofsted inspections. Charlotte would visit and report on each school.

3.5.2 Martin Lloyd offered to provide Charlotte with Section 48 Inspection reports on church schools, which gave a clear picture of schools' performance in RE and the impact of RE on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

4 Matters for discussion

4.1 SACRE budget

4.1.1 Charlotte reported on the annual SACRE budget, which is approximately £4,000 and is spent on:

- Meetings costs, travel claims, photocopying, related supply cover
- Conference expenditure
- Events and projects, eg SACRE Awareness evenings, current school self-evaluation project
- Additional resources for the resource centre
- The production of any publications

4.1.2 Colleagues were invited to propose any additional areas which they

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considered suitable expenditure for the budget. It was emphasised that any unspent monies were clawed back at the end of the year, although this was rarely the case with SACRE.

4.1.3 In view of the fact that the SACRE budget had seen only a minimal increase in nine or so years, there was discussion on whether to make a case for an increase, particularly if the alternative meant that certain projects would have to be forfeited.

4.1.4 It was agreed to prepare costed figures for 2007-08 for discussion at the next SACRE meeting.

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4.2 Current SACRE constitution and membership

4.2.1 Councillor Garvican referred to the resolution at the last meeting to increase the C of E membership on SACRE from 3 to 4 members, and to give full membership to the Baha'i Faith Community.

4.2.2 Members were invited to give further consideration to the representation on SACRE, including whether groups currently not represented should be, and whether the current maximum of 30 members should be reviewed.

4.2.3 There was some support for a review of the maximum number, and a discussion on the view that was expressed that the breadth of faiths in the local community needed to be more closely reflected on SACRE. It was agreed that raising the maximum number would go some way to widening the representation.

4.2.4 In response to a query as to what steps were being taken to fill the six vacancies on SACRE, Pat Lowne updated members on the current situation. Councillor Webb undertook to explore contacts in the Orthodox Christian Church and the Hastings Sikh community.

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4.2.5 The criteria for membership were discussed. There was agreement on the importance of members being committed to East Sussex, and the value of including a residency clause in the constitution, to read "(members) would normally be expected to live or work in East Sussex" was agreed.

4.2.6 It was reported that Alex Tindall had highlighted the difficulty of achieving a quorum in cases where the membership of the current groups on SACRE was not divisible by 3.

4.2.7 Charlotte undertook to re-draft the constitution, to take account of the views expressed, for discussion at the next meeting.

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5 Any other business

5.1 Massage in Schools programme

Concern was expressed about the appropriateness of the programme which entitled every child to 10-15 minutes of daily massage. Clarification was sought on whether SACRE should be issuing guidance.

Charlotte expressed the view that this was too peripheral an area to fall within SACRE's remit, and was a matter for decision by individual headteachers. Furthermore, as it was one of a number of similar current

programmes, it would be difficult to single it out for attention.

5.2 Proposal for a future SACRE meeting

Councillor Garvican informed colleagues of the research which Alex Tindall had undertaken, resulting in a recently published book about the origins of the teaching of Jesus. It was agreed to invite Alex to give a talk at the beginning of a future SACRE meeting.

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6 SACRE meeting dates, 2006-07

6.1 The following meeting dates for 2006-07 were notified:

12 October, pm, County Hall, Lewes
26 February, pm, Uckfield Civic Centre
21 June, pm, venue to be confirmed

6.2 Dave Bishop reported that his Bexhill church had rooms and catering available for meetings, together with free parking, and he offered this facility to SACRE. Dave undertook to provide Pat Lowne with the details, so that the venue could be explored along with others for the meeting on 21 June.

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7 Agenda items for the next meeting

The following items were agreed:

- Election of Chairman
- SACRE constitution
- SACRE budget
- Update on SACRE projects
- Update on the Racial and Religious Hatred Act (if guidance published)