

WEST BERKSHIRE STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 MARCH 2025

**VENUE: ROGER CROFT ROOM COUNCIL OFFICES MARKET STREET
NEWBURY**

Present:

Group A – Other Faiths Members

Dilip Ladwa (Hindu), Mobasshir Mushtaq (Muslim), Rabbi Zvi Solomons (Jewish) and Revd David Taylor (Thatcham Baptist Church)

Group B – Church of England Members

Revd Angela Brennan (St Mary's Church)

Group C – Teaching Association Members

Amanda Bedding (NEU), Melanie Higgs, and Chris Ward (NEU)

Group D – WBC Councillors

Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor Billy Drummond, Councillor Clive Taylor and Councillor Tony Vickers

Also Present: Rose Carberry (Principal Advisor for School Improvement), Thomas Radbourne (Clerk), David Rees (Professional Advisor)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Robin Launder (Humanism) and Mary Stagg (Church of England)

1 Welcome & Apologies

Apologies received from Robin Launder and Mary Stagg.

2 Membership

The Chairman stated that he would stay in post until the passage of the Agreed Syllabus. Pauline Donnelly from St Mary's Church in Thatcham was in attendance to observe the meeting, with a view to joining SACRE as a Church of England representative at the next meeting.

There were no changes in membership since the meeting on 1 October 2024.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2024 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 SACRE Code of Conduct

The Chairman introduced the item and stated that local SACREs were introducing Codes of Conduct, based on the Nolan Principles. The full presentation can be found here: [Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education - Recording](#)

The main points highlighted by the Chairman were:

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- West Berkshire SACRE would seek to work with other SACREs in Berkshire with a view to presenting a proposal to the next meeting in June 2025. SACRE did not currently have codes of conduct for its members
- The Nolan Principles for public life included: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership

Members noted that West Berkshire Council had a code of conduct for elected members and officers of the Council, which was based on the Nolan Principles.

Mobasshir Mushtaq joined the meeting at 16:39.

5 Updates from Professional Adviser

David Rees gave a presentation highlighting the updates relevant to SACRE. The full presentation can be found here: [Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education on Religious Education - Recording](#)

The main points highlight by David Rees were:

- The RE Newsletter was sent out at the beginning of every school term, with signposting and useful information for RE Leaders.
- Updates on attendance at Networks (Primary and Secondary)
- Action Plan displayed the statutory responsibilities held by SACRE.
- Upcoming Events – The Wiltshire Conference would take place on 26 March, and the Syllabus Launch event would take place on 27 March 2025 as a training event only.

Members noted that there was low teacher attendance at Primary Networks.

Rose Carberry stated that they were in contact with West Berkshire Schools, and they would be aware if there were any changes to people with responsibility such as headteachers.

Members noted that the launch of the new curriculum could be an incentive for religious leaders in schools. Schools needed resources, and a series of planned meetings with a purpose linked to the curriculum to each one would be a good way of increasing buy in from teachers and schools, especially with resources being provided to teachers who had attended training.

The professional advisor noted that West Berkshire had been oversubscribed for the Syllabus Event on 27 March 2025. He suggested that events such as the agreed syllabus would draw a significant number of teachers.

Members noted that it was often challenging for teachers to find time out of school for RE events due to significant strains on time and resources.

6 Budget Proposal 2025-26

Amanda Bedding and David Taylor introduced the SACRE Budget Proposal 2025-26. The full presentation can be found here: [Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education – Recording](#)

As he was the Professional Adviser which was a disclosable pecuniary interest, David Rees determined to leave the meeting for item 6. David Rees left the meeting at 16:53.

The main points highlighted by Amanda Bedding and David Taylor were:

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- The 2025/26 SACRE Budget, which had increases in budgeting for the Professional Advisor, and an overall increase from £4,840 to £5,300.
- There were no changes in what was being purchased with the budget.

Concerns were expressed that Mr Rees may have provided incorrect advice on previous occasions and it was suggested that he should be replaced as SACRE's independent advisor. However, other Members disagreed with this suggestion and spoke in support of Mr Rees.

The Chairman clarified that the budget put forward to the members of SACRE was for the services of a professional advisor, and whether it was a reasonable budget for members to approve.

Members noted that West Berkshire Council had a complaints process, however members questioned whether SACRE was independent of the Council's procedures and processes. It was noted that any complaint must be put in writing.

Officers stated that the budget for SACRE came from the School Improvement Team and was not funded by the Council. The budget was formed from de-delegation and trading, from DSG and DfE and it was part of the Council's statutory role to support SACRE.

Members agreed that the name David Rees would be removed from the budget proposal and replaced with Professional Advisor.

Resolved: Members voted to approve the budget, and the motion was carried.

Action: The name David Rees to be replaced with Professional Advisor

Action: Officers to investigate the complaints procedure.

7 Equality & Diversity

David Rees rejoined the meeting at 17:02.

The Chairman asked members of SACRE if they had any items they wished to discuss under Equality and Diversity. The full item can be viewed on the recording: [Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education – Recording](#)

The main points highlighted under Equality & Diversity were:

Concerns were expressed that the new syllabus was in breach of the Equality Act and the Education Act, and that a significant number of concerns raised by members of the Jewish Faith had not been adequately resolved. However, other members disagreed with this suggestion

The Chairman stated that the new syllabus had been created in conjunction with the five other SACREs in Berkshire and had been due to start from Autumn 2025. However, it could be pushed back to 2026-2031 if there were concerns raised by members.

The Chairman noted that the agreed syllabus had not been ratified by any of the Local Authorities in Berkshire, however, the syllabus had been passed by all six Berkshire SACREs, though some were now facing a legal challenge to this.

The Chairman noted that a number of other SACREs were revisiting some of the syllabus content particularly on Judaism, and it should be clear by the next meeting what the changes would look like.

Concerns were expressed that communications highlighting concerns about the syllabus to members had not included the Legal Department at West Berkshire Council. It would take time for the Legal Department to read and advise members on the content of the communications.

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It was clarified that the agreed syllabus would likely be passed via an Individual Member Decision, rather than a committee or Council. Members suggested that this could allow sufficient opportunity for any issues to be raised by Councillors, with the ability for the item to be called in before the Scrutiny Commission.

Concerns were expressed that the non-statutory alterations to the syllabus were inadequate to address the concerns raised and treated Jews differently to members of other faiths. Members noted that if a major religion was extremely unhappy, then the concerns should be given a fair hearing. It was clarified that the process for adopting the syllabus through an Individual Member Decision could give the opportunity for any concerns to be heard and would include an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment. Members were also informed that any output from an Individual Member Decision would be sent to members of SACRE.

Given the seriousness of the objection that had been raised, it was suggested that SACRE should halt the ratification of the syllabus in order to give a fair hearing to the concerns. It was suggested by members that if there had been more Jews on SACRE, the syllabus may have been paused earlier.

The Chairman noted that other SACREs were reopening their Agreed Syllabus Conferences and recommended that West Berkshire SACRE wait until its next meeting, as the other SACREs would meet before then, and it would be clearer for West Berkshire whether it should reopen the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

The Chairman clarified that all the objections that had been raised in the meeting and referenced in communications with members were being examined by the Berkshire Hub, both the statutory and non-statutory items.

It was suggested that Members could communicate directly with Rose Carberry regarding the processes.

It was clarified that Rose Carberry was the Principal Advisor to SACRE, but she was not advising SACRE on the Syllabus.

Officers noted that additional information was needed, and that all business moving forward had to be done respectfully and purposefully.

Members were in agreement that clear parameters should be set regarding the specific parts of the syllabus that were being looked at and what the potential outcomes would be.

The Chairman stated that the Pan-Berkshire Hub was looking into the concerns raised by members and was seeking to respond positively.

The Chairman clarified that the syllabus had been produced by the Pan-Berkshire Hub, in conjunction with members from each SACRE.

The Professional Advisor noted that the agreed syllabus had to reflect the demographic of the area and used local representatives from different religions and worldviews. It was further noted that the Pan-Berkshire Hub had drafted 33 versions of the syllabus before it was passed at the Agreed Syllabus Conference.

Members suggested that an external body could look through the syllabus and give feedback.

Concerns were expressed regarding the monocultural background of the advisors and that issues which had been highlighted were by members were being ignored.

However, other members disagreed with this assertion and stated that the professional advisors completed their work on the basis of their professional background and

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expertise, and were well qualified, and members could be confident in the syllabus they had produced.

Members noted that it was difficult for any one faith to feel it was properly represented if it was not the Church of England.

Members were in agreement that the concerns raised by members of the Jewish faith regarding the syllabus should be reviewed by an external independent advisor who would give their professional opinion on the matter.

The Chairman noted that there were budgetary concerns regarding the use of an external independent advisor. However, other members noted that other Local SACREs may wish to join in with any review process.

The Professional Advisor noted that SACRE could contact NASACRE for advice on the matter, however, he was uncertain whether NASACRE would be able to advise as they would be likely to state that it had to be a local syllabus, and it had to fit with local needs. The professional advisor noted that ARIAC could be contacted for further information on the syllabus.

The Professional Advisor suggested that West Berkshire SACRE could contact other Local Authorities who had SACREs with RE advisors for advice.

The Chairman stated that he would seek independent external advice but noted that it would cost money, and it had not been budgeted for in SACRE's budget.

It was suggested by members that if the syllabus was adjusted to include the advice given by Jewish Representatives, it would not be difficult to achieve, and it would not cost any money or damage the syllabus.

The Chairman noted that any information received from the independent external advisor would be advice and would not be binding.

The professional advisor stated that the Pan-Berkshire hub would reconsider the statutory information, taking into account the concerns raised by members, to make sure that it was the correct fit for the six local authorities.

Action: The Chairman to seek independent external advice regarding the agreed syllabus

8 Any Other Business

No items were raised under any other business.

9 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting would be 3 June 2025, and take place at The Willink School, as an in-person only meeting.

10 Exclusion of Press and Public

Members of SACRE voted to exclude the press and public and moved into a Part II session.

11 Support for Individual Schools