

WEST BERKSHIRE STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2024

VENUE: ROGER CROFT ROOM COUNCIL OFFICES MARKET STREET NEWBURY

Present:

Group A – Other Faiths Members

Robin Launder (Humanist), Mobasshir Mushtaq (Muslim) and Revd David Taylor (Thatcham Baptist Church)

Group B – Church of England Members

Mary Stagg (Church of England)

Group C – Teaching Association Members

Amanda Bedding (NEU) and Chris Ward (NEU)

Group D – WBC Councillors

Councillor Paul Dick, Councillor Billy Drummond and Councillor Tony Vickers

Also Present: Mel Higgs (LA Advisor), David Rees (Professional Advisor)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Val Bolan (Church of England), Dilip Ladwa (Hindu), Roseanna Obsiye (NASUWT) and Rabbi Zvi Solomons (Jewish)

Absent:

1 Welcome & Apologies

- The Chairman (David Taylor) welcomed the Members of the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) and stated that SACRE had 18 members.
- The Chairman stated that all members views would be valued and were important. The Chairman thanked SACRE for allowing members to express their views, and for making space for one another.
- The Chairman welcomed Thomas Radbourne (Clerk) to SACRE. The Clerk would change from Sadie Owens to Thomas Radbourne for future SACRE meetings.
- The Chairman welcomed Mel Higgs to SACRE.

Apologies received from Angela Brennan, Val Bolan (Church of England), Rose Carberry (WBC), Dilip Ladwa (Hindu), Roseanna Obsiye (NASUWT), Rabbi Zvi Solomons (Jewish).

2 Membership - David Taylor

Appointment of Robin Launder: The Chairman stated that SACRE had received a nomination for Robin Launder from Humanists UK.

RESOLVED: Robin Launder (Humanist) was accepted as a member of SACRE as a Humanist Representative.

Appointment of Angela Brennan: The Chairman asked Mary Stagg to nominate Angela Brennan as a representative for the Church of England. The Chairman stated that Angela Brennan had attended the previous meeting as an observer. The Chairman stated that

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Angela Brennan had been a member of the clergy team at St Mary's Church with an interest in education.

RESOLVED: Angela Brennan was accepted as a member of SACRE, as a Church of England Representative.

Angela Brennan and Mobasshir Mushtaq (Muslim) joined the meeting at 16:36

RESOLVED: Appointment of Mel Higgs as Local Authority Advisor (LA Advisor)

The Chairman thanked Mel Higgs for accepting to take on the role of LA Advisor for SACRE. The Chairman noted that the role of LA Advisor would be the official link between SACRE and West Berkshire Council as the Local Authority. David Rees stated that an LA Advisor would maximise SACRE's ability to support schools in the delivery of Religious Education.

Councillor Vickers questioned whether Mel Higgs would be a Member of SACRE or an advisor. The Chairman responded that Mel Higgs would be a Member of SACRE and an advisor. The Chairman stated that the LA Advisor as a Headteacher would provide additional information to SACRE, in addition to the four Members who were Teachers.

Vacancies in Group B and Group D

The Chairman commented that SACRE membership required an additional Church of England representative, and an additional Councillor.

Councillor Vickers and Councillor Paul Dick agreed to approach fellow Councillors to gauge interest. The Chairman noted that a new member of SACRE would not need to be a person of faith.

The Chairman requested that Mary Stagg continue to approach members of the Church of England to join SACRE. Mary Stagg commented that there were two potential members of the Church of England who could join SACRE.

3 **Election of Vice-Chair for 2023-24 Academic Year - David Taylor**

SACRE resolved to appoint Amanda Bedding as Vice-Chair of SACRE.

4 **Minutes of the previous meeting and actions (not covered elsewhere) - Thomas Radbourne**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5 **Contact with Schools**

5.1 The Chairman queried whether SACRE members had held any direct communication with schools since the previous meeting. The members of SACRE responded that there had been no such communication, but that representations were ongoing.

5.2 The Chairman stated that they would have a meeting with the Collective Worship Lead at Kennet School, and the Downs School. The Chairman stated that they would convene them both to discuss collective worship. The Chairman noted that it had been difficult to find the person responsible for collective worship in secondary schools. The Chairman noted that they had not been able to communicate with the Willink School in regard to collective worship. Chris Ward agreed that communication with schools regarding collective worship had often been difficult.

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In response to a query from Robin Launder, the Chairman clarified that the Langtree School did not fall within the West Berkshire catchment area.

Robin Launder asked SACRE if there could be a list of the Schools in the West Berkshire catchment area. Sadie Owens (Principal Democratic Services Officer) responded that a list could be provided to Robin Launder. The Chairman stated that the list would be accessible on the West Berkshire Council website.

Councillor Vickers asked the Chairman if a copy of the list of responsibilities regarding SACRE members to schools would be made available. The Chairman stated that the list would be made available to all members.

5.3 The Chairman handed over to David Rees. David Rees presented an update on the Secondary and Primary Networks with the following information:

- Secondary Networks would take place on 14 March 2024
- Primary Networks would take place on 20 March 2024
- David Rees stated that he would report to SACRE updates from the Primary and Secondary networks.

The Chairman queried if additional communication with schools had increased attendance at the Primary and Secondary Networks. David Rees responded that he would update the Chairman once he had attended the Networks.

Amanda Bedding stated that they would attend a BDLP Primary Network on 5 March, focussing on the proposed Locally agreed syllabus review. Amanda Bedding stated that they would provide an update to SACRE.

Councillor Dick queried whether the new contact information gathered by members of SACRE from schools had been collated. The Chairman responded that they had collected and collated the contact information and shared it with David Rees in order for them to email the correct people. The Chairman stated that they wanted to keep the list of contacts up to date.

Councillor Vickers questioned whether contact details had been provided through the Networks which could help SACRE members contact schools. The Chairman responded that they had not seen that. David Rees suggested that a central database be held by the Clerk, with updates sent to the Clerk from members of SACRE. David Rees stated that they would send the contact details that they had to the Clerk.

SACRE resolved Clerk to hold a central database of contact information for schools in relation to religious education. Members would send updates to the Clerk.

Mel Higgs highlighted the turnover of Subject Coordinators and worship leaders. Mel Higgs suggested copying in the School Office when sending out information.

6 2023-24 Action Plan Update - David Rees

David Rees presented an update on the 2023-24 Action Plan to SACRE:

- Item A: Good increase in membership of SACRE; Annual Report; Subscription to NASACRE; Monitor Locally Agreed Syllabus; Monitoring and offering guidance on collective worship. 31.32
- Item B: Connect through primary and secondary networks; termly newsletter; Local events, Free resources for teachers.
- Item C: Pan-Berkshire Hub. Six SACREs working together: Supportive resources such as the *Real People, Real Faith* videos.

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- David Rees suggested broadcasting Amanda Bedding's contact details on the newsletter.
- David Rees suggested a Religious Education conference for schools organised through the hub. Opportunity to bring people together.
- David Rees noted that any suggestions would be welcomed.

Councillor Vickers questioned David Rees regarding interfaith dialogue and suggested a list of local speakers that schools could use in their Religious Education.

The Chairman highlighted the 'Crossing the Bridges' contact list. David Rees noted that the list would need updating.

David Rees suggested that a member of SACRE use the 'Crossing the Bridges' list, to get more details on the churches and other places of worship. Councillor Vickers noted that they investigate.

Councillor Vickers suggested a directory of local representatives of faith groups, who would be willing to go into schools and talk about their faith. Councillor Dick supported the creation of a local directory.

Councillor Vickers agreed to investigate the Directory.

The Chairman questioned whether more could be done to highlight the work and faith of the Newbury Mosque. The Chairman noted that Kareem Sharawi had previously highlighted the work of the Muslim community. The Chairman handed over to Mobasshir Mushtaq, who supported the idea of highlighting the work of the Muslim community, and the creation of a list of good quality speakers. Mobasshir Mushtaq also noted that members of their Sunday school would likely put themselves forward to be included on the list of speakers.

Robin Launder expressed their desire for the list to be created with caution regarding quality control of the speakers. Robin Launder noted that speakers should be checked in regard to the content of their presentations in schools.

David Rees highlighted that the new RE Hub website had a section on local speakers for different areas and noted that the speakers on the list had been quality controlled.

David Rees stated that there would be a code of conduct for speakers and what would be expected of them. David Rees developed it with another SACRE, to give guidance to speakers and to schools. David Rees suggested a meeting with schools before a speaker would be allowed to speak to children. David Rees would find the document and send it to all members of SACRE.

Mel Higgs supported the suggestions made by David Rees and Robin Launder regarding safeguarding. Mel Higgs stated that schools would value a quality-controlled list of speakers, with additional training to be delivered to speakers, in addition to a code of conduct. Mel Higgs stated that they would support the training or meeting with local speakers before they went into schools.

Councillor Vickers suggested that the interfaith approach would not be appropriate for primary schools. Mel Higgs agreed in principle but stated that simplified subjects would work in primary schools to be accessible for the children. Mel Higgs highlighted the benefits of providing diverse points of view to children.

The Chairman noted that the Secondary Teachers on SACRE were already in contact with school representatives, more so than the primary teachers, with their own networks, functioning as a unit.

The Chairman suggested having a meeting with speakers before they would be enabled to speak at a school, walking through the code of conduct and what would be expected of

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them when presenting to children. Mel Higgs supported the Chairmans suggestion, and in addition noted that basic themes could be included, for the children to learn and add to their world knowledge, and for the speaker to share personal experiences relevant to the criteria.

The Chairman resolved that SACRE would take safeguarding, and quality control under advisement when creating a list of speakers. Mel Higgs suggested the vetting of speakers. Mel Higgs highlighted the need for two references before speakers would be enabled to speak at a school.

The Chairman queried whether the speakers would be left alone with Children. Mel Higgs agreed that they would not necessarily be left alone with Children. Mel Higgs suggested that speakers with several references would increase Schools' confidence in using the list. Mel Higgs noted the balancing between gratitude for volunteers donating their time, and the responsibility of making sure the speakers would be of a satisfactory quality.

The Chairman asked Mary Stagg for their interpretation. Mary Stagg noted the need for Speakers to abide by the time allocated for them, without overrunning. Mary Stagg highlighted the benefits for schools bringing in external speakers and noted the need for guidelines.

Robin Launder noted that there were two issues: the quality of delivery of the speaker; and the appropriateness of the content delivered. Robin Launder noted the potential for inappropriate comments being put forward by speakers, and the responsibility of SACRE to ensure that such incident would not occur with speakers chosen from the list.

Councillor Vickers stated that they would undertake to research the organisations such as churches and places of worship, in order to update the database. Councillor Vickers suggested David Rees send out the Code of Conduct, in order for them to approach potential speakers in places of worship if they would be willing to speak to children.

SACRE resolved to approach places of worship, in order to ascertain if any members would be willing to speak to schools abiding by the code of conduct.

Councillors Billy Drummond and Tony Vickers left the meeting at 17:20.

7 **New Agreed Syllabus - David Rees**

The three Professional Advisors who advised the six SACREs, David Rees, Angela Hill, and Anne Andrews, had used the feedback from SACRE meetings, teacher working groups, and created an initial draft syllabus.

David Rees stated that the syllabus would be intentionally larger and focus on the questions to frame the learning. The questions would be suggested rather than statutory.

David Rees stated that there would be another meeting of SACRE advisors on 20 March, and a Pan-Berkshire hub meeting on the 18 March.

David Rees noted that the proposed syllabus focussed on the Teachers and the Children, with an emphasis on making it user friendly. The syllabus focused on enquiry questions, which David Rees noted would be common for all syllabuses.

David Rees asked SACRE if there were any questions or additions.

Mel Higgs queried whether the document could be shared outside of SACRE. David Rees responded that the document could be shared, but noted that the syllabus was a draft, not a final copy ready for publication.

Mobasshir Mushtaq noted that there would be items that could be added to the draft syllabus, and that they would be happy to work on the syllabus with David Rees. The

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Chairman supported any additions and stated that any additions should be mentioned to David Rees and SACRE. David Rees responded that the age range of the students should be considered before any additions were added to the syllabus.

Councillor Dick supported the Syllabus and congratulated the hard work of David Rees and Anne Andrews.

Councillor Dick noted the anxiety of schools in regard to resources, and the Schools desire for examples of resources that could be used in order to develop their own. The Chairman agreed with Councillor Dick. David Rees noted that an aim of the Syllabus had been to enable schools to use bought resources, however, the Pan-Berkshire hub would likely create exemplar materials for schools.

Chris Ward highlighted the political ramifications of increased tensions in the Middle East, noting the potential increase in antisemitism, and islamophobia. Chris Ward questioned if these subjects should be mentioned or should be avoided. David Rees noted that Religious Education had previously avoided the topics, however, that Religious Education would be the forum for discussing those issues, with caution and guidance. David Rees stated that Discovery RE tackled issues such as Jihad, and antisemitism at the end of Key Stage Two. David Rees stated that additions could be made to the suggested additions section, especially to be mindful of stereotypes and images, checking with faith groups to ensure that they are representative and appropriate.

8 Budget Proposal 2024-25 - David Taylor

The Chairman stated that the Budget Proposal would be formally voted on at the start of the next financial year, noting that the budget would be spent in the same way, unless there were any changes.

Councillor Dick stated that the Council budget would be voted on 29 February. Councillor Dick suggested SACRE could push for more funding from the Council for the new Syllabus to tackle the challenges SACRE would be expecting.

The Chairman noted that the majority of the SACRE budget would be spent on the services of David Rees. The Chairman thanked David Rees for his continued work for SACRE.

9 Flyer for SACRE Conference - David Taylor

David Rees highlighted that the Southeast SACRE Conference would take place on 4 March, and that it would be one of the only Conferences directly focused on SACRE Members.

David Rees stated that he would attend and provide feedback and encouraged other members of SACRE to attend.

10 Newsletter - David Rees

David Rees stated that the Newsletter would be published on the second week of every term and would lead with letting SACRE know about the Religious Coordinator, particularly if it has changed. The Newsletter would also set out the support that SACRE gives, and desire for SACRE to know what would be happening. The Newsletter would then focus on update from Pan-Berkshire Hub and then the Syllabus.

David Rees noted that any additions would be welcomed. Mobasshir Mushtaq commented that Ramadan would begin at the start of March and agreed to send David Rees information to include within the Newsletter.

Councillor Dick expressed an interest for regular receipt of the Newsletter. David Rees stated that the Newsletter should go out to all members of SACRE.

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Resolved: Clerk to ensure the Newsletter would be circulated to all members of SACRE.

11 **Strictly RE - David Rees**

David Rees updated SACRE on the Strictly RE conference at the end of January 2024. David Rees stated that they would create a document with all relevant information gathered from the conference for SACRE members.

12 **Equality & Diversity - David Taylor**

The Chairman highlighted the division of SACRE into four specific groups to express the diversity of the population in the local area and encouraged members to express the values of their group in a respectable way.

Councillor Dick left the meeting at 17:45

The Chairman suggested that there could be a way of appropriately representing the diversity of the Committee and stated that they were not sure it was always successful.

Mel Higgs questioned the Chairman's vision when he stated that there could be a way of appropriately representing the diversity of the committee.

Chris Ward suggested the important factor would be representing the diversity of West Berkshire. The Chairman supported the representation of the diversity of West Berkshire. The Chairman highlighted that they had been focussed on the four groupings in SACRE.

David Rees highlighted the decolonisation of the curriculum as an important aspect of diversity and equality, and the importance of sensitivity in the resources, images and language used in the teaching of Religious Education.

David Rees stated the importance of representing the local area, and awareness of issues occurring nationally.

Robin Launder highlighted the importance of inclusive language when discussing Religious Education.

13 **Date of next meeting - Thomas Radbourne**

The date of the next SACRE meeting set for 4 June 2024, 4:30pm at Calcot Junior School.

14 **Any Other Business**

There were no items raised under any other business.

15 **Support for Individual Schools - Billy Drummond, David Taylor, etc.**