

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.00 pm on 14 June 2023

Present:

Reverend Roger Bristow (Chairman)
Deborah Corcoran (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Graeme Casey,
Dr Sunil Gupta FRCP FRCPATH, Chris Price and
Rebecca Wiffen
Mrs Denise Angell, Ms Hannah Arnold, Ms Alex Hamill,
Mrs Caroline Ringham, Mr Christopher Town,
Mrs Katie Burtonshaw, Mr Saiyed Mahmood,
Mr Arvinder Nandra, Dr Omar Taha and Dr Katie Turner

Also Present:

Julia Andrew, LBB Head of School Standards
Carol Arnfield, LBB Head of Service for Early Years,
Schools Standards and Adult Education
Stacey Burman, SACRE RE Advisor
Councillor David Jefferys (*via conference call*)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

Councillor Dr Sunil Gupta was proposed for the role of Vice-Chairman by Councillor David Jefferys and seconded by Councillor Graeme Casey. Ms Deborah Corcoran was proposed for the role of Vice-Chairman by Councillor Rebecca Wiffen and seconded by Dr Omar Taha. Following a discussion and vote, it was resolved that Ms Corcoran be elected Vice-Chairman for the 2023/2024 municipal year.

RESOLVED that Reverend Roger Bristow be elected as Chairman, and Ms Deborah Corcoran be elected as Vice-Chairman, of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education for the 2023/2024 municipal year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Jonathan Andrews, Councillor Robert Evans, Mr Daniel Coleman, Mr Lee Kings and Ms Cilla Larbi.

The Chairman welcomed new representatives Councillor Dr Sunil Gupta, Councillor Rebecca Wiffen and Dr Katie Turner to the meeting and introductions took place. The Chairman advised Members that, following the

resignation of Ms Vicki Ashmore, Dr Turner wished to join the SACRE as a representative of the Reformed Jewish faith.

Following a brief discussion, SACRE Members agreed that Dr Turner be appointed to the other faiths group as a representative of the Reformed Jewish faith.

RESOLVED that Dr Katie Turner join the Bromley SACRE as a representative of the Reformed Jewish faith.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Graeme Casey declared that he worked at Tubbenden Primary School and that his wife was Chair of Governors at the school.

Councillor Rebecca Wiffen declared that she and her husband worked at schools within the borough, and were Aquinas Trust parents.

Councillor Chris Price declared that he was an Aquinas Trust parent, a Governor at Riverside School and a member of the Advisory Group for Midfield Primary School.

Councillor David Jefferys declared that he was a Governor at Southborough Primary School.

Dr Katie Turner declared that she was an Aquinas Trust parent.

Ms Katie Burtonshaw declared that she worked for the Spinnaker Trust.

The Chairman declared that he was a Trustee of the Spinnaker Trust.

4 COMPLIANCE OF THE GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)

No breaches of the GDPR were reported.

5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1ST MARCH 2023

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1st March 2023 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

B) MATTERS ARISING

Mrs Angell, teacher representative, informed SACRE Members that, following a successful application, Warren Road Primary School had been awarded the Gold RE Quality Mark. The Chairman extended congratulations to Mrs Angell on behalf of the SACRE.

The Chairman advised that he had spoken to Governors, as part of a training session, about the work of the SACRE. They had been reminded of their

responsibilities in respect of RE and collective worship and invited to participate in the Governor Survey, which would be discussed later in the meeting. It was noted that the main issue of engaging with Governors that most schools in the borough were academies – they had their own form of governance and did not necessarily engage with training provided by the Local Authority.

6 REVIEW DETERMINATIONS

No determinations had been received.

7 NASACRE CONFERENCE, WORKSHOPS AND AGM

The Chairman advised that the NASACRE conference and AGM had taken place at Fishmongers' Hall on Monday 22nd May 2023 – the theme had been 'Celebrating 30 years: SACREs for the Future'. The first keynote address had been received from Dr Kathryn Wright, Chief Executive of Culham St Gabriel's Trust, which focussed on education in religion and worldviews – assessing the current situation and her hopes going forward. A copy of the summary transcript and presentation were available via the following links:

<https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Summary-Transcript-of-Keynote-by-Kathryn-Wright.pdf>

<https://nasacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Kathryn-PPT-May-2023.pdf>

The second keynote address, regarding the role of SACREs in the emerging educational landscape, had been delivered by Charles Clarke, Patron of NASACRE. The strengths of SACREs had been identified as having a moral high ground, building community cohesion, and having a passion for education. SACREs were identified as a direct force in bringing different faith communities together and in most Local Authorities was the only group that did so. A weakness of SACREs was considered to be finances, which varied across the country, and it was noted that legislation had previously been suggested for ensuring that all Local Authorities acted in a similar way. The SACRE RE Adviser echoed these comments and highlighted that, nationally, funding was sporadic. The Department for Education (DfE) had recommended that 2% of the Central Services School Block (CSSB) funding received by local authorities be allocated to a SACRE in order for their statutory duties to be carried out, and 1% as a minimum. It was noted that Bromley had responded to the Freedom of Information (FOI) request and the Chairman and SACRE RE Adviser expressed their gratitude for the funding that was provided to the SACRE. The Chairman advised that another weakness identified for some SACREs in this second keynote speech was that the relationship with their local authorities could be weak – the SACRE was a statutory Committee, and often wanted to do far more than it was able to, but the funding and support was not always provided. It had been suggested that SACREs therefore consider accessing funding outside of the education budget. The SACRE RE Adviser noted that SACREs were able to bid for

specific funding – Bromley had previously been successful twice in bids to receive a Westhill grant, and would continue to apply for any relevant funding.

The Chairman advised that according to this keynote speech, there had been an obvious decline in RE over the last 15 years and, in Mr Clarke's opinion, central government was culpable in schools seeing it as having less importance. It was felt that SACREs were a key stakeholder in reversing this decline and should lobby for more power to do the things they were responsible for. The Church of England was also considered in this speech to be culpable in failing to recognise the importance of its role in RE and collective worship. It was noted that NASACRE were looking to reengage with the Church of England Education Office.

The Chairman highlighted that there were two key questions to take away and consider – how could SACREs be more effective; and what the future role of SACREs could, and should, be. In response to a question regarding the SACREs role with academy trusts, the Chairman said that this was difficult as almost all Bromley schools were no longer under the control of the Local Authority. The role would be to advise, seek to ensure that all schools were compliant with legislation, and challenge them if not. The SACRE had previously visited schools by invitation – they had encouraged and praised what was good, and offered advice and support in terms of areas that could be improved. The SACRE RE Adviser stated that academies were still legally obliged to teach RE using the locally agreed syllabus unless their funding agreement with the DfE named another syllabus. It was highlighted that a number of academy schools were engaging with the teacher networks, and they were continuing to work to make these inclusive. Members were advised that national organisations had recently established a programme of regular meetings with the RE leads in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). The first meeting had been held on 1st March 2023 and attendees represented 30 MATs – nationally, work was ongoing to engage with academies on discussions around RE. It was noted that some MATs were faith groups and in Bromley a number were associated with the Church of England. The SACRE RE Adviser said she was looking to engage with the RE lead for the Diocese to undertake a joint piece of work to further support each other.

In response to a question regarding the national curriculum and locally agreed syllabus, the SACRE RE Adviser said that the national curriculum did not include RE as a subject – this had been decided back in 2013, and the decision was also taken to exclude RE from the Baccalaureate. Each borough was legally obliged to review its own agreed syllabus every 5 years. Bromley's agreed syllabus had been reviewed and released in 2020 – it had been devised using the latest research and Ofsted guidance, which promoted a worldviews approach. This approach acknowledged that even if someone followed a particular religion their worldviews would be influenced by a number of other factors. This understanding had been reflected in the agreed syllabus and they had worked with a number of schools to create the curriculum materials. The SACRE RE Adviser noted that a document, which suggested a national RE entitlement, had been published and groups had been established to consider what this should look like. The SACRE RE

Adviser informed SACRE Members that she was involved in one of these groups and they were in the process of drafting a document outlining a national picture for RE. However there was no indication that the legal situation would change and, even if this was further developed, would remain optional. The Chairman highlighted that the Bromley schools within the Aquinas Trust were part of the Diocese of Rochester and had taken the decision to use the same syllabus as the rest of the schools within the Diocese. The SACRE RE Adviser noted that this also took a worldview approach and supported the Bromley agreed syllabus.

In terms of raising the profiles of SACREs, a representative of the other faiths group enquired if representatives attended other related conferences and suggested that this could be an idea for further consideration. The Chairman agreed that this was something that could be fed back. It was noted that the Head of BBC Religion, and other media representatives, had attended previous NASACRE conferences. The SACRE RE Adviser said she was aware that several national organisations were working more cohesively – this was thanks to Dr Kathryn Wright, who was bringing together the elements of RE and engaging in conversations with the Chairs of these types of organisations to ensure messages regarding priorities were being shared. There was also a termly meeting for the Chairs of national RE organisations, and invites to attend had been extended to the organisations mentioned.

The Chairman advised that a national analysis of SACRE annual reports had been presented by Dr David Hampshire at the NASACRE Conference. At the end of the presentation two key elements had been identified for consideration. The first was in relation to Local Authority support for SACREs and what Group D (Councillors) could do to advocate for the SACRE and inform colleagues of its work. A Member highlighted that the SACRE Annual Report was provided to Full Council each year. It was suggested that it could also be presented at the Children, Education and Families Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee (CEF PDS), or a slot should be allocated once a year at Full Council for the SACRE Chairman to provide an update. Another Member agreed that it would be beneficial for a presentation to be made at Full Council. The Chairman advised that he was a Church Representative on the CEF PDS, and would also be very happy to discuss the SACRE at a future meeting. The SACRE RE Adviser noted that everyone had a worldview, and all SACRE Members could be involved in conversations and any projects delivered by the SACRE.

The second element mentioned in this NASACRE presentation was for SACREs to consider their role as an 'advisory' body – who it was advising, and how well this was being done. The Chairman noted that, in terms of the SACREs role as an advisory body, it held a statutory responsibility to ensure compliance with the legislation around RE and collective worship. One of the SACRE's roles was to challenge and hold the Local Authority to account if it felt it was failing to support schools in respect of this. In response to a question regarding whether there were any consequences if a school did not follow the agreed syllabus, the SACRE RE Adviser said that SACREs could provide advice and guidance to schools and educate them as to why it was

best to do so. An action the SACRE could take was to write to the DfE and/or Ofsted to ask them to investigate a particular school if deemed necessary. The Chairman highlighted the need to be mindful of SACREs legal responsibilities – a SACRE was legally obliged to inform its local Director of Education if it discovered that a school was not complying with legislation in respect of RE and collective worship. It was then their responsibility to contact the school.

With regards to the conference workshops, the SACRE RE Adviser informed SACRE Members that Bromley SACRE would be delivering an online workshop about the REal Resources: Interfaith Dialogue Conference the following evening. This was a project undertaken after Bromley SACRE had won a NASACRE and Westhill grant in 2021-2022. Two Interfaith Dialogue Conferences had been held, during which SACRE Members provided responses to key questions and this was recorded to create videos that could be used as resources in schools. The videos had been trialled by some of the SACRE teacher representatives. These had received positive feedback – pupils had been really engaged, asking to watch them again, and had appreciated hearing a real person talking about their faith. Teacher representatives said viewing the videos was much more effective than reading about the subjects raised; they could guarantee that the resources were correct; and pupils loved the fact that it was real people talking about their lived experiences. The SACRE RE Adviser noted that discussions had taken place during the teacher network meetings about how the resources might be used – through the networks they hoped to continue to build resources and activities that pupils could engage with. A representative of the other faiths groups said that being involved in the Interfaith Dialogue Conference had been fascinating, and they had been left wanting to know more about the other people involved and the items being discussed. It was valuable to hear that pupils had found the videos interesting. These comments were echoed by another member of the other faiths group – it was a session that the SACRE as a whole could benefit from, even if held informally. The Chairman agreed, and suggested that in the future an informal meeting, or sections of the meetings, could be held to allow SACRE Members the opportunity to get to know each other better.

The Chairman advised that he had attended an online workshop which expanded on the details provided by Dr Kathryn Wright and how Culham St Gabriel's Trust could support SACREs. The other workshop on SACREs role in promoting community cohesion had been postponed and a new date was still to be confirmed. The SACRE RE Adviser noted she had also attended a workshop which focused on funding.

8 LOCAL AND NATIONAL UPDATES

The SACRE RE Adviser informed SACRE Members that a primary teacher network meeting had been held that day, and was the first time it had been held in person since before the COVID-19 pandemic. The SACRE RE Adviser reminded Members that the syllabus was statutory. A full set of primary curriculum materials had been provided, separated into statutory and non-

statutory. Work would continue to produce further materials with schools and towards moderation as part of the non-statutory sections, allowing the reflection of good RE practice. A teacher representative said that it had been great to meet with colleagues face-to-face – and despite the pandemic, they had managed to move RE forwards within their schools. Being able to share best practice was extremely valuable – the network meetings were a great resource and provided a source of support. These comments were echoed by another teacher representative who said the networks provided reassurance and guidance.

The SACRE RE Adviser informed SACRE Members that she had been working on a RE artefacts projects with the RE Faith Forum, which promoted interfaith dialogue and the sharing of views. This was a national project, aimed at engaging with parents in terms of what was taught and how pupils were learning about RE in schools.

The SACRE RE Adviser said that parents would be invited to take the artefacts home and investigate with their families what the objects were and what concepts they related to. Their thoughts and feedback would be collated, and from these, further classroom resources created. The pupils would use the artefacts in the classroom, along with the responses, to promote interfaith dialogue. Video clips of people talking about the artefacts would be created. Local schools involved in the pilot would be hosting events to reveal what the items were, which it was hoped SACRE Members could support.

The SACRE RE Adviser then passed around some artefacts from different religions and worldviews used as part of this project. SACRE Members were divided into groups to discuss the artefacts then fed back, reflecting on the types of conversations that could held in RE classrooms that supported the pedagogy outlines in the locally agreed syllabus.

In response to a question regarding helping people to expand conversations to include all worldviews, which were not necessarily religious, the SACRE RE Adviser said that when pupils were investigating a new item they automatically brought in non-religious worldviews as they were linking the item to their own experiences. It was important that the conversations promoted thinking about ideas and concepts relevant to both religious and non-religious experiences, and that an inclusive approach was used. It was noted that in the network group they had developed the primary curriculum, ensuring that the core questions at the centre of it were ones that everyone could engage with and answer.

Dr Taha left the meeting at 8.00pm.

The SACRE RE Adviser informed SACRE Members that the RE Hub website was a national project, funded by national organisations that were involved in RE. The project was the creation of a website, which would house information about places of interest to visit and speakers who could visit, which every school could access. SACRE Members who had not yet engaged with the

project were encouraged to do so, and more information could be accessed via the following link: <https://www.re-hubs.uk/get-involved/get-involved/>

In response to a question, the SACRE RE Adviser said that guidance had been produced for Bromley schools and speakers, in terms of what the school would like the speaker to discuss and what the speaker would be happy to talk about. Ideally, the school and the speaker would engage in these conversations before the visit took place. It was noted that a requirement of being listed as a speaker on the RE Hub website was attendance to a free online session, which would discuss best practice.

9 'REAL' RESOURCES: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE CONFERENCES

The SACRE RE Adviser noted that, as mentioned earlier in the meeting, Bromley SACRE would be delivering an online workshop about the REal Resources: Interfaith Dialogue Conference the following evening. It was hoped that these resources would soon be shared with schools to use as a resource in the classroom. It was noted that the questions asked related specifically to materials in the primary curriculum but would also be shared with secondary schools.

In response to questions, the SACRE RE Adviser confirmed that access to the resources would be provided to all schools within the Bromley borough. The LBB Head of School Standards said that it had been difficult to identify a platform that could host large video files and share them privately with schools. Work had been undertaken to create a SharePoint Page called 'Knowledge Hub' which would be used to share resources with schools. The names of school RE leads, and their email addresses, would need to be collated and a link would be provided which would need authentication. Instructions were currently being written for the authentication process, and it was hoped that a survey would be sent to schools in the coming weeks to gather the required information.

The Chairman highlighted that there would be the opportunity to add to these resources in the future.

10 INTER-FAITH CALENDAR COMPETITION

The SACRE RE Adviser informed SACRE Members that the winners of the inter-faith calendar competition had been selected earlier that day. A number of schools had entered the competition, with submissions received from a range of year groups, capturing different religions and worldviews. The SACRE RE Adviser noted that a list of dates for religious events and festivals would be drafted and sent to faith representatives to be double-checked before the calendar was finalised.

ACTION: SACRE RE Adviser

In response to a question, the SACRE RE Adviser said that 10 schools had taken part in the inter-faith calendar competition, which was higher than previous years. Apologies for being unable to take part had also been

received from a further 8 schools, so the engagement with the project was positive.

11 SACRE ACTION PLAN (INCLUDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS)

The SACRE RE Adviser had provided Members with an updated SACRE Action Plan for the period September 2022-September 2023.

SACRE Members were advised that the self-evaluation of the SACRE was a continuous process, which informed the development of the Committee and the Annual Report to the DfE each year.

It was agreed that Members would follow the same process used in previous years, and confer with other representatives from their respective groups. It was suggested that:

- Group A members (representatives of other faiths and Christian denominations) look at *section 5 – how effectively does SACRE, in partnership with the Local Authority and the faith communities, contribute to the promoting of cohesion across the community.*
- Group B members (the Church of England) look at *section 4 – how effectively does the SACRE fulfil its responsibilities for the provision and practice of Collective Worship.*
- Group C members (teachers) look at *section 3 – the effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus.*
- Group D members (Councillors) look at *section 1 – management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders.*

The SACRE RE Adviser said that she would draft some guidance which could be circulated to Members, with a copy of the self-evaluation document, following the meeting.

ACTION: SACRE RE Adviser / Clerk

It was agreed that the following SACRE Members would collate the feedback from their group:

- Group A (other faiths and Christian denominations) – Deborah Corcoran
- Group B (Church of England) – Reverend Roger Bristow
- Group C (teachers) – Caroline Ringham
- Group D (Councillors) – Councillor David Jefferys

ACTION: SACRE Members

Members were requested to email the SACRE clerk their thoughts by 12.00pm on Monday 17th July 2023, after which time the responses would be collated and provided to the SACRE RE Adviser.

The SACRE RE Adviser highlighted that the Local Authority were undertaking a Bromley Religious Education Governor Survey 2023. SACRE Members were asked to encourage schools to engage with the survey, which could be accessed via the following link: <https://forms.office.com/e/SXF3iLz9Lf>

In response to questions, the LBB Head of Early Years, School Standards and Adult Education said that in schools which had both Board of Trustees and Advisory Councils, it was the latter that that would be best placed to deal with the level of questioning included. It was noted that the survey link had been sent in the School Circular, which went to all schools in the borough, and had also been sent by the Governor Services organisation to all clerks of Governing Bodies. However if they had no record of the clerk, this information may not have been received by the school. A Member advised that a number of SACRE Members and Councillors sat on the Governing Bodies of local schools and therefore it may be beneficial to circulate the link to them directly.

ACTION: Clerk

12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

A teacher representative informed SACRE Members that her primary school had been subject to an Ofsted Inspection during May 2023. Although they had not undertaken a deep dive of RE, they had been interested in collective worship. The Inspectors had wanted to know what the school did and if it was purely Christian based, and had seemed happy with the responses provided. The teacher representative said she considered that what they delivered in school was more diverse and inclusive, but questioned if there was any guidance in terms of how schools should deliver collective worship, and if the school was required to have a policy relating to this. The Chairman said that schools should ideally have a collective worship policy in place. The SACRE had not produced any recent guidance, but there was a resource called 'Pools of Reflection' which could be used. It was suggested that this could be a future area of focus. A SACRE Member suggested that another area of focus could be to produce some guidance for school Governors in terms of what they should look for in terms of RE.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6.00pm, Wednesday 1st November 2023

6.00pm, Wednesday 28th February 2024

The Meeting ended at 8.31 pm

Chairman