

Notes

of the Virtual Meeting of the

Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education

Tuesday 15 July 2025

held via Microsoft Team

Meeting Commenced: 16:05pm **Meeting Concluded:** 17:00pm

Attendees:

Councillors: None

Apologies: None

Absent: Cllr Martin Williams

Group A – Christian and other religious denominations

Present: Tom Leimdorfer (Society of Friends - Quakers)

Apologies: Don Cameron (Humanists UK)

Absent: Martin Taylor (Free Churches – URC, Baptist, Methodist)

Vacancies: Buddhist Community, Catholic Community, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Greek Orthodox Community, Hindu Community, Jewish Community, Muslim Community, Sikh Community

Group B – Church of England

Present: Louise Jenkins (Diocese of Bath & Wells)

Apologies: None

Absent: None

Group C – Teachers Associations

Present: Stephen Webber (PHANS), Colette Miyagawa, Jane Arney (Primary School Representatives)

Apologies: None

Absent: Matthew Gray, Rebecca Poole, Lorraine Brawn

Vacancies: Association of Teachers and Lecturers, NUT Primary, NUT Secondary, Secondary Heads Association, SHINS, VOICE

Officers from North Somerset Council: Jesse Bellamy (Committee Services Support Officer), Sarah McGahern (Early Years Consultant - Children's Services Directorate)

Apologies: Pip Hesketh (Assistant Director, Education Partnerships – Children's Services Directorate)

Absent: None

Other: Debbie Yeomans (RE Today)

Apologies: Ian Nicholson (RE Today)

Absent: None

1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence

Sarah McGahern presented the agenda items. Jane Arney advised she would be leaving the SACRE as she was leaving St Andrews at the end of the year.

2. Minutes of the Previous Committee Meeting for Approval

Minutes of the previous meeting on 10 March 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair for 2025-26 Municipal Year

Vote did not take place due to the nominated Chair not being present.

4. SACRE Annual Report

A foreword from the previous Chair of the SACRE Committee was needed for the Annual Report. Debbie Yeomans (RE Today) was not aware of whether the foreword had been added, and Ian Nicholson (RE Today) was not present for the meeting, therefore it was not possible to provide an update on this. Debbie Yeomans would follow this up with Ian Nicholson.

5. Feedback from the SACRE National Conference on 19 May 2025

Debbie Yeomans gave feedback from the conference which had taken place on 19 May 2025. Although the focus had been on primary schools for Primary Focus week, the content was still useful for secondary school teachers as well.

An interim report in March had raised concerns about the teaching of RE being a 'postcode lottery' depending on local area. A review was going to be carried out which would look at how the assessment system for RE curriculums could better serve young people for their learning.

There were discussions as to whether RE was to become part of the National Curriculum, and whether a national content standard was to be adopted for RE. The emphasis was on methods of teaching to ensure what was being taught reached a certain standard.

Headlines from a recent Ofsted report were shared whereby a secondary school - which was not in North Somerset - had attained a less than good outcome, with a recommendation for RE to be part of the school curriculum. Ian Nicholson had previously noted this was the first time he had seen this recommendation in an Ofsted report, but in a way this was positive as it was

the first time action had been taken in a situation where RE was not being taught.

Jane Arney left the meeting at 16:30

6. Website Updates, including membership of Committees and updates to contact details on the website.

There were no objections to members having their names published on the SACRE website. Stephen Webber requested to make sure his name was shown as 'Stephen' on the website and not 'Steve'. Sarah McGahern would email other members not present in the meeting to make sure there were no objections to their names being published.

7. Dates for School Visits 2025-26

Sarah would coordinate with Stephen Webber regarding dates for school visits. Collete said Sarah would be welcome to visit Westhaven school as part of these visits.

The Wire Award was an acknowledgement of a school's dedication to teaching RE. Achieving the award involved schools carrying out activities throughout the year such as school visits by religious representatives, engaging with the Spirited Arts competition, and organising school trips for pupils relating to RE. The purpose of the award was to encourage giving children the opportunity to engage with RE in a variety of ways.

It was noted that the cost of school trips could be prohibitive, but it was possible for SACREs to offer support with funding for these trips.

8. Teaching of RE in Schools

BANES and Somerset had already done a lot of work on their recommended syllabus. The Somerset curriculum would be ready in September and the BANES curriculum was to be ready in November, with a new syllabus for BANES in 2027.

The North Somerset syllabus had last been agreed in 2022 and would run until 2026. Debbie advised on the process for setting up an agreed syllabus conference, and advised liaising with other nearby authorities e.g. South Gloucester and Bristol.

It was noted that when schools are part of Trusts they can have their own RE curriculum, and it would be beneficial to find out which Trust schools within North Somerset were already using their own curriculum.

9. Authorised Dates for Authorised Absence for Religious Observation

The SACRE had been approached as to whether it could provide feedback on what would be regarded as an authorised absence for religious reasons - for example, if a child had been requested to have time off for Eid. Debbie advised there was guidance for this on the NATRE website. However, it was not the role of the SACRE to deal with absences.

Stephen noted that advice was also included in the DfE guidance which allowed for religious observance depending on context, e.g. whether the absence was for attending a wedding to do with that religion.

It was agreed that Sarah McGahern would reply to the request for advice and signpost the school to the DfE guidance (page 86):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66bf300da44f1c4c23e5bd1b/Working_together_to_improve_school_attendance_-_August_2024.pdf

10. Any Other Business

Tom noted the importance of raising the profile of the SACRE, and get more representation of different denominations, and more buy-in from Cllrs.

Sarah suggested the possibility of sending out letters to members who have not attended recent meetings, to confirm whether they still want to be a part of the SACRE. As Louise was part of a different SACRE, Sarah was to liaise with Louise regarding how to recruit and retain members.

Louise also noted that an interfaith group based in Bath had been very helpful with the SACRE. Sarah was to follow this up and find out whether there was an equivalent group in North Somerset.