

Minutes

HILLINGDON STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

26 June 2024



Meeting held at Committee Room 5 - Civic Centre

	<p>Committee Members: Sumen Starr (Chair, Secondary) Keith Lunn (Vice-Chair, Church of England) Alice Vahdat (Bahai) Alavari Jeevathol (Humanist) Dorothy Sadlik (Jewish) Naseem Bint Amir (Muslim) Angela Lount (Methodist) Dr Ninette Fernandes-Viana (Roman Catholic) Jasvir Singh Rayat (Sikh) Tim Wright (Church of England) Pauline Byles (Church of England) Melanie Dring (Church of England) Ria Searle (Secondary) Hedson De Castro (SEND Secondary) David Beeston (Primary) Jenna Naulls (Primary) Waheeda Rehmanji (Primary) Councillor Kishan Bhatt Councillor Jagjit Singh Councillor Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana</p> <p>Also Present: Sheikh Muffadal Gulamali (Mosque Member)</p> <p>LBH Officers Present: Stacey Burman, HSACRE Advisor Head of the School Improvement Team Rebecca Reid, Democratic Services Apprentice (Clerk)</p>
33.	<p>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (<i>Agenda Item 1</i>)</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Shehryar Ahmad-Wallana.</p>
34.	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (<i>Agenda Item 2</i>)</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
35.	<p>MEMBERSHIP (<i>Agenda Item 3</i>)</p> <p>Following a discussion, the Committee agreed to vote in new Group C Members to SACRE: Jenna Naulls (Primary Teacher) and David Beeston (Primary Teacher).</p> <p>After confirming the current Islamic representation on SACRE (Sunni or Shia) to ensure specific Islamic representation, the importance of having Islamic representation on</p>

SACRE was emphasised.
While the fundamental principles were the same across denominations, there were distinct celebrations and practices within different branches of Islam.

Waheeda Rehmanji (Primary Teacher) would be considered for election as a new SACRE Member.

In addition, questions were raised about including Sentientism in Group A.

Currently, there were two vacancies available in Group A (representing other faiths and worldviews within the LA).

The Committee considered inviting a representative of Sentientism to join SACRE under Group A.

It was noted that Sentientism was a non-religious worldview, and there was a question about how many students identified as sentientists.

Members observed that Sentientism was a subgroup of Humanism, which was already represented in Group A.

The Committee agreed not to immediately invite a representative of Sentientism to join SACRE under Group A but to invite them to share their views during future SACRE's planned activities.

A Member volunteered to provide the HSACRE Advisor with the name and contact details of persons representing the Jainism and Buddhist faith groups to be invited to further enhance SACRE's understanding.

36. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING** (*Agenda Item 4*)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting dated 05 March 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

37. **DETERMINATIONS** (*Agenda Item 5*)

It was noted that there had been no requests for determinations.

38. **NATIONAL UPDATES (VERBAL UPDATE)** (*Agenda Item 6*)

Agenda item 6.1

Members heard that an Ofsted Report on RE had been published on 17 April 2024, which recorded findings on the common strengths and weaknesses of religious education (RE) in the schools visited.

Student access to RE was reported to be statistically low. Members observed that there was limited access to research for teacher development to shaping the RE curriculum, which was one of the recommendations cited. Utilising videos for staff training in RE development was suggested.

Members emphasized the significance of the three types of knowledge given in the report. They acknowledged the need for further support for teaching staff who lacked confidence in teaching RE in accordance with the syllabus. The importance of nurturing

children's personal voice and philosophy was underscored. Philosophy for children was recognised not only as acquiring knowledge and key concepts but also integrating personal perspectives at the primary level. It was agreed learning RE extended beyond factual knowledge to include reflecting on and sharing experiences related to religious education content.

The HSACRE Advisor had noted in the report instances where RE lessons focused more on literacy skills rather than specific RE content.

It was emphasised that additional support was necessary for subject deliverers beyond exclusively for RE specialists.

Members were informed that the LA through the HLP was providing CPD sessions which were currently free to all schools, and this initiative was set to continue.

Regarding secondary schools, it was reported that fewer than one-fifth of students, who did not take RE at A-levels, had studied any RE content in KS4 or KS5.

The Head of Education & Lifelong Learning (MH) explained that during Ofsted inspections, inspectors would assess whether the curriculum distinguished between primary and secondary education, and appropriately incorporated RE. He explained that the Ofsted report provided guidance on three key strands:

Intent - the intended outcomes and goals of the curriculum.

Implementation - how effectively the curriculum was delivered.

Impact - what students could discuss based on what they had learned.

It was noted from the Ofsted Report that feedback from young people indicated they lacked access to preparation for adult life.

Suggested recommendations as a SACRE, in line with the launch of the 'universal promise' to prepare children for adulthood, included communicating this message to schools via a bulletin*.

The HSACRE Advisor shared that in another borough she was intended to work on borough-wide training for school governors, focusing on essential knowledge for effective school governance.

A Member highlighted the need for varied training for school governors, drawing from their experience as school governor at Harmondsworth Primary School. This would enable the Chair of Governors to provide feedback that could be considered in ongoing discussions.

The Head of Education & Lifelong Learning approved of a similar plan for Hillingdon.

Agenda item 6.2

It was shared that the RE Hub website was operational with over 500 school speakers and places of interest for school visits registered.

The Borough of Hillingdon was currently underrepresented on the website, with only one Member registered.

The HSACRE Advisor reiterated the importance of all SACRE faith representative Committee Members to register as faith speakers on the RE Hubs website.

Councillors who were practicing believers could also register as faith speakers.

Teacher representatives in Group C encouraged Members to sign up as faith speakers on the RE Hubs website to widen the values and representation of faith groups.

Agenda item 6.3

Key highlights from the NASACRE Conference in May, shared by SACRE Member Keith Lunn, included a review of the year's significant developments in RE, such as the publication of the National Content Standard for RE, a new Religion and Worldviews Handbook, an OFSTED review (as per above), and a House of Lords debate.

Three SACREs received awards, including projects in other boroughs supported by current HSACRE Advisor, Stacey Burman.

Lat Blaylock of 'RE Today' presented 35 ways SACREs could enhance their impact, including raising the profile of RE, securing funding, providing CPD, hosting annual conferences, and recognising good practice in schools.

Suggestions from the conference, included breakout groups, focused on strengthening SACRE foundations through increased collaboration, frequent meetings, and cross-border events.

The conference featured several uplifting presentations, emphasising the importance of listening to diverse perspectives, especially young people, on contemporary faith-related issues.

A Leicester initiative to link Peace Studies with the RE curriculum showed ways in which local contexts can be sensitively harnessed, e.g. around Remembrance Sunday.

A subsequent workshop for SACRE chairs and vice-chairs on 'How SACRE's can get more active' offered practical ideas for increasing SACRE activity, such as introducing members, utilising NASACRE resources, and ensuring inclusive and effective meetings.

In light of the above, the HSACRE Advisor shared her eagerness to also advance SACRE's work. One suggestion was building an increased presence through a dedicated webpage, to include statements from SACRE (as per the above* 6.1), as well as developing resources for schools that promoted interfaith dialogue by involving various religions.

The HSACRE Advisor described a previous project creating real video clips addressing questions like "What happens when we die?" featuring diverse responses from SACRE Members to spark interfaith discussions in classrooms.

In response to the suggestion of increasing understanding of SACRE members' worldviews and religions, it was suggested that the next SACRE meeting would be held in person to best facilitate an interfaith dialogue exercise to be arranged by the HSACRE Advisor. (See item 10.2)

Agenda item 6.4 / item 6.5

NASACRE aimed to gain recognition as a charitable organisation.

They had drafted a proposal and were seeking feedback from all SACRE members. Members of HSACRE were asked to respond directly to the contact at NASACRE if they desired. Details had been provided.

39. **LOCAL UPDATES (VERBAL UPDATE)** (*Agenda Item 7*)

Agenda item 7.1

The HSACRE Advisor proposed organising an art competition for schools in November 2024 instead of creating a calendar of religious festivals.

Members supported the idea, suggesting that students created artwork answering the question, "What is the most important day of the year and why?"

Members shared their experience with a similar project in schools, where students created Easter-themed artwork and wrote about their interpretations. The idea of teaching RE through art was well-received.

The Committee agreed that completing the artwork by early November 2024 was feasible.

The HSACRE Advisor planned to hold a network meeting at a school, followed by a SACRE meeting on the same day, where teachers could bring the students' artwork. If students couldn't attend in person, their artwork could be mailed in. The HSACRE Advisor will arrange the artwork competition accordingly.

Agenda item 7.2

Two teacher sessions had been conducted so far, with excellent attendance and participation from dedicated teachers. The secondary group had particularly fruitful discussions.

For the primary group, the HSACRE Advisor hoped to hold the next teacher session in person on 14 November 2024, coinciding with a SACRE meeting on the same day. If hosted at a school, pupil's work samples could be shared with SACRE to showcase ongoing school activities.

Members commented that the CPD teacher sessions were very successful, with beneficial overlap between primary and secondary teachers, enhancing development.

Members added that CPD sessions were most effective in critically analysing the syllabus and identifying areas where it needs improvement.

Members praised the sessions, emphasising that CPD teacher sessions provided valuable input for RE development.

Ruislip Gardens Primary School offered to host the next teacher session on 14 November 2024, starting with the primary school group, followed by the secondary school group.

Agenda item 7.3

An electronic survey had been drafted by the HSACRE Advisor and was ready to be distributed to schools via the bulletin.

The HSACRE Advisor suggested sending these surveys out before the end of the summer term and repeating them after the autumn term to reflect school needs. This will be included in the schools' bulletin.

The Committee unanimously agreed to this approach.

40. **HSACRE ACTION PLAN (VERBAL UPDATE) (Agenda Item 8)**

Agenda item 8.1

The HSACRE Advisor explained the action plan for the Committee's consideration over the upcoming months which would be updated to reflect the key action points proposed to Members.

Below listed are some of the agreed actions approved by the Committee:

- The Muslim representative in Group A to be contacted again to confirm their affiliation (Sunni or Shia) to ensure specific Islamic representation within SACRE.
- Faith Representatives on the Hillingdon SACRE Committee to register themselves as Faith Speakers on the RE Hubs website.
- The Member who volunteered, to provide the HSACRE Advisor with the name and contact details of persons representing the Jainism and Buddhist faith groups to enhance SACRE's understanding.
- The Member who volunteered, to provide the HSACRE Advisor with a list of Sikh holidays approved by government departments.
- HSACRE Advisor to invite on behalf of HSACRE the representative of Sentientism to participate in SACRE's scheduled activities to share their perspective.
- The HSACRE Advisor and Head of Education & Lifelong Learning to draft a school bulletin statement for upload to the Hillingdon Council website and send to schools.
- The HSACRE Advisor to organise an art competition for schools in November 2024.
- A designated representative from Group A-D to collaborate with colleagues in their Group to compile self-evaluation responses and send them directly to the HSACRE Advisor.
- The Head of Education & Lifelong Learning to consult the legal team to address any missing elements within the guidance paper on school absence due to religious observance.
- The next SACRE meeting would be held in person to best facilitate interfaith dialogue.

Agenda item 8.2

It was agreed to be beneficial for HSACRE to complete a self-evaluation form as an opportunity to express individual opinions.

NASACRE had developed its own self-assessment form. The HSACRE Advisor proposed that each HSACRE group completed their respective sections for self-evaluation, assessing whether the SACRE group was developing, established, or advanced.

Each section of the self-evaluation form consisted of only a few questions.

Each group needed a designated representative to collaborate with colleagues in compiling self-evaluation responses and send them directly to the HSACRE Advisor:

Section 1 was to be completed by one representative of the LA Councillors.

Section 2 was to be completed by The Head of Education & Lifelong Learning.

Section 3 was to be completed by a teacher representative in Group C.

Section 4 was to be completed by a Church of England representative in Group B.

Section 5 was to be completed by an Other Faiths and Worldviews representative in Group A.

The Members agreed to share their contact information to their group's representative solely for the purpose of collaborating on compiling self-evaluation responses.

41. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS** (*Agenda Item 9*)

It was agreed that the next meeting of HSACRE would be scheduled for:

- Thursday 14 November 2024

42. **AOB** (*Agenda Item 10*)

Members were informed of a query being raised regarding pupils being allowed time off from school to participate in religious observance. This was in relation to a particular 9-day festival, noting that for many Shia Muslims, this had a different significance to other Muslims.

A member of a mosque in Northolt was invited to share their views from a Shia Islamic perspective, including information about requests from Shia families and guidance about a 9-day religious observance period in other councils.

In response, a guidance paper on school absence due to religious observance had been drafted for Committee discussion. The HSACRE Advisor suggested sending this guidance to schools for headteachers on authorising days for religious observance.

Some Members expressed concern that requesting 9 days off would be disruptive to children's education.

Members raised concerns about compromising education for religious observance, highlighting the need to balance various faiths' needs.

Members responded that days off had not always fallen during school time but might sometimes necessitate the need for pupils to have time off school for religious observance.

Members also emphasised the importance of continuity in education and conveyed the challenges of managing long periods of absence.

The Chair noted the impact on resources and student learning of taking numerous days off for religious observance.

Questions arose about whether to publish the guidance policy as is or to amend the policy to specify a certain number of days.

Members suggested seeking clarity from the Head of Education & Lifelong Learning regarding the LA's views and the impact on schools of children taking numerous days off for religious observance.

The HSACRE Advisor clarified that the LA did not have any specific guidance on religious observance leave. The role of SACRE was to advise the LA and schools on matters connected with Religious Education. It was suggested that the guidance paper did not specify, for any religion or world view, a fixed number of days. Several reasons were given for this, including reference to content within the guidance paper itself.

The Head of Education & Lifelong Learning confirmed that the responsibility for granting children time off for religious observance lay with the discretion to headteachers on the number of authorised days for religious observance. However, additional days could be taken under specific circumstances, such as fasting periods. The guidance paper was advisory and allowed headteachers to consider various factors.

It was suggested the Head of Education & Lifelong Learning could consult the legal team to address any missing elements within the guidance paper. He added that the law was intentionally vague to support religious freedom, making the guidance document useful.

The Committee approved the guidance paper to be sent to the legal team for their view before distributing the document to schools and posting it on the Council website.

Members mentioned that there was a Sikh celebration taking place on 1 September 2024 and offered to send a list of Sikh holidays approved by government departments to the HSACRE Advisor.

(Agenda Item 10.2)

Members also highlighted the importance of getting to know each other as a SACRE and understanding different religions.

The HSACRE Advisor therefore suggested that HSACRE Members could share artwork or photos from their own lived experiences for the 14 November meeting, with the intention of recording this to share in schools.

A Member mentioned that Hillingdon does not recognise Black History Month and highlighted the interrelationship between religion and culture. It was noted that all religions were influenced and affected by culture, and the importance of learning about

beliefs through real believers was stressed as an important part of RE.

Members recommended featuring HSACRE's work in the Hillingdon magazine monthly. It was suggested that the HSACRE Advisor could support this. The relevant member agreed to contact the HSACRE Advisor accordingly.

Members learnt that in another SACRE borough, the activities of SACRE had been captured in a video published on the Council website to be shared with the local Councillors. This activity, led by the HSACRE Advisor, could be something to consider themselves in the future.

The meeting, which commenced at 6.00 pm, closed at 8.00 pm.

These are the minutes of the above meeting. For more information on any of the resolutions please contact Clerk to HSACRE - Email: democratic@hillingdon.gov.uk. Circulation of these minutes is to Councillors, Officers, the Press and Members of the Public.