

HARROW SACRE
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA VIDEO CONFERENCING ON
23 JUNE 2022

Attendance

Group A

A Mercedes Afnan
* Ven Sumana Sramaner
A Diana Ohene
* Ciara O'Flaherty
* Vijay Hirani
* David Cryer
* Varsha Dodhia
* Gill Ross
~ *Doreen Samuels*
~ *Zafar Khalid*
* Asad Omar
~ *Mohammed Amar*
* Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Phiroza Gan-Kotwal

Religious traditions and Christian churches

Baha'i
Buddhist
Christian (Catholic)
Christian (Catholic)
Hindu (Swaminarayan)
Humanist (Harrow Humanists)
Jain
Jewish
Jewish
Muslim (representing Harrow Central Mosque)
Muslim
Muslim (representing Harrow Central Mosque)
Sikh
Zoroastrian

Group B

* Mary Abbott
* Alison Stowe
A Revd James Power

Church of England

Group C

* Fatema Rahemani
A Heena Mistry
* Elizabeth Boulter

Teachers' Associations

NASUWT
NAHT
NEU

Group D

* Cllr Salim Chowdhury Conservative
~ *Cllr Janet Mote* Conservative
A Cllr Sasi Suresh Labour

Local Authority

A Cllr David Ashton Conservative (*reserve*)
A Cllr Hitesh Karia Conservative (*reserve*)
~ *Cllr Antonio Weiss* Labour (*reserve*)

Advisor to the SACRE

* Lesley Prior (Advisor to Harrow SACRE)

Clerk

* Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

Observers

* Camilla Bath
* Arvind Halai from the Swaminarayan temple on Kenton Road

* denotes presence

A denotes absence with apologies

~ denotes absence without apologies

1. Welcome

Alison welcomed everyone to the meeting especially new councillor member, Cllr Salim Chowdhury and observer Arvind Halai. Vijay introduced Arvind who is very knowledgeable about Hinduism and very active in the Swaminarayan temple on Kenton Road. He is a member of Brent SACRE.

2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

Chair

The clerk chaired this part of the meeting. Alison Stowe has indicated her willingness to stand again as Chair.

Mary Abbott, seconded by David Cryer proposed Alison Stowe as Chair. There were no other nominations.

Alison Stowe was elected unanimously

Alison then resumed chairing the meeting.

Vice-Chair

Deferred pending Camilla's reappointment to the SACRE committee. (See 5. below)

3. Apologies for absence

RESOLVED: To note apologies for absence from Diana Ohene. Mercedes Afnan, James Power, Heena Mistry and Councillor Sasi Suresh. The three deputy councillor representatives, David Ashton, Hitesh Karia and Antonio Weiss had also sent apologies.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Doreen Samuels, Zafar Khalid and Mohammed Amar.

Group D: Cllr Janet Mote.

No apologies had been received.

Quorum

The meeting was quorate.

4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 8th March 2022 (previously circulated)

The minutes were agreed as a true record.

5. Matters arising from the minutes

p.2. Item 2. Attendance: WhatsApp group: pending.

p.2. Item 2. Membership

Camilla Bath is attending this meeting as an observer. Alison will write to the Archdiocese of Westminster to ask if they will nominate Camilla as a Catholic representative.

Action: Alison

p.2. Item 4. Matters arising: workforce data

Alison has contacted Whitefriars School; as they have a new RE lead she will contact the RE lead at Heathfields instead.

Action: Alison

p.3. Item 5. Local and National updates

NASACRE Virtual Training courses

The NASACRE webinar for new members of SACRE is on 29 June 7.00-8.30pm. Vivian will send the information about how to join to Cllr Salim Chowdhury and to other new members with a copy to Alison.

There were no further matters arising that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

6. ASC update

Background: for the benefit of new members, Lesley explained that one of the key responsibilities of SACREs is to provide a syllabus for RE for LA maintained schools. It is a legal requirement to review this every five years. This Committee has decided that the present syllabus which has been in place for five years needs revision but not a major overhaul.

It is incumbent on the LA to convene the ASC (Agreed Syllabus Conference). This is the committee that reviews the syllabus. In theory this is a separate entity but in practice will be made up of the same representatives who serve on the SACRE committee. All members of this SACRE have indicated their willingness to serve on the ASC.

Progress so far: the clerk has written to the nominating bodies for each representative on behalf of the Local Authority. Most have replied giving their consent; where no reply has been received, the letter stated that assent would be assumed if the nominating body had not replied within a certain time frame; this has now passed.

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair: the first duty of the ASC is to elect a chair and vice-chair. At the last meeting Alison Stowe and David Cryer were elected as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively.

Next steps: we are now in a position to launch the ASC. The next meeting will be a short SACRE meeting followed by the ASC. The two committees will have separate agendas and minutes but can be held back to back. The first SACRE meeting of the autumn term has been set back to 20 October so the Primary Teachers Group will have met beforehand, so their ideas can be brought to this meeting. So far the general view is that the present syllabus is serving the needs of Harrow maintained schools very well but some adjustments are needed to accommodate changes in the broader educational

documentation with regard to EYFS and the appointment of a new Ofsted inspector for RE. Further consultation will be sought from the secondary school sector and from special schools.

A range of schemes of work is in preparation and these schemes will be added to the statutory document.

Gill confirmed that the changes made to the assessment process in the last few years will need to be incorporated. She added that it would be useful for schools to keep a register of their visits to places of worship and visitors from different faith traditions.

Varsha mentioned that many schools participated in the recent London Climate Change week and the Interfaith group had held a discussion about this. This could be linked in to the syllabus as it was a topic that engaged young people. Alison agreed.

7. Local and National updates

Lesley reported on local and national events.

National

- **Government White Paper on education:** Lesley informed members that the White paper introduced to parliament in the Queen's speech outlines the government's plans for education. It is the government's plan that all schools should become academies by 2030. This means that they will no longer be under the control of the LA but receive their funding from central government and be affiliated to multi-academy trusts. As SACREs' sphere of influence is for schools that are maintained by the LA, this means that SACREs will become redundant. However, for the present, SACRE needs to continue with the revision of the Agreed Syllabus as this is still required by the law as it stands at present. We do not know if what is proposed will actually come to pass. NASACRE has been in contact with the government: the Department of Education was unaware of these issues until they were brought to its attention, but discussions are now going forward. One option is for LAs to form their own multi-academy trusts. The advice to schools is to proceed slowly and cautiously and not to make any hasty decisions. Harrow is untypical in that it presents a mixed picture. The secondary schools are all academies except Whitmore but most of the primary schools remain under the control of the LA. It is important to proceed with the Agreed Syllabus as this is the law at present. There is a place for the AS within academies as they can choose to follow the AS if they wish and many do so because it is an excellent syllabus. SACRE will also continue with its wider remit to advise and support schools.

Local

- **RE Network for Primary Subject Leaders:** the primary subject leaders group continues to thrive and grow. Members keep informed and in touch via the Newsletter and the WhatsApp group.
St John's C of E school, where Elizabeth teaches is doing some excellent work.

8. **Report from NASACRE AGM and Conference**

The NASACRE AGM and Conference were held virtually and Camilla attended from Harrow. Next year it is planned to hold it face to face in Birmingham on 22 May.

Lesley has provided a conference summary which is attached to these minutes.

Lesley commented that Harrow SACRE is fortunate in its Chair and Clerk and also in the fact that Harrow Council provides some funding. Not all SACREs benefit from this. It is also fortunate, of course, in the dedication and commitment of its members.

9. **RE Report Card** (*shared on screen*)

Lesley took members through the Report Card and had also provided a link: <https://www.rethinkre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Report-Card-2022-WEB-FINAL-ALL-PAGES.pdf>

The report card provides an evaluation of RE and its importance in schools and relevance to today's diverse multi-religious and multi-secular society. It covers the following areas:

- **School Performance**
Do schools spend enough time on RE? No of pupils entering full GCSE RE course is up 29% and numbers entering A level is up 49.5% since 2003.
How RE can prepare pupils for further study and certain professions.
Value of RE and its importance.
Do schools spend enough time on RE? 34% of academies have no timetabled RE.
- **Government Performance**
The government is not supporting RE appropriately.
The bursary for RE teacher training has been discontinued despite a shortage of RE teachers.
- **The Future of RE - recommendations**
Reinstate bursary for RE teacher training.
Implement Core report
Ofsted to be more proactive in criticising schools who are not performing well in RE.
Proper funding.

Phiroza asked if there was anything to be done at local level. Lesley felt that SACRE members could write to the government supporting the recommendations. If the councillors could identify a shortage of RE teachers in Harrow, their support for the reinstatement of the bursary could add extra weight.

10. News from Faith Groups relating to schools

- **Jains:** Varsha reported that the Jain temple in Kenton Road has celebrated its tenth anniversary.
- **Hinduism:** Arvind brought to members' attention a big celebration that is coming up in April 2023 (18th to 26th) in India that will affect some Hindus and the children's attendance in school. He is liaising with Harrow councillors, Bob Blackman (Kenton East MP) and Brent and Harrow GLA assembly member, Krupesh Hirani, regarding this. It's a 200-year-old anniversary (<https://www.swaminarayan.faith/>) and some devotees around the world who are associated with this temple are planning to attend this once in a lifetime celebration. In the UK, there are eight temples associated with this temple in Bhuj, of which 5 are in London. Some schools, for example the Avanti Trust Schools, have approved parents' requests for time off school for these celebrations. Some head teachers in other schools are not aware of this. Arvind asked for these celebrations to be included in the 2022-23 Harrow SACRE guidance on authorising Pupil Absence for Religious Observance. Alison stressed that the SACRE document is for guidance only and carries no legal or statutory weight. The final decision is made by the head teacher. However, Vivian will be working on the new Dates of Religious Observance over the summer, so if Arvind can send the dates to Vivian they can certainly be included with a request that head teachers look sympathetically at parents' requests for time off for this occasion.
- **Zoroastrians:** Phiroza informed the meeting that 90 students had visited the Zoroastrian Centre this morning. She did not know which school they were from. Lesley will ask at the next RE leaders' meeting.
Action: Lesley
Phiroza also mentioned that the Zoroastrians held a big celebration over the Platinum Jubilee weekend. School children played an instrumental role in this.
- **SE Asian Heritage Month:** Varsha mentioned that the SE Asia heritage month will be celebrated from mid-July to mid-August. It is the 75th anniversary of the partition of India.

11. Any Other Business

There were no items of Any Other Business.

12. Future Dates:

- ~~Wednesday 14 September 2022~~ **Thursday 20 October please note change of date.** It is hoped that this will be a face-to-face meeting but with Covid cases on the rise, this decision will be reviewed nearer the time.
- **Tuesday 6 December 2022**
- **Wednesday 1 March**

The meeting closed at 8.45pm

Signed:

(Chair)

(Date)