

**HARROW SACRE**  
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 10<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2012**

**Attendance:**

**Group A: (Religious traditions and Christian Churches)**

~ Mr Zia Baig	~ Ms Beverley Wilson
~ Mrs Sanaz Ajala	A Mr Neville Ransley
* Mr Mike Bishop	* Ms Angela Clapham
A Dr Julie Crow	* Mrs Gill Ross
~ Mrs Niru Desai	* Mrs Doreen Samuels
* Mrs Phiroza Gan-Kotwal	~ Mr Paramjit Singh-Kohli
* Mr Vijay Hirani	A Ven Sumana Sramaner
* Varsha Dodhia	* Zafar Khalid
A Councillor Asad Omar	* Ananda Caitanya Das

**Group B: (Church of England)**

~ Mrs Mary Abbott	* Rev'd. Matthew Stone
* Rev'd Philip Barnes	

**Group C: (Teachers' Associations)**

~ Ms Bhavita Pandya	~ Mrs Manju Radia
	* Mrs Alison Stowe (Chair)

**Group D: (Local Authority)**

Councillors:	
* Nana Asante	* Camilla Bath
	* Sasikala Suresh

**Officer**

\*Rachel Bowerman (Senior School Improvement Professional & Adviser to SACRE, nominated by the Director of Education)

**Visitors / observers**

\* Patrick O'Dwyer Professional lead at ESSO (Education and Schools Strategic Organisation)

**Clerk**

\*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

*\* denotes presence*

*A denotes absence with apologies*

*~ denotes absence without apologies*

**1. Order of the Agenda:** items 6, 7 and 8 were taken in reverse order, but are minuted in the order in which they appear on the agenda.

**2. Welcome and introductions:** the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting especially Patrick O'Dwyer, lead education professional for ESSO (Education Strategy and Schools Organisation) and two new members, Ananda Caitanya Das, nominated by the Bhaktivedanta Manor Temple and Angela Clapham, a new representative of Harrow's Catholic communities on Group A. She is also a chaplain at St Dominic's College. Members of the committee introduced themselves.

### **3. Apologies for absence:**

**RESOLVED:** To note apologies for absence from Julie Crow, Ven Sumana Srimaner, Neville Ransley and Cllr Asad Omar.

The meeting was quorate.

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Zia Baig, Sanaz Ajala, Niru Desai, Beverley Wilson, Paramjit Singh-Kohli

Group B: Mary Abbott

Group C: Bhavita Pandya, Manju Radia.

### **4. Minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> June:**

**5. Apologies for Absence:** Jill Crow *should read* Julie Crow. This has been amended earlier, but unfortunately the updated minutes had not been used when circulating the papers.

**With this amendment the minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.**

### **5. Matters arising from the minutes**

#### **4. b) Update on membership:**

**Academies:** Mike Bishop asked if there has been any progress on recruiting a representative from the academies. Rachel Bowerman reported that she has not yet had any response from the academies. She will follow-up her initial communication.

**Action: Rachel Bowerman**

**Lapsed members:** Doreen Samuels asked if there had been any progress in removing lapsed members from the committee. Rachel Bowerman will advise those members who have not attended meetings this year and who have not sent apologies, that they are no longer eligible to sit on the SACRE committee. Rachel Bowerman is actively engaged in finding new members for Group C.

**Action: Rachel Bowerman**

**There were no further matters arising from the minutes**

### ***Business Items: Improving standards in RE and collective worship***

#### **5. Annual report pp9-18**

Rachel Bowerman introduced the draft Annual Report. She explained that the report is now sent to the NASACRE/RE council. It remains a statutory duty to publish an Annual Report.

The report is on target for completion by the end of December. It is organised under the same headings as previous years, which were first suggested as guidance by the QCA so that there was a consistency to the structure of SACRE reports.

The draft requires the addition of an analysis of public examination (GCSE RS and GCE A level) entry patterns and results. This data is not yet available. Schools which are now academies are not required to share their results with the LA although many have agreed to do so; some of this information will become available when the results are validated and move into the public domain.

The draft report includes pen-portraits of aspects of the provision for RE at Belmont School and at Priestmead Primary School and Nursery. These schools made RE presentations to SACRE during 2011 – 2012.

The report also includes cameos of the provision for collective worship at Norbury Primary and Stanburn Infant schools. When these schools submitted applications for a determination they were asked to make a presentation to SACRE outlining their approach to collective worship.

Rachel Bowerman also drew the committee's attention to the fact that Harrow Council receives a number of freedom of information requests each year, usually in relation to collective worship. One of these, from Chris Hastings of the *Mail on Sunday*, required a detailed response, including the collation of emails, about applications for determinations and the type of provision for collective worship in schools where determinations had been granted. Rachel contacted NASACRE and ascertained that other SACREs have received FOI requests from the same source. Members may see Rachel Bowerman's response if they wish.

There followed some discussion: Alison Stowe had received a "courtesy call" from the Saturday Telegraph asking her about assemblies at Priestmead. This had resulted in a positive article.

In response to a question, councillors informed the committee that portfolio holders have some training in handling the media but councillors are usually advised to refer requests to the Communications Team at Harrow Council.

It was agreed that it would be interesting to monitor these requests, which occur frequently, and if possible, to find out how the information is used.

The draft annual report concludes with an account of the training for RE subject leaders which took place at St Panteleimon Greek Orthodox Church. SACRE's new Guidance on Visits and Visitors for RE and Collective Worship was launched at this event.

Rachel Bowerman invited questions and suggestions for the report. The Jain representative, Varsha Dodhia, suggested including a paragraph on Harrow's cultural diversity.

Acknowledging that a statement on the SACRE budget had yet to be drafted, the Chair asked how the budget is allocated and what it covers. Patrick O'Dwyer explained that HSIP (Harrow School Improvement Partnership) is commissioned by ESSO (Education Strategy and School Organisation) to provide professional advice and guidance, on behalf of the Corporate Director, in order that SACRE can operate effectively and fulfil its statutory duties. SACRE is allocated a budget of £7500 by the Local Authority. HSIP had reported that in 2011 – 2012, the equivalent of 25 days of Rachel Bowerman's time had been used for SACRE business, including:

- co-ordinating school presentations;
- preparing the agenda and papers for meetings;
- drafting and developing the two guidance publications which had been launched in 2011 - 2012;
- recruitment of new members.

Rachel Bowerman had provided a statement (in reply to a freedom of information request from Christians in Government group) on HSIP support for SACRE. This could be used as a basis for the financial section of the report.

There were enquiries about the termly training for RE subject leaders and about how the budget could be used to commission external consultants. Members agreed that these questions indicated a robust approach to managing a budget allocated by Harrow Council.

**It was agreed that the Chair's group should address these questions and report back at the next meeting**

**Action: Chair's group**

The Chair expressed her appreciation for the hours that Rachel Bowerman spends on SACRE "over and above" the statutory requirements. The SACRE agreed that it continued to receive professional advice of a high quality from Rachel Bowerman.

**Mathew Stone, on behalf of the committee congratulated Rachel Bowerman on the draft annual report.**

## **6. SACRE Conference: Meeting the needs of families from religious backgrounds: developing SACRE Guidance for schools**

Rachel Bowerman introduced this item.

As a result of the discussion, at the previous meeting, of SACRE guidance on establishing a space for prayer in schools, members had commissioned a SACRE Conference for school leaders in order to support schools in being proactive in meeting the needs of pupils and families from religious backgrounds.

The Chair advised postponing the conference from the proposed date of 29<sup>th</sup> November, in view of the fact that schools and SACRE members are very busy at this time of year. The date has been posted on CPD online but there have been no bookings so far. Mike Bishop added that the time scale is very short to organise workshops and a key speaker.

**The committee resolved unanimously to postpone the conference until the spring term. Rachel Bowerman will circulate some possible dates.**

**Action: Rachel Bowerman**

### **7. School attendance and absence for religious observance: reviewing SACRE guidance**

Patrick O'Dwyer introduced this item. He thanked SACRE for inviting him to address this meeting. He was about to make a request to SACRE to strengthen its guidance to schools about authorised absence for religious observance.

He outlined the background to this request: the LA is currently in consultation with Harrow head teachers and chairs of governors about measures to promote good attendance. These include early intervention, support for families, and, when necessary, prosecution and penalty notices.

The LA and headteachers would welcome support from SACRE regarding its guidance on authorised absence for religious festivals. Patrick O' Dwyer reminded SACRE members of DfE guidance that "absence due to religious festivals should be authorised by the school if it is a day set apart exclusively for religious observance and it is set apart by the parents' religious body." However, headteachers had raised with the LA instances whereby:

- when a day of observance falls at the weekend, the parents take a compensatory weekday on the preceding Friday or following Monday;
- when one day is set aside for religious observance, parents take two or three days;
- parents apply for extended visits abroad on the grounds of religious observance.

Although numbers in primary and secondary school are comparable, religious observance accounts for twice as many days of absence in primary schools. SACRE's advice is much respected, and head teachers requested strengthened guidance so that schools felt supported in taking a consistently rigorous stance in relation to absences for religious observance. This would support their position with Ofsted.

In response to a question about how Ofsted judge attendance, Patrick O'Dwyer explained that Ofsted inspectors will take into account factors affecting absence. Inspectors look at overall absence; they do not distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence but if they felt that schools were being too liberal in authorising absence, this could be considered a weakness in the school's leadership. Authorised absence is very high in Harrow: Harrow is 125<sup>th</sup> out of 150 LAs in the primary sector.

Doreen Samuels informed the committee that Jewish days of observance are very specific and it is extremely rare for children to need a day on either side of the day of observance. Vijay Hirani felt that SACRE should further clarify its guidance as requested by headteachers.

**It was agreed that SACRE should support this request and include in its guidance a statement to the effect that SACRE does not endorse additional absence beyond the day exclusively set apart for religious observance by a religious body. A form of words will be drafted by the Chair's Group.**

**Action: Chair's group.**

### **Information Items:**

#### **8. SEWA Day: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

Varsha Dodhia introduced this item. She explained that sewa is the concept of selfless service and that this concept of serving others is not an exclusively Hindu concept.

The Sewa International Charity has been promoting a sewa day across the world. In Britain this year, Sewa Day was linked to the celebrations for the Jubilee, with an emphasis upon volunteering within the community. Last Sunday (7<sup>th</sup> October) was SEWA day. Varsha Dodhia had taken part in a book collection project in Wembley Park. She was pleased to report that Harrow Council has adopted SEWA day.

The Sewa International Charity hopes to work through schools to make the event bigger and better next year. They want to target younger people and reach as many communities as possible.

Rachel Bowerman expressed disappointment that the published materials and website had not articulated the religious concepts underlying sewa, concepts shared across the faith traditions. Gill Ross agreed that it was essential that faith communities communicated to young people the link between religious values and the civic duty and service that they drive.

Doreen Samuels described her experience as a gamesmaker at the Olympics this year. The experience of had had an amazing impact upon some of the volunteers who had not previously been involved in that sort of community activity . Many were bereft when the project ended. Members of faith communities are privileged in that they enjoy this sense of belonging to and responsibility towards a community. SACRE members were invited to write a paragraph about what sewa might look like in their communities.

Rachel Bowerman thanked Varsha Dodhia for her presentation and for drawing the attention of the committee to Sewa Day. She asked committee members to work on their cameos.

**Action: members of the committee**

## **9. Reports from National RE Associations**

- a) **RE Council Newsletter October 2012:** the RE council has been asked to conduct a review of RE leading to proposals for a revised RE framework. A panel had been convened and its first report will be published shortly. SACREs will be consulted at a later stage.
- b) **Update on the Agreed Syllabus:** it is a requirement that an Agreed Syllabus Conference should be convened to review the local agreed syllabus at least every five years. Rachel Bowerman advised that, taking account of the on-going RE Council consultation, the LA could establish an Agreed Syllabus Conference, which might meet once and agree to postpone its actions until a national review statement and the response of the Secretary of State had been published.

## **10. Any other business**

**There were no items of any other business**

## **11. Dates of Future SACRE Meetings:**

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 7.30pm Committee Rooms 1 and 2.

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013 7.30pm Committee rooms 1 and 2

**The Meeting closed at 9.05 pm**

**Signed:**

**(Chair)**

**(Date)**