

**HARROW SACRE**  
(STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION)  
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 27 JUNE 2019**

**Attendance**

**Group A**

\* Mercedes Afnan  
~ *Ven Sumana Sramaner*  
\* Bob Dawson  
\* Carolyn O'Brien  
\* Ciara O'Flaherty  
\* Vijay Hirani  
\* David Cryer  
~ Varsha Dodhia  
\* Gill Ross  
\* Doreen Samuels  
~ *Zafar Khalid*  
*A Asad Omar*  
~ *Tahir Hashmi*  
*A Mohammed Amar*  
*A Paramjit Singh-Kohli*  
\* Phiroza Gan-Kotwal

**Religious traditions and Christian churches**

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

**Group B**

*A Mary Abbott*  
\* Revd Kate Blake  
*A Revd James Power*

**Church of England**

**Group C**

\* Alison Stowe (Chair)  
\* Teri-Louise O'Brien  
\* Fatema Rahemani

**Teachers' Associations**

**Group D**

\*Cllr Camilla Bath Conservative (Vice Chair)  
*A Cllr Ghazanfar Ali Labour*  
\*Cllr Angella Murphy-Strachan (Labour)

**Local Authority**

*Cllr Dr Lesline Lewinson Conservative (reserve)*  
*Cllr Simon Brown Labour (reserve)*  
Vacancy Labour (reserve)

**Advisor to the SACRE**

\* Lesley Prior (Advisor to Harrow SACRE)

**Present as an observer:**

\*Cllr Christine Robson, Portfolio Holder of Education and Social Services

**Clerk**

\*Vivian Wright (Clerk to SACRE)

\* *denotes presence*

*A denotes absence with apologies*

~ *denotes absence without apologies*

## 1. Welcome

Alison welcomed everyone to the meeting especially Lesley Prior, who although still officially on sick leave, was attending the meeting. Alison also welcomed Cllr Christine Robson, Portfolio Holder for Education and Social Services; Cllr Robson was attending as an observer.

## 2. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

### Chair

The Clerk chaired this part of the meeting. Alison Stowe had expressed her willingness to stand again as chair.

Camilla Bath, seconded by Ciara O'Flaherty, proposed Alison Stowe as Chair.

**Elected unanimously.**

Alison then resumed chairing the meeting.

### Vice-Chair

Vijay Hirani, seconded by Gill Ross proposed Camilla Bath as Vice-Chair. Camilla indicated that she was willing to stand.

**Elected unanimously**

## 3. Apologies for absence

**RESOLVED:** To note apologies for absence from Asad Omar, Mohammed Amar, Paramjit Singh-Kohli, Mary Abbott, Revd James Power and Cllr Ghazanfar Ali..

The following members were also absent:

Group A: Ven Sumaner Sramaner, Varsha Dodhia and Tahir Hashmi.

No apologies had been received.

## 4. Minutes of the last meeting held on 19 March 2019 (*previously circulated*)

The minutes were agreed and signed as a true record.

## 5. Matters arising from the minutes

**There were no matters arising from the minutes not covered on the agenda.**

## 6. Order of the agenda:

**Agenda items were taken in the following order:**

**7. Determinations**

**8. LGBT and education**

**9. Collective Worship working group**

**10. Dates for religious days of worship**

**11. Website reviews in the light of new Ofsted inspections**

**12. Feedback from RE Subject Leader meetings**

**13. News from NASACRE Conference**

**14. Commission on RE: Final Report: schools' briefing**

**15. News from Faith groups relating to schools**

**16. Any other business**

**17. Future dates**

## 7. Determinations

**Norbury Primary School** (*documents previously circulated*)

Members have reviewed the comprehensive array of documentation sent by Teri-Louise O'Brien in support of Norbury's application for a determination. Some members had also visited Norbury and attended an assembly. Their feedback was reported at the last meeting. Teri-Louise reported that the consultation exercise has provided a useful insight into how children and parents view the school.

Questions

Were teachers at Norbury surprised by any of the parents' questions at the determination meeting? Teri-Louise explained that the ethos of Norbury is very open and inclusive and the meeting confirmed her view that parents appreciated the school's assemblies. The school has always worked closely with its community.

Are any parents dissatisfied if their religion is not represented? Teri-Louise explained that Norbury makes every effort to ensure that even the minority religions are represented. Parents are able to ask any questions. SACRE members who visited the school felt that this inclusive ethos was truly embedded. This was apparent in the way children answered their questions in a very unforced and spontaneous way. It was also noted that no parents have withdrawn their children from RE lessons or school assemblies. Teri-Louise added that parents often lead assemblies, for instance at E 'id and Diwali, and they are very eager to do so.

Could Norbury's application be used as a model for other schools? Alison explained that Teri-Louise is assisting in the drafting of a Collective Worship policy for the borough. See 9 below. Teri-Louise added that the school always welcomes visitors. She will not be the RE co-ordinator next year but will continue to take an interest.

**Members agreed unanimously that Norbury should be granted a determination.**

Alison will write to the Head Teacher to inform her of SACRE's decision.

**Action: Alison Stowe.**

### **Marlborough Primary School**

It was agreed to defer Marlborough's application for a determination to the October meeting. Zahra Mamdani, the RE co-ordinator at Marlborough will be working with the experienced RE co-ordinator at Glebe School in order to prepare the documentation.

**Item for next agenda**

## **8. LGBT and Education**

**The new SRE curriculum:** there is much rumour and speculation about the SRE curriculum to be introduced in September 2020. Parents have been objecting to what they perceive as attempts to indoctrinate children about LGBT gender issues. Teri-Louise explained Norbury has held meetings with parents and they have had a chance to review the new curriculum and ask questions. Teri-Louise stressed that the primary curriculum is about different families rather than sexual orientation. She hopes to invite a member of the Shia community to visit the school. The curriculum is about respecting diversity rather than promoting homosexuality and there is some flexibility about how this is delivered.

**How should Harrow SACRE respond?** It is not SACRE's responsibility to adjudicate on delivery of SRE but it should address the concerns and objections that touch on religious sensibilities. Fatema stressed the importance of promoting tolerance in our diverse society. The DfE guidance for schools suggests that the curriculum should be introduced in consultation with parents. Many of those objecting to the curriculum come from the Muslim faith traditions, but Muslims are also trying to promote tolerance within their own communities. Doreen added that there has been a similar response from some sectors of the Jewish community. The Chief Rabbi has written a guide to LGBT. This can be found at <https://chiefrabbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-Wellbeing-of-LGBT-Pupils-A-Guide-for-Orthodox-Jewish-Schools.pdf>

The Catholic community also has some guidance on this and the Pope leads with his messages that always stress love and hope.

**Legal responsibilities:** Lesley reminded members that the law requires schools to provide SRE but also that parents have the right to withdraw their children from SRE and RE. From September 2020 the right to withdraw children will be limited to children aged up to 14.

Norbury's example is a good one where parents are kept informed and consulted.

**The way forward:** while SACRE is not responsible for SRE, it should, as mentioned above address the concerns of parents that are based on religion and make every attempt to promote tolerance and respect. It can do this by, for instance, promoting the Chief Rabbi's document referred to above.

Alison will also find out who is the Harrow lead on SRE and seek their advice.

**Action: Alison**

Members will read up on this issue over the summer and come to the next meeting prepared for an informed discussion.

**Action: SACRE members**

#### **9. Collective Worship working group**

As mentioned above, Alison is drafting a Collective Worship Policy for the borough. Teri-Louise will have an input into this. It will form part of a guidance pack to assist schools who are seeking a determination. There is a wealth of expertise in Harrow and among the members of SACRE on which to draw in order to support schools that may have little or no awareness of what a determination is or how to apply for one. Teachers often receive little training in RE and no training in Collective Worship.

The RE co-ordinators meeting next summer (2020) will focus on Collective Worship; it will be open to Head Teachers and Deputies. Members agreed that Collective Worship should not be the sole responsibility of the RE co-ordinator but should be supported by governors and senior leadership.

Alison has used the Harrow Newsletter to appeal for volunteers to join the working party drafting the Collective Worship policy and Lesley will also advise.

#### **10. Dates for Religious Days of Worship**

There are a large number of Romanians in Harrow who celebrate Easter on the Julian calendar used by some Orthodox Christians. The date of Easter is calculated differently from the Western churches. This year the date of Orthodox Easter was exceptionally late and the Monday following Easter Sunday fell in term time. This is a day when Orthodox families can take their children to an Easter celebration service instead of the midnight vigil. Some head teachers were prepared and understanding when faced with requests for this Monday off, but others were less accommodating.

Alison has contacted Orthodox priests in order to find out if future Easter dates are likely to fall in term time. She is hoping that a teacher from the Romanian community may be able to join SACRE.

Vivian will soon be compiling the Guidance to Days of Religious Observance for 2020; Alison asked members to advise Vivian of any forthcoming dates. SACRE makes every effort to listen to all voices in Harrow.

#### **11. Website reviews in the light of new Ofsted inspections**

Ofsted have updated their guidance which means that RE will come under a different sort of scrutiny. The subject has a higher profile and RE books are inspected.

Phiroza showed members documents from *The Key* describing Ofsted's new approach to monitoring the curriculum.

SACRE members should continue to monitor school websites and note whether changes are occurring to reflect this new focus.

**SACRE members**

#### **12. Feedback from RE Subject Leader meetings**

The RE subject leaders have met three times this year. The meetings are very stimulating and informative. Some SACRE members have contributed presentations: Mercedes on the Baha'i faith, Varsha on Jainism and Phiroza on Zoroastrianism. Alison thanked Mercedes, Varsha and Phiroza for their contributions which were well-received. David is making a presentation on Humanism at the next meeting and Alison will continue to invite members from different faith traditions to contribute. Their approach is to show how the big questions are addressed by different faiths and to build teachers' subject knowledge. Phiroza has a leaflet on Zoroastrianism: members should approach her if they would like a copy of this.

The RE subject coordinators have now had a year to work on the new RE syllabus and the November meeting will focus on the lesson plans that have been developed. There is a clear focus for future meetings.

### **13. News from NASACRE Conference**

No one from Harrow SACRE attended this year's conference but the keynote speeches are on the website. Harrow has just renewed its subscription to NASACRE, so members will have access to this. Lesley is attending a NASACRE executive meeting tomorrow.

**Next year's conference will be on 18 May 2020 at the Merchant Taylors' Hall in London.**

The NASACRE website contains helpful support materials. Lesley reminded members that NASACRE exists to support local SACREs and to their right to make their own decisions.

### **14. Commission on RE: Final Report: schools' briefing**

Lesley attended a meeting with Dave Francis who is the Vice-Chair of the RE Council for England and Wales. He felt that there is an appetite for legislative change regarding RE on the part of the government. Others might think that RE is not among the government's priorities at the moment.

Ofsted's greater emphasis on RE may be a result of the Commission's report. It is now established in principle; it remains to be seen how far this will impact on provision in practice.

RE and SACRE are valued by Harrow schools.

Lesley will attend the next RE Council meeting in November. To find out more about the Commission and its recommendations, members can access the Council's website at <https://www.religiouseducationcouncil.org.uk/projects/core/>.

At present there has been no legislative change as a result of the Commission's report and RE remains locally delivered.

Lesley cited the example of one SACRE which wrote to the DfE supporting the Commission's recommendations for a national RE syllabus. The response from the DfE indicated that the government still considers that SACREs should be monitoring the provision of RE. This begs a number of questions:

- What mechanisms are in place to enable SACRE to do this?
- What sanctions are in place if RE is not being delivered?
- What is the position of SACRE regarding schools such as academies and free schools which are not under Local Authority control?

In addition, members felt that that SACREs wish to be advisory and supportive: they do not want to police RE.

In Harrow, questionnaires sent to secondary schools provided a number of responses indicating that schools are providing RE education but this may not necessarily be the case. For instance, some schools may flout the law by ceasing to provide RE education after pupils have taken their RE GCSE in Year 10. Although RE provision in secondary schools can be monitored through the schools' websites, this is an unreliable source of information as websites can bely the real state of affairs.

Q. Should SACRE develop stronger links with governors? Lesley indicated that this question has been discussed by another SACRE. They felt it might be seen as going behind the Head Teacher's back, although there is nothing to prevent both Head Teacher and Governors from being contacted. This committee has discussed the possibility of inviting governors to SACRE meetings. Another suggestion was that SACRE members might make a presentation on RE standards at the annual Governors' Conference in Harrow. RE education might also form the basis of one of the governors' training sessions run by the LA.

### **15. News from Faith Groups pertinent to schools**

**There was no news from faith groups relating to schools.**

**16. Any Other Business**

- **New Islam Resource for School and Teacher Pack** (*previously circulated: email from Imran Kotwal at Muslim Learner Services, sample pages and artefacts poster*):  
Muslim members who were asked to review the resource pack were not present at the meeting but the following comment was received from Asad Omar:  
*My comments about resource for Islam is that we should send the information to schools and let them decide if they want to buy the pack. We should stay neutral.*
- **Hindu Resource audiobook, “The Ramayana: An Ancient Indian Epic”** (*Previously circulated: email from Shreyas Pulle and audiobook presentation*):  
Vijay had looked at the resource pack.

Vijay felt that this resource was very expensive: members agreed that this applied to both resource packs and that in the current financial climate it is unrealistic to expect schools to purchase such resources when there are so many good quality free resources available on the Internet. They agreed that it was difficult for SACRE members to recommend specific resources as they are not in a position to test materials in the classroom.

The clerk will write to Shreyas Pulle and Imran Kotwal to inform them that, for the reasons outlined above, Harrow SACRE could not recommend these materials to schools.

- **Lesley Prior’s attendance at the meeting:** Doreen Samuels spoke for all committee members in expressing her pleasure at Lesley’s attendance at the meeting. Lesley has been much missed and members expressed their warmest good wishes for her continuing recovery.

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

**17. Future Dates:**

- Future dates 2019-20
  - Tuesday 15 October
  - Tuesday 10 December
  - Tuesday 24 March

The dates were noted.

**The Chair wished everyone a glorious summer holiday and closed the meeting at 8.55pm pm**

**Signed:**

**(Chair)**

**(Date)**