

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDING
ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

TUESDAY 25th NOVEMBER 2025

The meeting took place at the Church of Christ the Eternal High Priest

Present

**Representing Christian denominations and other religious dominations
and beliefs (Group A):**

Wendy Brice-Thompson (WBT), Roman Catholic
Peter Feinson (PF), Baptist
Jenny Fox (JF), Salvation Army
Dr John Lester (JL), Baha'i faith
Tariq Mahmood (TM), Sunni Muslim
Corinne Simmons (CS) Romford Synagogue
John Smailes (JS), Evangelical Free Church
Barry Smith (BS), United Reform Church

Representing the Church of England (Group B):

None.

Representing teachers (Group C):

Kathryn Everett* (KE)

Representing the Local Authority (Group D):

Councillor David Taylor* (DT)

Co-opted Member

None.

Observer

Sarah Yeneralski (SY)

Professional adviser:

Julia Diamond Conway (JDC) – R.E. Advisor

Joanne McLauchlan – Clerk, Havering Governor Services

**for part of the meeting*

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

In the absence of the Chair, JL welcomed everyone to the meeting. JL acknowledged the recent incidents at the Manchester Synagogue, the Sussex Mosque and at the Church of the Latter-Day Saints in the USA. The Chair stated that SACRE was committed to bringing faiths together in harmony and quoted Confucius '*if you fall into the river and are drowning, are you going to worry about who saves you?*'

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Katherine Tumilty, George Prinn, Pastor Aloysius Peter, Stephanie Elnor, Dawn Ladbrook and Sidra Naeem.

Absence of the following Members was noted: Om Dhir, Sanar Narwal, Kamal Siddiqui, Nasir Mubashar, Luthaneal Adams, Ruth Everett, Bal Degun, Terry Riches, Stephanie Elnor, and Councillor Philip Ruck.

It was noted that Cllr David Taylor needed to leave at 7pm and Sarah Yeneralski at 7.30pm.

It was noted that the meeting was not quorate.

The ongoing absence of Sansar Narwal, Pastor Peter Aloysius Peter, Luthaneal Adams, Terry Riches, Bal Degun and Om Dhir was discussed. It was agreed that HGS would contact the individuals with regard to their intentions. If no response was received, they would be removed at the next meeting.

ACTION: HGS

DT informed members that he would not be standing for re-election as a Councillor. However, from a faith point of view, he was interested in continuing as a member of SACRE. DT was a member of the Pentecostal Church and was also a member of the National Board of Religious Leaders.

SACRE Members recommended the appointment of David Taylor to Group A once his term as a councillor came to an end.

ACTION: HGS

2. NEW OR SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Julia Diamond-Conway (JDC) introduced Sarah Yeneralski, who was a new SACRE member and the intention was that she would join Committee Group C. Sarah was currently the R.E. Lead in a local Primary School and

it was hoped that members would have the opportunity to learn more about the curriculum delivered in the school setting.

As the meeting was not quorate, the appointment would be approved at the next meeting.

ACTION: HGS (agenda)

3. ELECTION OF CHAIR & VICE-CHAIR

Members noted that the term of office for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions was two years.

Wendy Brice-Thompson stated that she was willing to chair this meeting and the next one. John Lester stated that he was willing to take on the role of Vice-Chair. Members agreed the appointments.

W Brice-Thompson took the Chair.

It was agreed to move to agenda item 7, ANNUAL REPORT 2025

7. ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25

The draft Annual Report 2024-25 was received. It was noted that this should be sent to the DfE and NASACRE by the end of the year. Questions were invited. Cllr David Taylor asked if the report included efforts to increase the membership as meetings were regularly not quorate; a strategy was needed. JDC reported that some SACREs allowed time at every meeting to discuss how to increase the membership. It was agreed to include how to increase membership on the agenda for the next meeting. Members were asked to think about ways to do this.

ACTION: Members/HGS (agenda)

DT stated that it was worrying that the attendance of Local Authority members was not very good. The Chair suggested that there should be a conversation with Councillors about expectations before they joined.

Kathryn Everett arrived.

Those present approved the Annual Report 2024-25; however, the meeting was not quorate. JDC suggested asking Group B members if they were also in agreement.

4. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 24 JUNE 2025 AND MATTERS ARISING

4.1. The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 were received, agreed, and would be signed by the Chair. Arrangements for the

signing of minutes needed to be decided. HGS would contact the Chair.

ACTION: HGS

4.2. There were no matters arising from the minutes that were not included elsewhere on the agenda.

5. UPDATE ON SCHOOL ACTIVITY

JDC reported that she was running a course for 17 Subject Leaders; twilight sessions would also be available. SY had joined one in the previous week. The activity could be done in school if it was not possible to visit a place of worship. Schools could use virtual tours, as well as looking at how to utilise staff and parents of different faiths.

JDC had conducted an Evangelical and Baptist tour, and these were still available on the portal. SY added that teachers had access to the website. JDC had also delivered a training session for staff in the previous week.

6. NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

JDC presumed that everyone had received the written report and invited questions and comments. DT said he was intrigued by the large number of pupils with SEND within the Local Authority and the establishment of new SEND Schools. There was a need to be mindful that numbers in area were high when compared with the position London-wide.

JDC said that nationally, children with SEND in mainstream schools, were often taken out of e.g. R.E lessons for interventions to catch up on other subjects. The Ofsted view was that access to e.g. R.E., Music and Art should not be stopped. Children were entitled to then and might enjoy these subjects.

DT said that the experience of faith and religion could benefit children with SEND; for example, calming prayer and the structure provided by faith. JDC stated that there were children, who struggled with Maths and English, but did very well in R.E. Dr. Lester (JL) said that for those children who found Maths and English difficult, which could lead to low esteem, may realise early on in school that they could excel in R.E. DT commented that the understanding of R.E, provided context why people were different and this could be celebrated.

JDC suggested that if schools were surveyed by SACRE, the question should be asked what happens with SEND provision and how could SACRE help. DT asked when schools were visiting places of worship, could the sites accommodate children with SEND; where these places

ready and did the faith groups have programmes to engage with schools. JW questioned how this information could be gathered from places of worship. JS said that if a visit was to be arranged, the needs of children with SEND should be taken into account when planning. CS stated that for visits to the Romford Synagogue, there was always a check for children with SEND so that arrangements could be made to accommodate them. This group was also given extra attention during the visit.

It was acknowledged that not all places of worship had special facilities. DT suggested that SACRE members could become involved and act as bridge by visiting schools and identifying places of worship that could accommodate children with SEND. It was noted that places of worship should have their own risk assessment as they would have children with needs within its community.

JDC stated that it would be really useful for schools to know which places of worship could accommodate children with needs. JDC informed members that a church in Redbridge had a sensory room, which could accommodate a class. JDC stated that it would be nice for teachers if SACRE collected the information. BS stated that all places of worship should have risk assessment in place along with a Safeguarding Policy.

Cllr David Taylor left the meeting.

BS commented that children were withdrawn from R.E.; it was not part of the national curriculum but had to be taught. BS questioned where R.E. fitted within the philosophy of delivering a broad and balanced curriculum. JDC said that there should be compulsion for children to be there. However, parents often requested withdrawal from R.E. if their child was weak in Maths or English. The position was tricky; Headteachers tried to avoid the withdrawal from R.E. There was now a focus on adaptations within the classroom along with the delivery of Quality First Teaching. There was as strong focused, particularly from Ofsted, on the broad and balanced curriculum and it would not be as acceptable to take children out of e.g. R.E. or P.E. PF commented that it was more of a problem in secondary schools. JDC acknowledged that the situation was quite SERIOUS but did not know if it was more of a problem in primary or secondary schools. JDC said that parents could withdraw their child, but they did not have to give a reason. Parents used the right of withdrawal in ways that could make R.E. professionals and SACRE uncomfortable. JDC stated that the R.E. lessons were education and not worship.

JDC asked if HGS could send the PowerPoint to SACRE members.

ACTION: HGS

JDC informed members that the final curriculum and assessment report was available, which acknowledged the importance of R.E. JDC highlighted the following:

Page 107, "*R.E is a place where they encounter different beliefs*'.

Page 108, '*given the role of religion and values, access to R.E. continues to be vital*'. This was a more modern take on R.E.

Page 109, '*We are of the view the importance of R.E. was not reflected in its standing in the curriculum*'.

The report also suggested that R.E. should be moved into the national curriculum to prevent further diminishment. JDC commented that it would be helpful if the number of syllabi across the country was reduced. R.E. should be given parity with other subjects; the syllabus in Havering was good. However, in some areas, it was difficult to keep SACRE running.

The report did want to see R.E. included in the national curriculum but it was unrealistic to expect this to happen fast. The report recommended that the government invited the R.E. sector to form a 'task & finish' group. SACRE may be asked for their opinions at some point. This group may examine whether a new R.E. curriculum could be drafted. The viability would be explored over the next few months with the aim of R.E. becoming part of the national curriculum; however, the report did not say that this would definitely happen.

JDC reported that one of the suggestions the commission had made was that the approach should be the baseline requirement and not all of the content.

JDC stated that the DfE should consider the legislation around R.E. and what the function of SACRE would be if R.E was part of the national curriculum; there might be some additional duties.

JDC also questioned if R.E. should be included in Key Stage 5; the government response to this was needed. The government would be guided by the sector and so a clear, shared position was needed from the sector. The consensus from the sector was that everyone needed to be flexible. The government would consult on what would be included in the curriculum and legislative framework. The earliest any new curriculum could be in place would be 2028.

JDC invited questions and comments.

The Chair suggested that members should read the report and bring questions to the next meeting. It was noted that the government's

response to the Curriculum & Assessment Review was due in November 2025. KE asked why this was so sudden and JDC responded that no changes had been considered since 1999. The review had been asked to look at all subjects, not just R.E. and had completed the task thoroughly. Scoping would be conducted by Dr V Ogden, who was a previous Headteacher in Tower Hamlets. PF noted that the review was taking place at the same time as the move towards 'Religion & World Views.' JDC agreed with PF and acknowledged that there might be a change in name; should the subject be called Religion & World Views?

8. WORKING PARTY UPDATE – PRIMARY R.E. CONFERENCE

WBT noted that JS had sent emails, although JS informed members that the individual had left, and he was not sure who to contact. JF reported that the proposed dates to host the conference were 18th March or 25th March 2026, although it was likely there would be a teachers' CPD day on 25th March. T Mahmood, S Neam, and W Brice-Thompson were the members of the working party.

JF stated that there was a need to make sure the event would be worthwhile. JL stated that contact needed to be made with schools. JDC asked how robust the plans for the day were and JS responded that there would be tables by faith with activities. S Neam had the materials. JF asked how feasible it would be to have 2 children from each school arriving at 9.30am; this could be a challenge. JF suggested inviting a couple of schools or a whole class; the event should be good. KE stated that schools would need to have clear confirmed plans. It was suggested to postpone to 2026-27.

JDC informed members that the Havering R.E. Subject Leaders group would be meeting on 17th March 2026 at CEME and suggested that a member could attend and ask leaders what would be useful to include. An itinerary could then be drawn up; Year 5 children would be invited. JDC stated that she had attended sessions in other LAs where 6 children with a teacher had attended and had then fed back when they returned to school. JS suggested postponing due to the timeframe and JDC stated that it would be better to agree the itinerary and then set a date. TM said that he was very keen to attend in a supporting role.

JDC had attended an R.E. Day in Cumbria and quite a few SACRE representatives had attended. The teachers had time to meet with the representatives, who could then arrange to visit schools. The alternative was to attend the session and stay for a break; this was a great way for SACRE members and teachers to network. Timings for the day would be worked out so that members could attend.

JS asked if the working party needed to meet again and WBT responded said this was up to the working party members. JF said that other members were welcome to join. JDC stated that there needed to be a plan that could be sent to schools. The Working Party (WBT, SN, TM, JL and JS) would need to produce the plan. JS would look at SN's minutes. TM would contact SN.

ACTION: JS & TM

It was suggested that SN could present about the Primary Conference.

9. SCHOOL WEBSITE MONITORING

HGS had shared templates of letters with SACRE members, which could be sent to schools based on website audits or their outcomes. SACRE Members agreed to complete the outstanding website audits by the end of the academic year.

ACTION: SACRE Members

10. AGREED SYLLABUS

JDC stated that the syllabus was getting older and was near to review. Next time, JDC would conduct a survey with schools to establish what they liked and what they would like change. JDC would action this in January 2026 and the results would be available for the next meeting. The London Borough of Redbridge usually joined, and it was noted that they were thinking to adopting the Religion & World Views approach.

R.E. Today had some syllabi available, which were off the peg but cheap:

- Thematic
- Systematic
- Religion & World Views

LBR was interested in the Religion & World Views syllabus.

JDC advised members that the LBR was holding a meeting via Zoom on 19th January 2026 6.30pm to 8.30pm with Stephen Pett, who had written the Religion & World Views syllabus. JDC suggested that it would be useful for SACRE members to attend, regardless of which syllabus was chosen. JDC had asked for all SACRE members to be invited to the session. The session was free and other neighbouring SACREs would be attending.

WBT asked how members should confirm their attendance and JDC said it would be useful to confirm as 6 Local Authorities had been invited.

JDC asked if HGS could send the Zoom link details to SACRE members.

ACTION: HGS

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no other business items to discuss.

12. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Future meeting dates were noted:

Thursday 12th February 2026

Tuesday 23rd June 2026

Members were asked to inform WBT if they were able to offer a venue for the next meeting. TM would send details to WBT.

ACTION: TM

The meeting closed at 7.50pm.

Chair.....

Date.....