

Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish

Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education

The meeting will be held at **6.00 pm** on **14 October 2015**

Committee Room 4, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL

Membership:

- Committee A:** Mrs S Lawson, Free Church Christian Member
Mrs Shepherd, Roman Catholic Member
Vacancy, Jewish Member
Miss A Ahmed, Muslim Member
Mr A Rashid, Muslim Member
Mr B Gill, Sikh Member
Vacancy, Hindu Member
Dr O Soleye, Pentecostal Member
Mr P Anderson, Free Church Representative.
- Committee B:** Mr J Graham, Rev. J Guest, Mrs M Taylor and Mr D Bates - Church of England.
- Committee C:** Ms A Jellicoe, Ms H Gillman, Mr P Griffiths and Ms N Fawell - Teachers' Associations.
- Committee D:** Councillors: Yash Gupta, Martin Kerin and Tunde Ojetola - Local Authority.
- Co-opted** Vacancy

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 10

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education meeting held on 15 July 2015.

3 Items of Urgent Business

To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

4 Declarations of Interest

5 A New settlement Religion and Belief in Schools 11 - 20

6 Any Other Business

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **8 October 2015**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;
- Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and
- leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Vision: Thurrock: A place of **opportunity**, **enterprise** and **excellence**, where **individuals**, **communities** and **businesses** flourish.

To achieve our vision, we have identified five strategic priorities:

1. Create a great place for learning and opportunity

- Ensure that every place of learning is rated “Good” or better
- Raise levels of aspiration and attainment so that residents can take advantage of local job opportunities
- Support families to give children the best possible start in life

2. Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity

- Promote Thurrock and encourage inward investment to enable and sustain growth
- Support business and develop the local skilled workforce they require
- Work with partners to secure improved infrastructure and built environment

3. Build pride, responsibility and respect

- Create welcoming, safe, and resilient communities which value fairness
- Work in partnership with communities to help them take responsibility for shaping their quality of life
- Empower residents through choice and independence to improve their health and well-being

4. Improve health and well-being

- Ensure people stay healthy longer, adding years to life and life to years
- Reduce inequalities in health and well-being and safeguard the most vulnerable people with timely intervention and care accessed closer to home
- Enhance quality of life through improved housing, employment and opportunity

5. Promote and protect our clean and green environment

- Enhance access to Thurrock's river frontage, cultural assets and leisure opportunities
- Promote Thurrock's natural environment and biodiversity
- Inspire high quality design and standards in our buildings and public space

Minutes of the Meeting of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education held on 15 July 2015 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Committee A: Phil Anderson, Free Church Representative

Committee B: Rev. John Guest

Committee C: Phil Griffiths (left at 7.15)

Committee D: Councillor Yash Gupta (MBE)

Apologies: Mrs S Lawson, Mrs M Shepherd, Miss A Ahmed, Mr B Gill, Mr D Bates, Ms A Jellicoe, Ms H Gillman, Ms N Fawell, Councillors Martin Kerin and Tunde Ojetola

In attendance: Deborah Weston - Associate Adviser for Religious Education
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The Minutes from the previous meeting held on 15 January 2015 were approved, subject to the following amendment:

That Councillors Gupta and Ojetola be removed from giving there apologies to being present at the meeting.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no interests declared.

4. Membership Discussion

The Chair of the SACRE invited the Clerk to inform those present of the current Membership status of the Committee, during which the following points were highlighted:

- At the end of the last meeting Mr Epps informed SACRE that he was to retire, however he would like to remain on the committee if possible. The Clerk explained that there was a vacancy on the Committee for a Co-Opted Member, which Mr Epps could be invited to fill;
- Councillor Gupta had passed on contact details of Adisha Kariyawasam to the RE Associate Adviser who was a potential Buddhist representative and another colleague who was a potential Hindu representative. She would enquire if these individuals might be happy to fill the vacancies on the Committee;
- There was also a vacancy on Committee A of SACRE for a Jewish representative. The RE Associate adviser confirmed that she would contact the Board of Jewish Deputies again to seek representatives.
- Committee C now had 2 vacancies for Teacher representatives; the clerk confirmed that she would contact the relevant teaching groups to see nominations.

Resolved:

That the RE Associate Adviser and the Clerk email the relevant nominating bodies, to seek new Members for the Committee.

5. A New Settlement: Religion and Beliefs in Schools

The RE Adviser explained to the Committee that, the attached pamphlet was launched in the House of Lords in July 2015 by Professor Linda Woodhead and the Right Honourable Charles Clarke of Lancaster University. It considered the question of whether the current legal requirements for RE were fit for purpose in 2015.

During the Committees discussion the following points were highlighted:

- It was felt that organised religion appeared to be less important, with an increase in interest in matters of spirituality;
- The Chair informed the Committee that he was to have a meeting with the Headteachers within his area of the boroughs to discuss Collective Worship and would report back to the council;
- The associate adviser pointed out that the research of Professor Linda Woodhead had demonstrated that because a person reported themselves as having no religion on the census did not make them atheist, it meant that they did not consider themselves to be part of an organised religion;

- The Chair suggested that it seemed that collective worship was a normal part of daily life within schools but once it was made compulsory it appeared to decline;
- The teacher representative on the council, stated that collective worship still took place within schools as thoughts, prays and reflection this was usually undertaken during assemblies. It was felt that by doing collective worship in this way it wouldn't offend anyone with or without a faith.

Members continued to discuss the report and debated the question of what was meant by moral values, an example given was that faith schools would have their own individual values to follow. It was agreed by all present that the report should have included an explanation as to what was meant by "moral code".

It was suggested that it may be harder to conduct an act of collective worship if the person teaching doesn't have a religion or a faith. The RE Adviser, explained that collective worship, was an opportunity to worship for a collective of people who may be of different faiths or none.

The council were asked for their thoughts on page 75 of the document within agenda papers, as to whether there should be a national or local SACRE. During the debate it was agreed that a local SACRE worked best, as local context could be taken into account; as well as community cohesion and local schools understand the religions and beliefs within the local area.

The Chair of SACRE informed those present that he felt this item was an important item and should have a further debate with all members of SACRE present. He asked if members would be happy to hold a special meeting in October; the Clerk confirmed that 7.2 of the Committee Terms of Reference allowed the Chair to call a special meeting if it was felt one was required.

Those presented, agreed on holding a special meeting in October, the Chair asked the Clerk to contact all Members of SACRE for their availability and to arrange a meeting for the date convenience for all.

Resolved:

That SACRE discuss the recommendations of the report in relation to the Thurrock context at a special meeting in October.

6. Who Delivers RE In Thurrock Primary Schools

The Chair of SACRE introduced the report, in doing so he highlighted that the council had seen a previous report that suggested that there was a growing trend nationally of RE within primary schools being taught by adults other than qualified teachers.

It was agreed at a previous meeting that an investigation should be carried out to ascertain whether there was an increase in Teaching Assistants teaching RE within schools in Thurrock. Sadly the investigation conducted by the associate adviser was inconclusive since not all schools responded to the original survey carried out by SACRE.

Since that time however, following further responses from schools within the borough and a follow up from the Associate RE Adviser, it was now evident that Thurrock was bucking the trend and had more teachers teaching RE and a smaller proportion of adults other than teachers were teaching RE than was the case nationally.

Through discussions, it was debated as to whether to schools understood the question that had been asked as one school answered by indicating that when a teacher was absent then RE would be covered by a General Teaching Assistant, which equated to 33% of the time.

It was also agreed during the council discussions that point 3.1 be removed from the report as it was deemed irrelevant.

Resolved:

That SACRE Discuss the potential impact of using adults other than teachers to deliver RE on the quality of provision and consider their response to schools in relation to this matter.

7. Annual Report

The Associate Adviser for Religious Education introduced the report to the Committee explaining that the components throughout the year. Councillor Ojetola had offered to present the Annual Report to Full Council.

Mr Griffith enquired if it was possible to make any amendments to the report. The Associate Adviser confirmed that amendments could still be made; however the report was the Annual Report 2013-2014 so any amendments would need to be historical.

It was noted that the only amendments needed were fully name St Cleres School and Stanford–Le–Hope Primary School. The Chair, suggested that it would be interesting to see as to whether the local schools followed the agreed syllabus or their own. It was agreed that the associate RE Adviser would contact the schools within the report to seek which syllabus they follow and would report back to the next meeting.

Resolved:

- **That SACRE accept this report as an accurate record of its work in the year 2013-2014.**

- That Councillor Ojetola be asked to present the report to the full council meeting in September

The meeting finished at 7.20 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

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14 October 2015	ITEM: 5
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education	
A New settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Deborah Weston: Associate Adviser for Religious Education	
Accountable Head of Service: Roger Edwardson - Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Children, Education & Families	
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton - Director of Children's Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This pamphlet was launched in the House of Lords in July 2015 by Professor Linda Woodhead and Charles Clarke of Lancaster University. It considers the question of whether the current legal requirements for RE are fit for purpose in 2015.

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

That SACRE discuss the recommendations of the report in relation to the Thurrock context.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The pamphlet arises from the research and debate carried out by the Westminster Faith Debates and the Religion and Society Research programme which gave rise to them.
- 2.2 This report was presented to SACRE at their 15 July 2015 meeting; it was decided to bring the report back to SACRE for further consideration.
- 2.3 The pamphlet was previously circulated to all Members.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 It is difficult to draw conclusions when only 30% of the data has been returned but early indications are positive. SACRE might opt to continue to encourage schools to respond to the request for information or decide to act on this

sample of data.

- 3.2 The risk of writing to schools with incomplete data is that the conclusions might lack credibility in the minds of those who we wish to influence. However, the challenge of increasing the response-rate must not be under-estimated due to demands on the time of Head teachers.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 In order to carry out its statutory duties, SACRE needs to be informed of current research in relation to Religious Education and schools and to consider its implications for Thurrock Schools.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Not applicable

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager

There are no Financial Implications within this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lucinda Bell**
Education Lawyer

This report requests consideration of recommendations. No decision is required. There are no legal comments.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

Several recommendations in this report relate to questions of equality, especially whether or not people with non-religious belief are treated equally in relation to religious education in schools and in the structures that support it such as SACRE.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 NASACRE Briefing - A New settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools

Report Author:

Deborah Weston

Associate Adviser for RE

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NASACRE briefing

A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools

NASACRE's role

It is not the role of NASACRE to predetermine the discussions of individual SACREs which may have wide and varied opinions on the issues raised by the proposals of Rt. Hon Charles Clarke and Prof Linda Woodhead. In the 2014 survey of members, though, SACREs were clear that NASACRE had a role in being an advocate for SACREs with government. The changes proposed would not see an end to SACREs per se but they would have a significant impact on what SACREs do and what statutory powers, if any, they would retain. Hence, this briefing paper sets out the issues as seen by NASACRE to help individual SACREs make their own response. It is important to recognise that there is no formal consultation on the proposals set out at the moment, despite its launch in Parliament. SACREs will need to have thoroughly discussed these proposals, though, before any such process takes place – given that consultation periods for statutory change often happen over a short period of time and may fall between SACRE meetings in some authorities.

What are the issues that SACREs should be discussing?

On 15th June, 2015, Rt. Hon Charles Clarke and Professor Linda Woodhead launched **A New Settlement: Religion and Belief in Schools** (the full document is available on the NASACRE website) as part of the Westminster Faith Debates in the House of Lords under the sponsorship of Lord Sutherland. The briefing paper focuses on three issues:

1. Collective Worship
2. Religious Education
3. Faith Schools

Salient recommendations

Act of Collective Worship

[1] The current requirement in statute for an Act of Collective Worship should be abolished, and the decision about the form and character of school assemblies should be left to the governors of individual schools. Schools should be required to set out their statement and strategy for promoting Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education, with school community assemblies as an important part of that strategy, upon which they would be inspected by OFSTED. The government should provide non-statutory guidance to help achieve this. (p63-4)

Comment

Whilst this proposal, if taken seriously by government, would not stop SACREs from offering advice and guidance in this area it would mean that there would be no role for SACREs in matters such as Determinations, which are required by the Education Act 1996.

SACREs may wish to ask the questions:

- How would the government ensure that individual schools and academies would take this new arrangement seriously if they are not taking the current settlement seriously, according to the report?
- How would it ensure that governing bodies acted with due diligence in relation to the ethos of such assemblies and their delivery so as not to be accused of pursuing a narrow or partisan agenda?
- If some schools or academies continued to have an act of collective worship as part of any assembly, especially in light of their foundation documents, would parents still have the right to withdraw their child from such assemblies?

Agreed Syllabuses

[3] The Religious Education syllabus in county and voluntary controlled schools should no longer be set by a system of agreed local syllabuses, but by an agreed national syllabus which would have a similar legal status to the requirements of other subjects in the National Curriculum.

[4] The nationally-agreed syllabus would be determined by the Secretary of State in agreement with a newly created 'National Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (NASACRE)' comprising experts on religion and education, and after formal consultation and input from the relevant established professional bodies and representatives of religions, humanism and other belief systems. This nationally-agreed syllabus should be reviewed every 5/7 years. (p.64)

Comment

Local authorities would no longer have to convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference to review a syllabus and all locally agreed syllabuses would become void at the point of a nationally agreed syllabus being put in place. There is a question, though, as to the point of a nationally agreed syllabus which would have a similar status to the National Curriculum when, increasingly, schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum due to the Academisation programme being pursued by the government; although that also applies to locally agreed syllabuses as well.

The key questions for local SACREs would be:

- Given that the religious make-up of different parts of the United Kingdom is so diverse, how would a national document allow for a study of 'the local' in RE?
- Would the delivery of a national syllabus for RE be a requirement of any funding agreement between the DfE, EFA and academy chains or individual academies and free schools in light of the proposed removal of the parental right of withdrawal?

In terms of [4] there would be questions about how a national SACRE would be appointed and how a judgement would be made in terms of expertise in a particular religion or belief. Given the diverse nature of religious traditions and beliefs, who would be seen as an adequate voice for any one tradition? There is also question of which religions should be represented and how that decision would be made. In this model the Secretary of State would be exercising the judgment of Solomon. In terms of the proposed name it may be worth suggesting that this be a National Agreed Syllabus Conference (NASC) as opposed to the current suggestion. It would certainly clarify the function of the body. Agreed Syllabus Conferences are covered by Schedule 31 of the Education Act 1996, would similar requirements be made of the national body? Currently, all four Committees have to agree to the syllabus and a vote against or abstention by one Committee acts as a veto. Therefore, in the new proposed body would one Committee or group be allowed to veto the whole process?

Put more simply there are three questions that arise from the proposal:

- How would a decision be made as to which religions would be required to be taught as part of the National Agreed Syllabus and which non-religious belief systems should be included?
- How would experts who would share the confidence of the broad spectrum of traditions from within each religion and non-religious world view be appointed to such a body?
- Would any one 'committee' or 'group' have a veto over the whole process as currently happens in local agreed syllabus conferences? If so how would disputes be resolved?

SACREs

[11] The local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs) are given a new role which includes participating in the consultations about the content of the national RE curriculum, helping local implementation of the national RE syllabus, promoting community cohesion and educating for diversity, and advising on local availability of religious instruction. The Local Authority too can use the guidance when it goes through discussions about whether to adopt the syllabus recommended or not. If the syllabus varies widely from the guidance LAs have the right to ask why. In this case members of Committee D of the ASC are crucial as they are the LA representatives on the ASC. If they cannot answer that question the quality of the work of the ASC can be rightly called into question. (p.65)

Comment

The proposal is not to get rid of local SACREs but to see their role as being transformed. Clearly, SACREs will be involved in the consultation process about a national Agreed Syllabus but how they would exercise their functions otherwise is not clear. The key question has to be: how would SACREs themselves respond to this re-visioning of their role?

Of course SACREs currently have the role of supporting RE by having links with local initial teacher training providers, supporting CPD for teachers and recommending (or not) resources for schools to use to support the locally agreed syllabus. Would this role be retained by SACREs or would it pass to the government?

Key questions would be:

- To what extent would a SACRE be allowed to hold its local authority, schools and academies to account in ensuring pupils receive high quality religious education according to a national syllabus?
- Would any such role conflict with that of Ofsted?

What is not clear

The document does not make clear the next steps to be taken or what could be achieved by when in terms of a timetable. If government is going to re-look at the 1944 settlement for RE and collective worship, as reformed in 1988, there will be need to change primary legislation. This would involve widespread consultation, including SACREs and the other partners in RE and collective worship, such as the RE Council, the Church of England, other Christian denominations and other religious traditions as well as with teachers and their organisations. As this was not in the Queen's speech 2015 it would be at least another year before this could be progressed. Nevertheless, if there is appetite for change, the question is: will this new settlement satisfy that appetite?

Similarly, there is a proposal to remove the parental right to withdrawal if the recommendations in the briefing paper are adopted (Proposal 8). What is not clear is

how this would work in practice if not all schools or academies had to adopt a new nationally Agreed Syllabus. This could lead to confusion as to why some parents did have the right to withdraw and others did not. Therefore, SACREs might like to ask the question:

- If the right to withdraw from RE was removed in schools following a nationally agreed syllabus what would be the arrangements for schools and academies not following such a syllabus?

As with much legislation the devil is often in the detail.

Helping NASACRE respond to the proposals

It would be helpful if SACREs could give some time to the proposals set out, although there are more points in the briefing that may attract comment from SACRE members. When SACREs have considered a response it would be useful if they could be sent to NASACRE to ensure that its own position reflects that of the membership when speaking to government. As there is no current timetable of events it is difficult to know by what point this would be needed, nevertheless all SACREs should have had an opportunity to consider the proposals put forward by Rt. Hon Charles Clarke and Prof Linda Woodhead and respond to them by the end of the Autumn term 2015. Responses can be sent to NASACRE at secretary@nasacre.org.uk

A clarification

At times the document refers to NASACRE and means the current organisation of that name; at other times it refers to a National SACRE [as in (4) above]. In the latter case this is a typo that was not corrected before publication. As long as there is a National Association of SACREs the abbreviation NASACRE will relate only to that body.

The questions

Collective Worship:

- How would the government ensure that individual schools and academies would take this new arrangement seriously if they are not, according to the report, taking the current settlement seriously?
- How would it ensure that governing bodies acted with due diligence in relation to the ethos of such assemblies and their delivery so as not to be accused of pursuing a narrow or partisan agenda?
- If some schools or academies continued to have an act of collective worship as part of any assembly, especially in light of their foundation documents, would parents still have the right to withdraw their child from such assemblies?

Agreed Syllabuses:

- Given that the religious make-up of different parts of the United Kingdom is so diverse, how would a national document allow for a study of 'the local' in RE?

- Would the delivery of a national syllabus for RE be a requirement of any funding agreement between the DfE, EFA and academy chains or individual academies and free schools in light of the proposed removal of the parental right of withdrawal?
- How would a decision be made as to which religions would be required to be taught as part of the National Agreed Syllabus and which non-religious belief systems should be included?
- How would experts who would share the confidence of the broad spectrum of traditions from within each religion and non-religious world view be appointed to such a body?
- Would any one 'committee' or 'group' have a veto over the whole process as currently happens in local agreed syllabus conferences? If so how would disputes be resolved?

SACREs:

- To what extent would a SACRE be allowed to hold its local authority, schools and academies to account in ensuring pupils receive high quality religious education according to a national syllabus?
- Would any such role conflict with that of Ofsted?

The parental right to withdraw from RE

- If the right to withdraw from RE were removed in schools following a nationally agreed syllabus what would be the arrangements for schools and academies not following such a syllabus?