

Minutes of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

04/06/2025 – MS Teams/Committee Room 4 Civic Suite

Present

Name	Role/Representative	Initials
Bev Petch (Chair)	Chair	BP
Donna Grosvenor (Vice-Chair)	Teacher, St Mary & St Margaret's CE Primary School	DG
David Harris	Education adviser – Catholic schools	DH
Cecil Knight	Methodist Church representative	CK
Rabbi Yehuda Pink	Jewish Community	RP
Claire Potts	School Adviser Solihull MBC (Observer)	CP
Austin Rodriguez	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	AR
Councillor Wazma Qais	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	Cllr WQ
Councillor Alison Williams	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	Cllr AW

Apologies

Ian Carnell	Birmingham Diocese and United Reformed Church	IC
Michael Lancashire	Humanist representative	ML
Cllr Sardul Marwa	Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council	Cllr SM
Paul Wilkinson	Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints	PW

Consent was sought and given by attendees for today's meeting to be recorded.

Welcome and introductions

BP welcomed members to her last meeting as Chair of SACRE and informed everyone that she would be retiring from Solihull MBC at the end of August.

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 26/03/2025

- **Hindu representative:** CK has now identified a potential Hindu representative for SACRE.

Action: CP to follow up and make contact.

- **New agreed syllabus:** BP sent the link to all schools before the launch on 9 April.
- KES distributed the annual report and self-evaluation to all members.

BP introduced Austin Rodriguez, Head of Stronger Communities (SMBC), and asked him to talk a bit about his role, the work he does, and its intersectionality with SACRE.

AR provided a general overview of how the Council works with faith communities and how his team's work overlaps with SACRE. The team has been reviewing relationships within the faith sector and faith communities, and how the Council should engage with different stakeholders, recognising the rapidly changing population in some parts of the borough. He noted that the relationship between the Council and faith communities has primarily been through the well-established faith forum in Solihull. The Council has also recently renewed their faith covenant.

With funding from the MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), his team has been working with the faith forum to review the Council's relationships around faith. One outcome was identifying the number of people in the borough who want to become more involved in community and social action, motivated by their faith, in areas such as homelessness, child poverty, and food. Unfortunately, the Council currently lacks a way to support this facility.

However, his team has now developed a new faith covenant, which sets out their commitments and shared values between the Council and the faith sectors/communities. They are in the process of the Council formally adopting this document.

The conversation with the faith forum is a long-term piece, always aiming to promote mutual respect and dialogue between different faiths. Considering the changing context for Solihull, including its changing population and increased connection to national and international events, there is a renewed focus on community cohesion, particularly around community tensions and leadership in the west of the borough.

These three strands represent the work the team will support with various faith groups and communities. This also means they have numerous contacts in places of worship and many community volunteers, including those who volunteer as leaders.

Additionally, SACRE is now part of the faith covenant, which was not the case before. This inclusion shows the Council's commitment to working with the faith sector and communities. For this group, it means there are additional routes for reaching out to different parts of the community or understanding what's happening in the faith sector and communities through AR's team.

BP said that the SACRE is committed to working together to ensure that children and young people in the Solihull family of schools receive their entitlement to high quality religious education and also serve in terms of principles and commitments.

AR informed members that his team will present to the scrutiny board annually to review progress and reflect on Solihull's context and amend the covenant if needed.

BP talked about the potential for someone from AR's team joining the SACRE and AR said he was happy to attend today's meeting and will liaise with his team regarding future meetings.

Action: AR to liaise with his team.

Cllr AW asked AR if there is a connection between local, international and local community cohesion in the covenant.

AR replied that the document aims to be concise and easy to refer to. The focus will be on working with faith communities and maintaining high-level principles due to the fluid nature of the current environment.

Reflections on the new agreed syllabus launch

BP reflected on the launch of the new agreed syllabus which took place 9 April. The morning was focused on primary schools and the afternoon focused on secondary schools. Special schools could either attend the morning or afternoon, or both, so that addressed the whole range of age groups during the day.

She felt that there was a palpable sense of excitement during the online meeting, even though people weren't in the same room. Ian Nicholson, the RE national advisor with RE Today and author of the agreed syllabus had exceeded expectations. Many have praised the syllabus and asked when they will receive their copies. However, BP emphasised that some schools are not entitled to free copies due to their type of school. Schools not legally required to teach in accordance with the agreed syllabus or, in accordance with any Trust deed, may purchase a five-year licence, valid until 2030. BP had recently had an interesting email conversation with a school which has inadequate RE provision. They had appreciated her feedback and have now decided to buy the agreed syllabus, moving from no RE to a comprehensive programme.

She informed members that she has written a briefing paper on the new agreed syllabus to take the senior leadership team next week, with the recommendation that the local authority formally adopt and approve the new agreed syllabus.

She also said to fulfil legal responsibilities, members should formally vote to recommend the Council adopt the new agreed syllabus. CK had proposed the recommendation, and there were no objections. This formal adoption is crucial to avoid any potential legal challenges in the future.

DG asked the Chair if SACRE should inform schools through headlines that the Council had formally approved the proposal. She felt this would emphasise its importance and encourage usage. BP agreed with this suggestion.

Action: BP to confirm in Headlines once the LA has formally adopted and approved the agreed syllabus.

There was a lot of discussion concerning the licences that are currently being used and voluntary aided schools. DG challenged BP around VA schools having to pay for their licences to give them access to the new agreed syllabus. BP said that voluntary aided schools must teach according to the school's Trust deed, and this is the legal position. She said that an article had been published in headlines that went to schools on 15 May which included documents about the requirements for different schools.

She suggested meeting separately with DG outside the meeting to discuss this item further. However, the legal requirements remain and must be adhered to.

Succession planning for the role of Chair

After 27 years of working for Solihull MBC, BP will be retiring at the end of August. KES had sent to members the NASACRE document around the role of the SACRE Chair.

BP said that the first paragraph talked about the appointment of staff for a chair, and the right of the local authority to appoint. However, should the local authority decide not to exercise this right, SACRE can appoint their own chair. She said that this needed to be a local agreement and the process of the appointment to chair needed to be carefully outlined.

DG suggested that having the new chair from the local authority would be beneficial as they could go “behind the scenes” and can make quicker decisions.

BP asked members if they had any concerns about the local authority appointing a new Chair for SACRE as she has a proposal in mind but hadn't discussed it with the necessary people yet. If members were happy for her to proceed, she will consult with them and get back to the group as soon as possible.

Action: BP to share details of new Chair with members.

Regarding collective worship guidance, KES sent examples from three local authority SACREs. In the Chair's opinion, the Leeds guidance is very simple and appealing, Lewisham's is attracting, and the Newham's guidance is too detailed and lengthy. She suggested creating something like the Leeds' guidance and would discuss this further with Alistair Ross from Leeds Council.

Action: BP to contact Alistair Ross, Leeds Council.

Small task and finish group

BP suggested forming a sub-committee of 3 or 4 members, to review examples and to draft guidance by the end of June or early July, aiming for it to be adopted in September and asked if anyone willing to join this group. CP, DH and CK put their names forward to join the sub-group.

BP said she would identify some dates by the end of the week and see if any of them coincide with everyone's availability. It could be a series of short meetings, or a more focused meeting of an hour and a half to two hours. She thanked those who had offered their availability.

Action: BP to send around dates for potential sub-group meetings.

Date of next meetings: schedule for 2025-2026 academic year

BP informed members that once the charring arrangements had been secured, a schedule of meetings will be arranged for the next academic year.

Urgent business

Agreed syllabus availability

BP stated that, with the new agreed syllabus now available, schools are currently in the process of integrating it. This syllabus includes clear curriculum outcomes and endpoints for each unit of learning, which is a significant improvement over the previous version. BP hoped that maintained schools will start using the new syllabus from September; this is the intention.

According to the DfE, all schools must publish their curriculum content for each academic year, including mandatory subjects like religious education, even if taught under a different name. Schools must also inform parents and carers of their right to withdraw their child from RE. The syllabus and support materials from RE Today are copyrighted, but the syllabus itself must be accessible on the schools' and Council's website. The authority needs to resolve this issue with RE Today to meet legal responsibilities.

BP to contact Chris Hooper at RE Today to address the issue of publishing the syllabus online, as other local authorities have done. There is also confusion around whether schools need to pay for the syllabus or just the support materials from RE Today.

Action: BP to contact Chris Hooper from RE Today.

Before the meeting closed, CK said he would like to interrupt on behalf of all the members of SACRE, both present via the screen and in person to thank the Chair for all the enthusiasm she had put into leading SACRE over the last couple of years and the inspiration she had provided. He wished BP a fulfilling and happy retirement.

The meeting closed at 17:45.

I confirm that these minutes are a true and accurate representation of the SACRE meeting.



Bev Petch, Chair of Solihull SACRE, 26/03/2025