

# North Yorkshire Council

## North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Notes of the informal meeting held on Tuesday, 21 April 2026 commencing at 4.00 pm.

Group A: Christian Denominations and such other religious denominations as, in the Authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area: Professor John Adams (Humanists)\*, Sarah Beveridge (Society of Friends).

Group B: Church of England: Lee Talbot, Revd Claire Soderman.

Group D: North Yorkshire Council: Councillors Alyson Baker (Chair)\*, Janet Jefferson, Simon Myers, and Annabel Wilkinson.

Officers present: Stuart Anslow (Senior Education Adviser Monitoring), Edward Maxwell (Clerk to SACRE), Julie Pattison (Principal Education Adviser Monitoring), and Olivia Seymour (Principal RE Adviser).

Other Attendees: Councillor Andrew Timothy.

Apologies: Councillor Robert Heseltine, Hayden Cohen, Nasr Moussa Emam and Sarah Hodgson.

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**Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book**

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### **127 Quoracy**

The Chair noted that no members of Group C were present and, in accordance with the SACRE Constitution, the meeting was therefore inquorate and could not be convened as a formal meeting. It was agreed that the meeting would proceed on an informal basis, with notes taken. With the agreement of members present, it was noted that any comments or minor actions arising from the informal discussion would be reported to and, where necessary, confirmed at the next quorate meeting.

### **128 Welcome and Announcements**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting, and acknowledged important faith observances taking place recently or in the near future, including Wesak, Easter, and Passover.

### **129 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Hayden Cohen and Nasr Moussa Emam (Group A), Sarah Hodgson (Group C), and Councillor Robert Heseltine (Group D).

### **130 Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 9 December 2025**

As the meeting was not quorate, consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting was deferred to the next meeting.

### **131 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **132 Public Participation**

There were no public questions or statements.

### **133 Member Training - Monitoring**

The Committee received a training presentation which revisited the statutory role of SACRE, with particular emphasis on how members may assure themselves of the standards of Religious Education and collective worship in North Yorkshire schools. It was noted that SACRE has a legal duty to advise the local authority on RE in accordance with the Agreed Syllabus and on collective worship, and that effective oversight requires an understanding of how the syllabus is being interpreted and implemented in different school contexts. The presentation outlined current sources of evidence available to SACRE, including annual school questionnaires, inspection information, examination and workforce data, professional adviser reports, and presentations from schools, while also emphasising the distinction between compliance monitoring and celebrating the wider educational impact of RE.

Discussion focused on whether SACRE currently has sufficient direct insight into practice in schools. It was acknowledged that opportunities for school visits and direct engagement with pupils and staff had reduced in recent years, particularly following the move to virtual meetings. Members reflected on the value of previous visits in reinforcing SACRE's understanding of lived experience in schools and validating the Committee's work within the wider education community. Members emphasised that any renewed programme of visits should be clearly positioned as supportive and developmental, rather than judgemental, and distinct from local authority school improvement activity. The importance of effective communication with schools about SACRE's role and purpose was highlighted.

The Committee supported further exploration of school visits as a means of strengthening SACRE's understanding of RE provision and collective worship. It was agreed that a small-scale "test and learn" approach would be taken, involving volunteer schools and a limited number of SACRE members working in partnership with local authority officers. This would enable visit protocols, questions and documentation to be trialled and refined before any wider rollout. It was noted that this work would inform future consideration of longer-term arrangements, including potential member-school links, and would support the development of more evidence-rich annual reporting and targeted support for schools.

**Agreed:** That:

- a) The training be noted, and the Professional RE Adviser be thanked for presenting it.
- b) That the results of any initial tests be reported back to the future meetings of SACRE.

### **134 Member Presentation**

It was agreed that, due to the absence of the member presenting this item, it be deferred to a future meeting.

### **135 Update by the Professional Religious Education Adviser**

The Committee received the Professional Adviser's update, which highlighted recent activity since the previous meeting, including subject networks and training for RE leads. It was noted that some planned training had not proceeded due to low take-up, reflecting wider pressures on schools locally and nationally, although those sessions that did run continued to provide opportunities for professional dialogue and sharing effective practice. The Adviser also referred members to updates on national developments affecting RE.

Members were updated on significant national work arising from the Curriculum and Assessment Review, including extensive sector engagement led by Dr. Vanessa Ogden and draft programmes of study submitted to the Secretary of State. It was noted that recommendations included consideration of Religious Education becoming a national curriculum subject, alongside a proposed enhanced role for SACREs, particularly in relation to community cohesion and support for schools. Members were also informed of the Government's *Protecting What Matters* policy paper, which identified Religious Education, religious literacy and SACREs as contributing to social cohesion. It was recognised that the implications of these developments, including timescales and legislative changes, remain subject to ministerial response.

The Committee discussed the potential implications of national policy change, including the continued importance of local context, engagement with schools and faith communities, and the future role of SACRE regardless of any change in the legal status of RE. Members noted the significance of the current period for RE nationally and welcomed the Adviser's commitment to provide further updates as information becomes available.

**Agreed:** That the report be noted.

### **136 Update by the Local Authority**

The Committee received an update from the Local Authority on activity since the previous meeting. It was noted that SACRE communications to schools had continued, including the distribution of Ramadan guidance, and that the SACRE Annual Report had been presented to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members were informed of positive feedback received from councillors on the breadth and quality of the report, together with comments relating to GCSE outcomes data and the relatively low response rate from secondary schools to the RE survey. It was noted that officers would seek to increase engagement from secondary schools with completing the survey during the current term.

An update was provided on recent Ofsted inspection activity within North Yorkshire. Members noted that only a small number of inspection reports had been published during the period covered, reflecting delays in Ofsted signing off and publishing the inspection reports. Extracts from published reports were highlighted, including positive references to pupils' retention and understanding of knowledge about worldviews in some schools, alongside areas for development in others. The Committee thanked officers for the ongoing monitoring of inspection outcomes and for keeping members informed.

**Agreed:** That the report be noted.

### **137 SACRE Development Plan 2024-26**

The Clerk presented the report and highlighted the actions which had been discussed, and how they contributed to Objective 2 of the Development Plan.

**Agreed:** That the report be noted.

**138 Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting, on Tuesday 16 June at 16:00, was noted.

Members were reminded that it would be an in-person meeting, at County Hall, with refreshments available from 15:00 to 16:00, and after the meeting closed. The Chair hoped that as many members as possible could join for the meeting, and looked forward to the opportunity to meet face to face.

Meeting closed at 17:20