

# North Yorkshire Council

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

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 19th September, 2023 commencing at 5.00 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 (Humanist), Hayden Cohen (Judaism), Chris Devanny (Catholic), Nasr Moussa Emam (Muslim), and Abhijeet Kulkarni (Hindu).

Group B: Church of England: N/a

Group C: Teachers Associations: Tara Askew, Jo Colledge, and Sarah Hodgson.

Group D: North Yorkshire Council: Councillors Robert Heseltine and George Jabbour (Chair).

Officers Present: Patrick Duffy, (Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer); Owen Griffiths, (Corporate Governance Officer); Julie Pattison (Principal Education Adviser - Monitoring); Heather Russell, (Senior Education Adviser); and Olivia Seymour, (Professional Religious Education Advisor).

Apologies: Councillor Alyson Baker, Tom Clayton, David Haddock, Councillor Janet Jefferson, Gill Simpson, Philippa Smith, Lee Talbot and Councillor Annabel Wilkinson

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

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#### **14 Election of Chair and Vice-Chair**

The meeting was introduced by Owen Griffiths, in his role of Clerk, to introduce the election of the Chair and the Vice-Chair. The meeting was not quorate however, owing to no attendance from the Church of England representatives, and the item had to be deferred to the next meeting.

Councillor Jabbour stepped in as Chair for the meeting as both Councillor Baker and Sarah Beveridge, the present Chair and Vice-Chair, had both sent apologies.

#### **15 Welcome and Announcements**

The Chair welcomed people to the meeting. The Chair particularly welcomed Hayden Cohen, as the new representative for Judaism, and Julie Pattison, as the new Principal Education Adviser.

#### **16 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received by Councillor Alyson Baker, Tom Clayton, David Haddock, Councillor Janet Jefferson, Gill Simpson, Philippa Smith, Lee Talbot, and Councillor Annabel Wilkinson.

#### **17 Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 June**

The minutes of the last meeting could not be agreed as a true account of the previous

meeting as the meeting was not quorate.

## **18 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **19 Public Participation**

There were no public questions.

## **20 Member Presentation by Professor John Adams**

Considered a presentation by Professor John Adams, a Humanist Faith Group Representative. By way of background, the Committee's Development Plan for 2022/2024 contains the action: Implement a programme of Member presentations at each SACRE meeting with a focus on Member work/community involvement and how it links into SACRE. This presentation was the third of these.

Professor Adams set out to share more about Humanism and his background within it. He did this in three sections:

1. How he got involved within it.
2. What Humanism is.
3. Questions and Discussion.

- 1) Professor Adams shared that many Humanists first become involved within the organisation through attending ceremonies, and that was also how he became involved, through a non-religious funeral for his father. That involvement within the organisation then became greater after retiring, and it was shared that he was now the Treasurer of the organisation.

Professor Adams then said that the organisation had more than 100,000 members and read a list of famous names who were part of it. Alongside ceremonies it was shown that the Humanists also offer pastoral care, apostate support for those fleeing religious, and working on human rights campaigns.

- 2) Professor Adams then provided insight to what Humanism actually is. Although the roots of Humanism can be seen in ancient times, with both Socrates and Erasmus being historical advocates, the modern foundation of the term is simply the conviction that it is possible to lead a good life of liberal values without superstition. This was explained in three points:

- A) The denial of the Supernatural. The world can be explained through reason and evidence. Humans, as a species, can explain the world that they live in, and these explanations continue to expand.
- B) Religion is culturally determined. Professor Adams shared that humanists would say that religion is a social construct, that mirrors the culture that it exists within in. As a result, the number of gods across anthropological time has been estimated to be around 10,000.
- C) Therefore, because of the first two points, moral precepts come from society. Reality is human and is socially constructed within the framework of what has been taught and understood.

- 3) Professor Adams provided room for questions to be asked. Nasr Moussa Emam said that it was very interesting and asked for the presentation to be shared in full. Hayden Cohen also said that it was very interesting

and said that he looked forward to many future discussions over the meetings to come.

The Chair thanked Professor Adams for his presentation and said it would be good for these to continue. Hayden Cohen said that he could do one at the next meeting.

## **21 North Yorkshire Council SACRE Draft Annual Report 2022-23**

Considered a report by the Senior Education Adviser, Heather Russell, on the draft annual report 2022-23.

Questions were asked about:

- How the data has been presented.
- Collective worship and whether it would be worth noting that it has been discussed at previous SACRE meetings.
- Whether Jewish people might be uncomfortable with how the questions have been framed in the religion and faith section, particularly with its ethno-religious element. In response to this, the Principal Education Adviser (Monitoring) said that the framing of the data for those questions was dependent on who answered the data and was reflective of that.

NOTED.

## **22 Update from Professional Religious Education Adviser**

Considered a report by the Professional Religious Education Adviser, Olivia Seymour, informing Members of work undertaken since the last meeting, together with local and national updates regarding Religious Education. The report provided details on the following issues:

- SACRE Newsletter – the timeline of this had to be expanded so that the Agreed Syllabus Conference could help to inform the content.
- Data – The national picture from exam results was provided to the group, with the local datasets forthcoming.
- The Department for Education have been asked to address the shortage of people training to become RE teachers.

NOTED.

## **23 Update from the Local Authority**

For the benefit of those who had not been at the Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting, ahead of this meeting, the Chair provided a quick summary. More volunteers will be needed for the launch report that will be provided to educational leaders. The Professional Religious Education Adviser shared that the launch of the Agreed Syllabus Conference will be the 14 June 2024 and it would be good for as many Members to attend as possible.

After this, a report was considered by the Principal Education Adviser (Monitoring) which updated Members on the work undertaken by the Local Authority since the last meeting.

The main point highlighted was that the methodology of how Ofsted inspections are analysed has been reconfigured towards a greater emphasis on personal development. These figures went back to March to provide a larger pool of data.

During this item Councillor Heseltine had to leave the meeting and said “God Bless” before leaving. Professor John Adams asked “Which one?” The Chair, Councillor Jabbour, told Professor Adams that his remark was not in line with the level of respect that was expected between the different Members. Professor Adams disagreed with the Chair’s rebuttal.

NOTED.

## **24 Work Programme**

The Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer gave an update on the work programme for SACRE. The programme provided in the agenda provided the relevant official items and members can suggest future items that could be considered.

## **25 SACRE Self-Assessment Tool- Report of the Working Party**

The Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer, Patrick Duffy, provided information on the SACRE self-assessment toolkit. The tool kit is based on 5 criteria and allows for the SACRE to evaluate its performance and seek to improve its performance.

The first of these assessments took place on 5 September and was undertaken by the Officers and Professor John Adams, Cllr Alyson Baker, and Abhijeet Kulkarni. The focus of the first working party was around the second aim:

*“How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, evaluate standards and the quality of provision for RE in schools? How effective are the strategies to improve standards and the quality of provision?”*

The feedback from the working party was that the SACRE was doing well in many of the areas highlighted by the second aim but there were areas of improvement, particularly between SACRE itself and schools.

Patrick Duffy then provided room for members who were not present at the working party to provide comment. He also shared two ways in which the committee could proceed with the other 4 criteria:

- Continue in the format of the last working party, drawing upon volunteers for each individual criterion, or;
- Can use part of the SACRE Committee meeting to discuss one criterion and split into different groups to do this.

NOTED.

## **26 Any Other Items**

Hayden Cohen told the committee that on 27 January, the Harrogate Synagogue would be holding an event to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. All of the committee members are invited but he asked that people let him know in advance so that the number of people going could be accounted for.

There being no further items of business, the meeting ended at 6:08 pm.

## **27 Dates of Next Meetings**

The dates of the next meetings were provided to the group.  
These would be:

- 12 December 2023 at 4pm.
- 9 April 2024 at 4pm.