

North Yorkshire Council

North Yorkshire Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12th December 2023 at 4.00 p.m.

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), Sarah Beveridge* (Society of Friends), Tom Clayton* (Methodist), Hayden Cohen (Judaism), Abhijeet Kulkarni* (Hindu), David Haddock* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Nasr Moussa Emam* (Muslim) and Mohinder Singh Chana* (Sikh)

Group B: Church of England: Philippa Smith* and Reverend Claire Soderman (Diocese of York) and Lee Talbot* (Diocese of Leeds)

Group C: Teachers Associations: Jo Colledge* and Sarah Hodgson*

Group D: Local Authority: Councillors Alyson Baker, George Jabbour, Janet Jefferson* and Annabel Wilkinson*

Officers present: Patrick Duffy (Principal Democratic Services Scrutiny Officer), Julie Pattison (Principal Adviser, Monitoring), Heather Russell (Senior Education Adviser) and Olivia Seymour* (Professional Religious Education Adviser)

In attendance for part of the meeting: Daniel Harry, Head of Democratic Services

*Denotes joined remotely

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

28. Election of Chair

The Clerk advised that the current Chair, Councillor Alyson Baker, had indicated that she would be prepared to continue in the role. No other nominations had been received for the post of Chair.

Members confirmed they were happy to agree to Councillor Baker continuing as Chair.

Resolved –

That Councillor Alyson Baker be elected as Chair of SACRE until the SACRE meeting in September 2024.

Councillor Alyson Baker in the Chair.

29. Election of Vice-Chair

The Chair advised that the current Vice-Chair, Sarah Beveridge, had indicated that she would be prepared to continue in the role. No other nominations had been received for the post of Vice-Chair.

Members confirmed they were happy to agree to Sarah Beveridge continuing as Vice-Chair.

Resolved –

That Sarah Beveridge be elected as Vice-Chair of SACRE until the SACRE meeting in September 2024.

30. Welcome

The Chair welcomed people to the meeting. It was noted that Reverend Claire Soderman had been appointed as a representative of the Church of England (York Diocese).

31. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:-

- Tara Askew
- Councillor Robert Heseltine

32. Minutes of the meeting on 20th June 2023

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

There were no matters arising.

33. Minutes of the meeting on 19th September 2023

Professor John Adams stated that he disagreed with the accuracy of the Minutes in two respects:-

- a) Minute No. 20, Member Presentation by Professor John Adams
Professor Adams advised that this contained errors which could easily have been checked with him and corrected. He suggested a way forward would be to attach his presentation (which had been sent to Members separately, following the meeting) to the Minutes as an Appendix. Members agreed with this suggestion.
- b) His main concern, however, related to the final paragraph in Minute No. 23, Update from the Local Authority

Professor Adams commented that where it says "Professor Adams disagreed with the Chair's rebuttal", he had said much more than that. Professor Adams felt that his comment was perfectly reasonable. He felt that the admonishment by Councillor Jabbour, who had chaired the meeting, belittled him and was a slur.

Professor Adams proposed that either the paragraph concerned be removed or be replaced by a form of wording he could suggest. Nasr Moussa Emam seconded this.

Councillor Jabbour maintained that his response to the comment made was appropriate. His issue was that the comment was accompanied by sniggering.

A number of Faith Group Representatives said they agreed with the suggestion by Professor Adams to remove the paragraph concerned, as there is no need for it to be included. They felt that its inclusion did not serve any purpose.

The Clerk advised that Minutes are intended to provide an accurate record of the meeting. In the circumstances, if Members feel it would be best to remove that paragraph that would be reasonable.

At this stage Daniel Harry, Head of Democratic Services, joined the meeting. He advised that for any Member to be able to propose, second or vote upon any matter they have to be present in person. This is in accordance with the Council's Constitution. Therefore, it will not be possible to approve the Minutes as this meeting is not quorate.

Olivia Seymour, Professional Religious Education Adviser, commented that this is new advice. SACRE had been operating for the last year via hybrid meetings on the understanding that Members who joined remotely could play a full part in the meeting

The Head of Democratic Services agreed to look at whether the requirement referred to can be changed in the case of SACRE.

Accordingly, it was noted that consideration and approval of the Minutes of the meeting would need to be deferred until the next meeting.

The Chair suggested that, in view of the advice above, the next meeting be held in person and at 5.00 p.m. to give Teachers more time following School.

34. Minutes of the meeting of the Agreed Syllabus Conference held on 19th September 2023

The Clerk reported that, as the meeting on 19th September had been the last meeting of the Agreed Syllabus Conference, the Minutes could not be approved as such. SACRE was asked to note them.

Professor Adams said that he had still not seen any detail of the additional syllabus or price. The Professional Religious Education Adviser confirmed that costings had been provided to Members.

NOTED.

35. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

36. Public Participation

It was confirmed that no questions or public statements had been received.

37. Member Presentation

Hayden Cohen shared with the Committee information about his faith.

The presentation is appended to these Minutes so that it can be viewed in its entirety. An outline of some of the points made by Hayden is set out below:-

- He has just recently been appointed to the Committee as a Jewish representative; this was his second meeting.
- This is now Hebrew Year 5784.
- He was born into a very typical Jewish home in North Leeds.
- In early life he had assumed that the only form of Judaism was the one that he was brought up in – but there are many strands.
- Unlike most faiths Judaism is not just a religion, but an ethnicity – one of many.
- In addition to the large groups of Jews, there are other smaller, but culturally different ethnicities, such as Yemeni Jews and Ethiopian Jews.
- Despite differences in practice, there is far more that unites Jewish people than does not.
- He is an active part of the Harrogate Hebrew Community and has been for over 30 years. It is a lovely, strong community. Since the events of 7th October 2023, that community is more united than he can ever remember. Some 70% of British Jews have friends or family in Israel.
- He has created, hosted and produced a podcast, which focuses on the UK Jewish Community, since 2018.
- Judaism has a heavy focus on annual cycles and Hayden outlined these.

At the conclusion of his presentation, Hayden referred to a Holocaust Service being held in the New Year. If anyone would like to attend, could they please let him know by the second week in January 2024.

A number of Members thanked Hayden for his presentation.

Nasr Moussa Emam asked if he and Hayden could look at working together to reduce hatred. Hayden said he would be happy to do so.

Professor Adams felt Members should note the disagreeable attacks on Jewish people since the 7th October, which are unforgivable.

Professor Adams asked Hayden what the fundamental differences are between different strands of Judaism. Hayden said that this would take some time to talk through. Therefore, he would contact Professor Adams separately.

The Chair thanked Hayden for his presentation and asked if any other Member would consider making one. Nasr Moussa Emam said that, given the closeness to Ramadan, he would be happy to make a presentation to the April 2024 meeting and added that he would like to be included in the drafting of any advice for Schools on Ramadan. The Professional Religious Education Adviser

said that she would send last year's Guidance to Schools to Nasr to see if he wished to make any changes.

Abhijeet Kulkarni volunteered to make a presentation at the meeting following the one in April 2024.

38. North Yorkshire SACRE Annual Report

Considered –

A revised draft Annual Report prepared by Heather Russell, Senior Education Officer

Prior to consideration of this Item, the Clerk advised that he had looked at the Constitution of SACRE. As stated earlier in the meeting by the Head of Democratic Services, for Council Committees only Members who are present in person can propose or second a motion and vote. However, SACRE has its own Constitution and there is a note in it that which says *Where a SACRE meeting is held remotely, "must be present" means joining the remote meeting, rather than being physically present.*

On that basis, it could be seen that this meeting of SACRE is quorate but this will be discussed further and the position clarified for Members prior to the next meeting.

The Senior Education Adviser advised that some changes had been made to the draft previously circulated. The changes were:-

- Making the data in the graphs from the Survey more readable.
- GCSE 'A' level data had been added but the local data cannot be included at this stage, as it has not yet been published. The Senior Education Adviser stated that she had raised, at the Regional NASACRE meeting in November, the issue about the Department for Education deadline being before the data is published.
- Further details of different religions had been included.
- Reference to all faith group views having been sought has been amended.

A Member commented that he was pleased to see the bar charts but was sorry there had been no change made in Collective Worship.

A Member questioned whether the total of Secondary Schools stated in one of the bar charts is correct because, further on in the Annual Report, a different figure is quoted. The Senior Education Adviser said this will be amended.

A Member pointed out that any reference to *County Councillor* should be amended to just *Councillor*.

It was noted that there is a typographical error in the word *bi-annual*.

As the Teacher Representatives were the only group not represented in person, the Chair asked those Teacher Representatives who had joined remotely, if they were happy with the content of the Annual Report. They confirmed that they were.

It was agreed that the Annual Report be approved for submission to the Department for Education, subject a) to the minor alterations referred to above and b) clarification being received as to whether or not today's meeting is quorate but that, in any event, it be noted that all four SACRE Groups have confirmed that they are happy with the content therein.

39. Update by the 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:-

- Primary RE Networks Autumn 2023
- North Yorkshire Council Literary Networks Training
- SACRE Newsletter
- National Content Standard
- OFSTED Annual Report

The Professional Religious Education Adviser highlighted the following:-

- The RE Networks take a different religious world view and look at how we can support the Agreed Syllabus.
- The National Content Standard is a significant document – it will provide a non-statutory benchmark for syllabus providers and other bodies to evaluate their work. A number of *deep dives* are being undertaken and the outcomes will be shared with SACRE
- The OFSTED Annual Report is critical of Religious Education in Schools, which it has found to be generally poor. NASACRE has written to Chairs of SACREs about this and have said they are ready to support SACREs in consideration of the report at its meetings.

A Member commented that the OFSTED Report is damning.

NOTED.

40. Agreed Syllabus Conference Update

Considered –

A verbal update by the Professional Religious Education Adviser.

The Professional Religious Education Adviser updated the Committee as follows:-

- The date for the launch has been confirmed – 14th June 2024
- Resources will start to be put together in January 2024
- The intention is to have a number of stalls at the Launch Day – if Members know anyone who might be interested in having a stall, please contact her
- The venue will be The Pavilions of Harrogate.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Professional Religious Education Adviser said that Group A Members could assist with things such as updating the Visitor Guide to include Schools that accept a visit and signposting to good quality resources for Schools.

Nasr Moussa Emam said he will send through a copy of a document that will be useful. Abhijeet Kulkarni indicated that he would be happy to help and asked what the process would be if further revisions were required. The Professional Religious Education Adviser said that she would check, but, essentially, SACRE is free to make it what it wants it to be.

In response to a question, about what was expected from Local Authority Members of SACRE, she confirmed that there are no specific requirements, but that it would be helpful if Local Authority Members could provide quotes as to why RE is important to them. It is likely that she will seek contributions from the Local Authority Members between times, as required. It would be helpful if they could be visible at the Launch Event.

NOTED.

41. Update by the Local Authority

Considered –

A report by the Principal Adviser, Monitoring, which updated Members on developments on the following:-

- Communication and resourcing
- Support for Senior Leaders and Governors
- Ofsted Inspections

The Principal Adviser, Monitoring, highlighted the following:-

- As soon as further information is received on the intended content of the Launch Event from RE Today, it will go live on the NYES booking system for Schools to register.
- She has changed the format of the references to Religious Education and Collective Worship contained in OFSTED Inspections and included the name of the School, which it is hoped Members will find helpful. Not every School inspected receives comments on these aspects, however.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.3 of the report which refers to Israel and Palestine. This can be contentious. Israel and Gaza, or Middle East, would be better. The Principal Adviser, Monitoring, confirmed she would be happy to change this.

The subject of visits to Schools by SACRE Members was raised. The Chair felt that, given the pressures on Schools, now would not be a good time. She and the Senior Education Adviser had drafted a form that could be used by Members to rate a School's website online. This will be shared with Members at the next meeting.

The Principal Adviser, Monitoring, commented that this would help the Committee to achieve Objective 2 in its Development Plan - *To monitor the effective teaching of RE throughout the Local Authority and explore ways to*

model best practice in RE - in a more manageable way, given the scale of North Yorkshire.

A Member suggested that the exercise would be better if it was carried out in pairs.

NOTED.

42. NASACRE Virtual Training

This Item had been suggested by the Senior Education Adviser to remind Members about the NASACRE Virtual Training Programme and to provide Members and officers who have attended any of the training with the opportunity to feedback on how useful they had found it.

Members were advised that they can view previous sessions via the NASACRE website. The Clerk will share the link.

A number of Members and officers commented on the training they had attended which, in each case, had been useful.

Whilst not directly related to the Virtual Training, the Professional Religious Education Adviser suggested that further Guidance on Collective Worship would be helpful. This had been expected nationally but is now thought to be unlikely. Following the Agreed Syllabus, this will be the next major piece of work for SACRE

NOTED.

43. Work Programme

Considered –

The latest rolling Work Programme.

The Clerk advised that the Work Programme, as it currently stands, expires at the next meeting in April 2024. Therefore, at that, or the following meeting, an updated Work Programme will be circulated for consideration.

NOTED.

44. Any other business, which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered as a matter of urgency

There was none. The Chair wished everyone all the best for the forthcoming holiday period.

45. Next Meeting – Tuesday 9th April 2024 at 5.00 p.m.

As mentioned in Minute No. 33, above, the meeting will commence at 5.00 p.m. - one hour later than originally scheduled and will be held in person.

UPDATE: The meeting will, in fact, be held at the usual time of 4.00 p.m. and will be hybrid.

The meeting concluded at 6.05 p.m.

PD

Presentation by Hayden Cohen

Thank you North Yorkshire SACRE, the chair and the committee. For those of you who don't know me yet, I'm Hayden Cohen and am the new Jewish representative. I've been given 10 minutes to speak about Judaism and my connection to it. It is currently the Hebrew Year 5784 so that is quite a lot to cover in 10 minutes.

I grew up in a very typical Jewish home in North Leeds with two very loving parents. Every Friday night my mum would light the candles to bring spiritual light into our home and my dad would make kiddush on the wine and we'd have two braided breads called Challah (braided to show intertwining love and strength) and two to remember that double portions of manna fell from heaven on a Friday whilst the Hebrews were wandering in the desert. We then had traditional chicken soup and kneidlach (dumplings).

Until my later involvement in Limmud: an educational organisation that's kind of a cross between TED Talks and Glastonbury, I thought this was exclusively Judaism. Then I started to learn more and discover I was only but one strand from a rich history of diverse Jewish thought and practice. I began to ask the question who and what is the Jewish community? Unlike most other faiths, Judaism is not only a religion but also an ethnicity. Not just one ethnicity but multiple. Unlike most faiths, you can be Jewish and not practise. Indeed in John's presentation about Humanism at the last SACRE meeting, multiple patrons of Humanism UK are Jewish. David Baddiel's Twitter bio merely reads "Jew".

The prevailing Jewish ethnicity you see on films and TV shows is Ashkenazi. It's white presenting with roots for the past thousand years in Eastern Europe.

The other large group is Sephardi who have a Spanish and Portuguese tradition. The third group is Mizrahi which are those who remained in the Middle East. There are other smaller but culturally different ethnicities such as Yemeni Jews who have their own traditions and even smaller ones still like Ethiopian.

Whilst these are very disparate groups in some ways with some distinct differences there's far more that unites us in our practice. It is also worth mentioning that specifically Ashkenazi practice has a variety of denominations with very varied approaches to the application of Jewish Law.

It was a desire to learn more of this law that saw me attempt an activity called Daf Yomi. It's a relatively new tradition where Jews across the globe try to read the entirety of the Talmud, two pages a day for seven years. I lasted the first three months which focussed on figuring out when it can be classified as night time for praying purposes. I think it is for intellects much loftier than mine.

I went to the only Jewish primary school in Leeds and from six years old started attending my second home of Harrogate Synagogue. As an only child with parents both only children and all my grandparents unfortunately dying before I was 5, it was like having a few dozen extra grandparents.

Amongst them were many Holocaust survivors. Children of the Kindertransport, a Windermere child, Arek Hersh, who I've heard tell his story of escaping 6 camps on many occasions. Survivors were an ever present part of my childhood in Harrogate. I remembered every Shabbat as a kid, I'd get bored and wander into the function room where I saw one of those survivors sneak a bit of cake and a few pretzels which were reserved for the community to eat after the service. He put his finger to his lips and I always kept his secret. Even now, I will not tell anyone who it was.

I've been an active part of the Harrogate Hebrew Congregation for over 30 years including last Sunday where I compered a 100 person strong chanukah party which was a lot of fun. It's a lovely warm small community and has been my second home. A place of personal comfort, warmth and connection to my Judaism.

I do want to briefly mention how the Jewish community has been feeling since October 7th. There is an adage that with two Jews comes three opinions and yet in these past couple of months we've been more united than I can ever remember. As antisemitic attacks and hate speech have increased so has synagogue attendance and engagement in community activities. I could easily talk about the conflict for hours however for now, I will keep it to this. With over 70% of British Jews with friends or family in Israel and over 90% having been to Israel at least once, the Jewish community is hurting. Any and all kindness is very much appreciated and may peace come swiftly.

I created, host and produce The Bagel Podcast which focuses on the UK Jewish Community since 2018 as well as being a writer, performance poet and funnyman with lots of Jewish themes. I was a Jewish sunday school teacher when I was in London. I've led lots of Jewish youth groups including at American summer camp. These are certainly stories for another day.

Judaism is monotheistic with a heavy focus on annual cycles. The Hebrew Calendar corresponds with the lunar cycle which is very similar to the Islamic calendar with the addition of a leap month. This ensures that our festivals are never more than a few weeks out from the Gregorian calendar. Also to note that all festivals and shabbat (bar some minor fast days) go from sundown to sundown.

Rosh Hashanah (literally translated as Head of the Year) is the Day of Judgement when we pray to G-d to be written into the Book of Life. We dip an apple in honey. The apple to signify the cycle of the year and the honey so we have a sweet year. Extending this out there are some people (myself included when we have the wherewithal to plan it) who enjoy pun based food combinations such as a grape on a piece of lettuce: Let-us have a grape year ahead. I adore food and wordplay so this is great.

The ten days of penitence following Rosh Hashanah lead us to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It's the holiest day of the year where those who are physically able to do so, fast for 25 hours whilst asking G-d to be sealed in the book of life. Some may think it strange, but I think it may be my favourite festival as it's a rare opportunity to reflect on the past year with both individual and communal prayer.

A few days after Yom Kippur we have Sukkot: Tabernacles. Originally designed for a more Mediterranean climate, we sit in a sukkah which for the most part are wooden huts outside with leaves for roofs so that we can see the stars. We shake a lulav and etrog (three types of branches and a pretty foul tasting citrus fruit) around us to signify the four types of Jewish people. In the UK it's predominantly more religious people who have a sukkah, but in Israel they are as ubiquitous as a Christmas tree is here.

The day after Sukkot is Simchat Torah where we celebrate the end of the cycle of reading from the Torah (what you may call the Old Testament and what I just call the testament) and restart again from the beginning. It's usually quite a large celebration and I feel this makes the larger point that Jews value the written word and more importantly engagement and debate with the Torah as integral to the faith.

Thankfully there is a bit of gap to the next festival of Chanukah which is actually today. It marks attempts by the Seleucid Greek King Antiochus IV to destroy Judaism. The most famous example of this is that his army destroyed all the oil with which the

Jews used to light their menorah in the temple. The miracle is that the Maccabees (the Jewish army) found one tiny bit of oil only enough for one night but it lasted for eight. To celebrate we now have oily foods such as donuts and hash browns. It is the festival of lights and one of rededication to the faith. I did want to light the menorah today, but whilst the Maccabees, in the first reported instance of guerilla warfare defeated the Greek army, I alas, could not defeat the North Yorkshire Council's Health and Safety Manager. Better luck next time.

In March time there is Purim where a man named Haman tried to kill the Jews, but failed, we wear fancy dress to celebrate and eat a pastry called hamantaschen (Haman's Hat) traditionally filled with poppy seed. I can confirm that his hat is very tasty indeed. I rehearsed this presentation last night with my wife who argued that it's not his hat, it's his ear and thus we had a lengthy google rabbit hole dive and extensive heated discussion about it. Now that is a prime example of the Jewish experience. We also enjoy being involved in an annual party at the synagogue.

Next up is Passover, Pesach. It's the story of the Exodus, 10 plagues etc and we can't eat leavened food for the eight days. On the first two nights Jewish families have a Seder night where we go through the story and additional commentaries, have a big meal and drink four glasses of wine whilst leaning to indicate our freedom from slavery. The leaning becomes more pronounced as each glass of wine is drunk. Not for any religious reason, but who wouldn't be leaning after four glasses of wine in one night? Seder night is relatively unique in that rather than being led by a rabbi or a communal leader, most families will host their own together (there are communal seders for those for whom this would be an issue).

The final festival I'm going to discuss today is Shavuot literally translated as weeks as it is seven weeks after Passover marked by the counting of the Omer and with it the revelation of the Torah to the Israelites at Sinai. In some traditions they learn all throughout the night. We eat cheesecake and every year we ask a rabbi why and every year we forget.

So that's my presentation which overlooked about 99.9% of Judaism. Please let me know if you have any questions and if I don't know the answer, I know plenty of rabbis who do! Thank You.