

Northumberland County Council Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

Constitution

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Sections 11 and 12 of the 1988 Education Reform Act, amended by Sections 15 and 16 of the 1993 Education Act and then by Section 390 - 397 of the Education Act 1996 requires Northumberland County Council to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (the SACRE), which is a permanent body.

1.2 "Members" of SACRE refers to those appointed by the Local Authority to represent interest groups in accordance with the 1996 Education Act.

1.3 The aim of SACRE is to advise the Local Authority on matters concerned with the provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship. This constitution sets out:

- the main functions of the SACRE
- membership and voting arrangements
- rules on the conduct of business and administration.

2.0 The objectives of Northumberland SACRE

2.1 The core objectives of the SACRE are:

- the provision of independent consultation and detailed scrutiny on any matters within the scope of interest of SACRE;
- to determine any application from Headteachers for amendment(s) to the requirement that collective worship be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character;
- to publish an annual report that provides details of any matters on which the SACRE has advised.

3.0 The scope of interest of Northumberland SACRE, including the relationship of SACRE with the Local Authority

3.1 SACRE will have a separate identity to and is independent from, the Local Authority.

3.2 The Local Authority will consult the SACRE on any issues within its scope of interest.

3.3 SACRE's primary function is to advise the Local Authority on matters relating to religious education and worship in Community and Voluntary schools and to provide advice on the Religious Education provided in such schools in accordance with the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

3.4 The Local Authority may refer to the SACRE for any other matters they believe to fall within its scope.

3.5 SACRE can require that the Local Authority undertake a review of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. It is a statutory duty of the Local Authority to review the Locally Agreed Syllabus every five years.

3.6 SACRE must consider all applications made by a Headteacher of a Community school or other school that is not designated as having a religious character, requesting that the requirement for

Collective Worship to be wholly or broadly of a Christian character shall not apply for some or all pupils at that school.

3.7 Thus, SACRE's scope and function in the broadest sense is to support the effective provision of Collective Worship and Religious Education in schools.

4.0 Accountability

4.1 The SACRE is independent from the Council. When actions or reporting is required that needs the consideration of the Council these will be formally considered by the Cabinet/Cabinet Member or Officer acting under delegated powers.

5.0 Activities of Northumberland SACRE

5.1 In the pursuit of its aims SACRE will:

- adhere to a timetable that reflects the municipal year of the Local Authority
- hold meetings (including extraordinary meetings) at times that allow for full participation by members, including holding meetings at County Hall and/or other easily accessible venues or online
- timing these so that they begin after the end of the school day
- notify SACRE members 5 working days before each regular meeting
- meet at least 3 times per year, with one meeting taking place in each school term require at least one member from each voting group to be present to constitute a quorum in order to have a fully constituted meeting
- seek to operate on a consensus basis. If a consensus cannot be reached, members will be required to undertake a formal vote as outlined in section 8 of this Constitution
- review and recommend to Cabinet/the Cabinet member, any amendments to its Constitution on an annual basis
- review and adopt the terms of reference for any subcommittees on an annual basis following a formal consultation process with the sub-committees
- keep a written record of all SACRE meetings and meetings of its subcommittees
- any member of the SACRE can submit items for inclusion on the agenda of a main meeting of the SACRE. Such items must be supported by a written statement/report to the Chair at least 10 working days before the meeting is due to take place
- the agenda and any reports will be circulated generally at least 5 working days before a meeting
- create sub-committees where these are necessary
- be able to ask that the Local Authority to consider holding an extraordinary meeting of the SACRE at the written request of at least one member

6.0 Membership of Northumberland SACRE and Consultation

6.1 The SACRE will be made up of members from the 4 committees below.

6.2 Member panels:

Committee A: Christian denominations (other than the Church of England) and other faiths or belief systems active in Northumberland, namely: the Assembly of God, the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Society of Friends, the United Reformed Church, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, the Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Sikhism, Humanism (1 representative for each church or religion).

Committee B: The Church of England – four members

Committee C: The Teachers' Professional Associations – four members: nominated by NASUWT, NEU, NAHT and ASCL

Committee D: Local Authority – up to four elected members of the Council. The elected members represented on Committee D shall reflect, as far as is practicable, the prevailing balance of power among the leading political parties/groups.

6.3 SACRE shall have the power to co-opt representatives to the SACRE as additional members. Co-opted persons may participate fully in discussions but may not vote.

7.0 Election and nomination of members

7.1 Nominees will be invited as observers to their first meeting of SACRE, ahead of voting.

7.2 Before appointing a person to represent a religion, denomination or association on Committees A, B or C, the local authority shall consult locally and take all reasonable steps to assure themselves that he/she is representative of the religion, denomination or association in question.

7.3 A representative of a religion, denomination or association may be removed from membership of the SACRE if, in the opinion of the local authority, he/she ceases to be representative of the religion, denomination or association he/she was appointed to represent.

7.4 Members of the SACRE, with the exception of co-opted members (see 7.5), will be appointed for four years.

7.5 The SACRE may co-opt additional persons. This may include teachers to ensure adequate representation of teachers who are actively engaged with religious education in schools. Any co-options will be for a period determined by the SACRE.

7.6 No more than 5 co-opted persons shall belong to SACRE at any one time.

7.7 The Local Authority will review the membership of the SACRE annually in line with the Constitutional review.

7.8 The Local Authority may terminate the membership of any member of the SACRE by providing one month's written notice.

7.9 Subject to condition 7.10 and 7.11 below, members of the SACRE who have served a full term are eligible for re-appointment.

7.10 A member ceases to be a member of the SACRE if they resign from the SACRE or no longer occupies the office which he or she was nominated to represent.

7.11 A member of the SACRE appointed by the Authority may be removed from membership by the Authority at any time if, in the opinion of the Authority, the person ceases to be representative of either the denomination, religious group or association which they were appointed to represent.

7.12 Subject to conditions 7.10 and 7.11 above members of the SACRE who have served a full term are eligible for re-appointment.

7.13 At the invitation of the Chair of the SACRE, School Improvement Officers and/or RE Consultants can attend SACRE meetings. They can provide professional expertise but they are not members of the SACRE and cannot vote.

7.14 The Director of Education will receive a standing invitation to attend all SACRE and sub-committee meetings but are not members of the SACRE and cannot vote. They may address the meeting if invited to do so by the Chair.

7.15 At the discretion of the Chair of the SACRE, observers can attend SACRE meetings. Observers are defined as individuals interested in the work of SACRE. At the discretion of the Chair of the SACRE observers can address the meeting. However, they are not members of the SACRE and cannot vote.

8.0 Voting

8.1 Only the representative groups on SACRE shall be entitled to vote. Each shall have a single vote.

8.2 In the event of a tied vote groups are to revisit the issue in question until a decision has been achieved.

8.3 Co-opted members do not have a vote.

9.0 Meetings of Northumberland SACRE

9.1 The SACRE shall normally meet termly on three occasions per year.

9.2 Meetings of the SACRE may be convened at the request of the Chair or any of the representative groups.

9.3 Any member of the SACRE unable to attend a meeting may appoint a named substitute to attend in their place. However, the said substitute must fulfil the same representative criteria as the representative for whom they are deputising (see 7.2 and 7.3 above). The substitute representative will have the same voting powers as the representative in whose place they attend. It shall be the responsibility of the relevant representative or co-opted member:

i. to determine whether or not it is necessary for the relevant named substitute to attend a meeting in their place

ii. to notify the Clerk to the SACRE, in advance of the meeting, that the named substitute will attend in their place

iii. to notify the named substitute of the time and place of the forthcoming meeting

iv. to brief the named substitute on the forthcoming meeting.

9.4 If a member of SACRE fails to attend three consecutive meetings (without sending a substitute), their membership will be reviewed. If non-attendance continues the membership may be terminated.

10. How the SACRE Conducts its Business

10.1 The SACRE shall meet not less than once each school term.

10.2 The quorum for a meeting of the SACRE shall be not less than one member of each of the four representative committees.

10.3 The quorum for a meeting of a representative committee shall be not less than one member of the committee in question.

10.4 If, within a period of thirty minutes after the time fixed for the start of the meeting of the SACRE, a quorum is not present, the meeting shall not be held. If, during the course of a meeting, a quorum is no longer present, the meeting shall be terminated. However, those present may decide to remain to discuss matters relating to the agenda, on the understanding that no decisions can be reached on the SACRE's behalf due to a quorum not being present.

10.5 If a meeting is not held, or is terminated before all the proposed business has been transacted, a further meeting shall be convened as soon as is reasonably practicable. A meeting of the SACRE shall be convened by the Clerk to the SACRE after consultation with the Chair, but the Clerk to the SACRE will comply with any direction given by the SACRE at the previous meeting, or with any direction given by the Chair, or, in her/his absence, the Vice Chair of the SACRE.

10.6 Other than in the most exceptional circumstances, and with the prior agreement of the Chairperson, every member of the SACRE shall be given written notice of the meeting, signed by the Clerk to the SACRE, not less than seven clear days before the date of the meeting. Such written notice will include the agenda and all relevant reports or papers required for business within the meeting to be undertaken efficiently.

10.7 No issue shall be discussed at the meeting of the SACRE unless notice of the intention to discuss that issue is given in the agenda for the meeting. Any SACRE committee representative or co-opted member can, at any meeting of the SACRE, propose agenda items for the next or a future meeting.

11.0 Chairing

11.1 The Chair and Vice Chair are appointed from committees A, B, C and D. Any appointments will be for the municipal year or until the person appointed ceases to be a member of the SACRE, whichever is sooner.

11.2 In the event of more than one committee representative being nominated for the role of Chair or Vice-Chair, an election shall be held. Those entitled to vote are the representatives of committees A, B, C and D. Each representative shall have one vote. A simple majority will decide who is to be elected Chair or Vice Chair.

11.3 Continuing members of the SACRE are eligible for reappointment to the position of Chair or Vice Chair.

11.4 The Vice Chair will act as Chair should the Chair be unable to attend.

12. The SACRE Sub-Groups

12.1 In order to more efficiently conduct its business, the SACRE may convene a SACRE sub-group. The SACRE will provide such a sub-group with a specific task or tasks to address and a time scale in which to complete its deliberations. Once its task or tasks are complete, the sub-group will bring the results of its deliberations to the SACRE. The SACRE will discuss the merits of the sub-group's deliberations and either accept fully, accept partially or reject in full the outcomes.

12.2 Any sub-group formed by the SACRE shall include committee representatives and/or co-opted members of the SACRE. However, should it feel it will be helpful, the SACRE shall invite other persons to join the sub-group if their knowledge, understanding and/or skills are deemed relevant to the task or tasks in hand.

13.0 Codes of Practice

13.1 Interests, whether personal or prejudicial, should be declared. If a member has a prejudicial interest, they should declare that interest and withdraw from the meeting and take no part in the decision.

14.0 Servicing the Committee

14.1 The specific responsibilities of Democratic Services of the Council are:

- convene meetings of the SACRE
- arrange accommodation for meetings
- co-ordinate and act as secretariat to meetings
- copy, circulate and dispatch appropriate papers and
- provide appropriate guidance on the operation of local government and other relevant procedures.

14.2 The specific responsibilities of the Professional Advisors to the SACRE will be to:

- provide advice to the SACRE and any sub-committee(s) on professional issues
- advise and update SACRE members on any new government guidance or policy documents.

15.0 Disputes, complaints and Freedom of Information

15.1 The SACRE is intended to be a collaborative body and needs to ensure that no particular sector or member is unduly favoured. Problems and issues should usually be raised and resolved at the SACRE meetings. However, if parties feel that an issue has not been resolved, the following process should be followed and minutes should be taken.

Stage 1: Parties who are in dispute meet with the Chair of the SACRE and the School Improvement Adviser who will assist in finding or recommending a solution.

Stage 2: A special meeting of the SACRE is convened. Papers should be prepared by the parties representing different views. The Chair and the School Improvement Adviser also prepare a paper

offering possible options for resolution. If the problem is not resolved, the dispute is referred to Stage 3.

Stage 3: If the issue is not resolved then guidance or clarification will be sought from the relevant Government Department.

15.2 Complaints from members of the public will be handled by the Council's Complaints Procedure.

15.3 Request for Information under the Freedom of Information Act will be handled in accordance with the Council's published procedures for dealing with such requests. If any member of the SACRE receiving a request under the FOIA will be required to pass that request to **Legal & Democratic Services within 24 hours of receipt of that request in order that Legal & Democratic Services may deal with the request on behalf of the SACRE within the 20 working day time limit. ???**

16.0 Monitoring and Inspection

16.1 The effectiveness of the SACRE will be assessed by an annual internal review via the SACRE Development Plan.

16.2 The SACRE will monitor and review the operation of the Constitution to ensure that the aims and the principles of the Constitution are given full effect. They may make recommendations for ways in which it can be changed.

16.3 The SACRE is authorised to make any variations to those parts of the Constitution to give effect to any changes in the law and where, in its opinion, circumstances require it.

17.0 Dissemination of the Annual Report

17.1 The Annual Report will be made available for public inspection. Additionally, a copy will be sent to the Department for Education, NASACRE and to other organisations and stakeholders, including all schools within the county, local teacher training institutions and others as Northumberland SACRE considers appropriate.

18. Public and Media Attendance at the Meetings of the SACRE

18.1 The meetings of the SACRE shall be open to members of the public and duly accredited representatives of the news media. Members of the public and representatives of the news media can attend as observers, not as participants in the discussions or proceedings. The attendance of the public and representatives of the news media at meetings of the SACRE are subject to the [Religious Education \(Meetings of Local Conferences and Councils\) Regulations 1994](#).

18.2 Public notice of the time and the place of any meeting of the SACRE shall be given by posting it on the Council website, at least three clear days before the meeting. Copies of the agenda, and all relevant reports or papers for the meeting of the SACRE, shall be available for inspection by members of the public at least three clear days before the meeting.

18.3 Copies of agendas, reports, papers and minutes shall be available for inspection by members of the public after a meeting of the SACRE until the expiration of six years beginning with the date of

the meeting. All such documents will be kept at County Hall, from where they will be made available to the public on request.

19. The Validity of Proceedings of the SACRE

19.1 The validity of proceedings of the SACRE shall not be affected:

- (a) by a vacancy in the office of any committee representative of the SACRE required by 6.2 above;
- (b) on the grounds that a committee representative of the SACRE appointed to represent any religion, denomination or association does not at the time of the proceedings represent the religion, denomination or association in question;
- (c) by reason of an individual SACRE member not having received written notice of a meeting or a copy of the agenda;
- (d) by the failure of any representative committee to agree on how its vote shall be cast on any particular issue before the SACRE.

20. Making Alterations to/Amending the Constitution

20.1 This Constitution was adopted as the Constitution of the Northumberland County Council Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education at a meeting duly convened

at:

on:

20.2 These arrangements may not be amended so as to make them inconsistent with the 1996 legislative requirements.

20.3 To the extent that these arrangements may be amended, they may only be amended by a decision of the SACRE.

20.4 In order to ensure a consistent approach to meetings, and that changes to these arrangements are not made without full notice and proper consideration of the implications of any proposed change, any change shall only be made as follows:

- (a) any member of the SACRE may propose a change to these arrangements;
- (b) any appropriate proposal to change these arrangements shall be submitted in writing to the Clerk to the SACRE for inclusion on the agenda of the next AGM of the SACRE, the proposal to include both the form of words suggested for inclusion in these arrangements and a statement of the objective to be achieved by the proposed change;
- (c) the SACRE shall then, at the AGM, convene a SACRE sub-group to consider the merits of the proposed change to the existing arrangements. The sub-group will meet to decide on the merits of the proposed change. The sub-group will bring a summary of its deliberations to the next full meeting of the SACRE and the SACRE will decide on what action, if any, to take.

21. Additional Information about the SACRE Annual Report

21.1 The annual report of the SACRE shall follow the structure and content as suggested by NASACRE in their [annual report framework](#).

22. Additional Information about the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC)

22.1 For the purpose of preparing an Agreed Syllabus for RE, the local authority must convene an ASC. An ASC is a separate legal entity from the SACRE and, although common membership is permissible, it must be separately convened.

22.2 The role of the ASC is to produce and recommend an Agreed Syllabus for RE which meets fully the present legislative requirements and is educationally sound. The task of producing a syllabus cannot be delegated except to a sub-group which must include at least one member of each of the representative committees constituting the SACRE. This does not prevent an ASC receiving advice or comment from outside groups or individuals. Only an ASC may recommend an Agreed Syllabus for RE, and its recommendation must be unanimously agreed by the representative committees constituting the ASC.