

**Reading Borough Council Standing Advisory
Council for Religious Education (SACRE)**

Wednesday 25 February 2026, 6.30pm

Online meeting via MS Teams



Reading
Borough Council

Working better with you

**Reading Borough Council SACRE:
Wednesday 25 February 2026, 6:30pm Microsoft Teams Meeting**

Members Present:

Jo Williams (Chair; Church of England representative Group B).
Helen Robinson (Teacher rep, Group C).
Christine Ferreira (Catholic rep, Group A).
Fiona Murray (Vice Chair, Group C):
Clare Walsha (Humanist rep Group A).
Mohammed Amir Saqlain (Muslim rep – Shia Group A).
Katie Dickens (RE Adviser).
Cllr Rachel Eden (Group D).
Ramesh Mepa (Hindu rep Observer Group A for SACRE meeting only): on behalf of Vika Srivastava.
Dr Shira Solomons (Jewish rep Observer Group A for SACRE meeting only): on behalf of Rabbi Zvi Solomons (Group A).
Nikki McVeigh (Local Authority rep).
Ann Jarvis (Teacher rep Group C).
Cllr Meri O’Connell (Group D).

Observer: Nikki McVeigh LA Link Advisor

Clerk: Heather Mendham

Apologies: Mohammed Ayub (Group D). Sam Juthani (Group D) Vika Srivastava (Group A)

Absent: Javed Kachhalia (D). Stephen Goss (D)

1.	Welcome & Introductions Meeting was quorate to proceed.	Chair
2.	Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising: 22 October 2025. Minutes were agreed and signed as a true and accurate record. Clare Walsha raised a query about publishing agendas online before the meeting. Jo Williams confirmed this requirement and asked Heather to ensure compliance. Minutes were approved unanimously.	Chair
3.	Membership Update Nikki McVeigh confirmed two new teacher members: Anne Jarvis and Helen Robinson. Methodist rep Sarah Wickett approved but absent. Quaker group seeking a representative; awaiting Sikh update. Jo Williams requested Diocese of Oxford be contacted for a second Church of England representative. Mohammed Amir Saqlain updated on attempts to secure a Sunni representative via Reading Muslim Council.	Nikki

4.	Annual Report Katie Dickens explained that individual school GCSE results cannot be published without permission; these will be removed. General list of schools offering RS GCSE will remain. Clare Walsha asked about comparative RE results over time and nationally. Cllr Rachel Eden noted that Reading usually performs strongly at GCSE, making lower RE results unusual. Fiona Murray added contextual information about high RS grade boundaries and suggested NATRE data. Annual report was approved subject to amendments.	Katie Dickens
5.	Next meeting: Proposed dates: 17 June, 21 October, 24 February (pending confirmation). Discussion on hybrid format; Jo Williams expressed preference for in-person with online option if rooms available.	Chair
6.	Any Other Business No further items raised. Jo Williams closed SACRE meeting and opened the ASC meeting.	Chair
7.	Actions Agreed • Agendas to be published online when circulated – Responsible: Heather Mendham. • Remove individual school GCSE data from annual report – Responsible: Katie Dickens. • Conduct deeper analysis of GCSE RE performance and trends – Responsible: Katie Dickens & Nikki McVeigh. • Contact Diocese of Oxford for additional Church of England representative – Responsible: Jo Williams / Nikki McVeigh. • Follow up with Reading Muslim Council to secure Sunni representative – Responsible: Mohammed Amir Saqlain.	Chair

8.	Jo Williams (Chair) Opened the ASC meeting, confirmed recording arrangements, welcomed Shira and Ramesh as full ASC representatives, explained breakout room use, clarified meeting purpose (review and voting on each section of the draft Agreed Syllabus), and handed over to Katie Dickens. Katie Dickens (RE Adviser) outlined process for reviewing the syllabus, thanked Dr Shira Solomons for producing extensive documents, noted that Reading is the final authority to review the syllabus already accepted by neighbouring SACREs, explained section-by-section voting, clarified handling of typos and content issues, and introduced Section A before sending groups to breakout rooms. Due to a technical issue the members were unable to separate into online breakout rooms. Katie Dickens adopted an objection-only voting process; no objections were raised so Section A passed unanimously. Section B Covered statutory content and adjustments following Section A changes. No objections: Section B passed. Section C Covered non-statutory content including Hebrew Bible additions and 'peace be upon him' phrasing. No objections: Section C passed. Section D Introduction (Katie Dickens) Highlighted importance of Section D, explaining it defines the religions/worldviews taught in each phase. Emphasised the Wokingham model is proposed but not universal. Noted schools maintain autonomy. Called for views or objections. Clare Walsha (Humanist Representative) Welcomed inclusion of non-religious worldviews in the syllabus. Presented Reading census data showing high non-religious populations, especially among younger cohorts. Argued that non-religious children lack structured opportunities comparable to religious children for developing beliefs and ethical frameworks. Requested that non-religious worldviews/Humanism appear in every phase. Favoured the original version over the Wokingham model. Katie Dickens – Clarification Asked whether Clare wanted Humanism named in EYFS and KS1 or broader non-religious coverage. Clare confirmed preference for the original syllabus model including non-religious content in all phases. Dr Shira Solomons Proposed compromise language adopted by Bracknell ASC: change Section D4 to 'It is recommended that non-religious worldviews have dedicated curriculum time within each phase', balancing flexibility with regular coverage.	Chair/ Katie Dickens
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9.	Explained rationale, showed example wording, and confirmed it would likely address Clare's concerns. Katie Dickens Agreed the amended recommendation would ensure coverage every two years without over-prescription. Asked Clare whether this resolved concerns. Clare Walsha Confirmed the compromise sounded positive and requested clarification on how it affects the coloured phase tables. Katie Dickens clarified that changing the wording in paragraph D4 does not alter how the tables function. Non-religious worldviews/Humanism appear across phases every two years under both table versions. Clare expressed concern that the Wokingham table's 'and/or' made Humanism seem optional. Katie noted all content is optional for schools, but tables provide guidance. Further Discussion on Table Interpretation Fiona Murray highlighted risks for non-specialist primary teachers who may rely heavily on the tables and misinterpret 'and/or'. Suggested a middle-ground solution to clarify Upper KS2 content. Cllr Rachel Eden requested side-by-side display of the tables for clarity. Rationale Behind the Wokingham Table (Dr Shira Solomons) Shira argued strongly against keeping the original table. Explained that Judaism and Hinduism do not reappear in secondary RE, so Upper KS2 may be pupils' final opportunity to learn them. Warned that ambiguous options could lead teachers to choose Islam repeatedly. Proposed removing 'and/or Humanism' or replacing it with 'non-religious worldviews'. Resolution on Section D Tables Katie Dickens proposed adopting the Wokingham table but removing the 'and/or Humanism' phrase. Fiona and Jo Williams agreed. Section D approved with modification. Section E – Terminology Katie Dickens proposed adopting 'religions and worldviews' across the document. Approved unanimously. Sections F and G These sections had previously been held over; no vote required. Section H – Hindu Non-Statutory Content Katie Dickens introduced Hindu non-statutory content approved by the Hindu Education Board. Ramesh Mepa confirmed approval. Shira requested EYFS river lists be replaced with 'sacred rivers'; Ramesh agreed. Section H approved with amendment. Section I – Errata Approved unanimously without concerns.	Chair
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	Final Review of Entire Document Katie invited final comments before overall vote. Only Shira and Mohammed raised points; each given two minutes. Final Comments – Dr Shira Solomons Shira requested removal of an added definition of 'personal worldviews', correction of an incorrect core question on life and death, reversal of an incorrect change adding theology/human sciences to a philosophy category and restoring consistent use of 'religions and worldviews'. Final Comments – Mohammed Amir Saqlain Mohammed noted factual corrections in Islam content: Qur'an described incorrectly as a source of worship (should be divine guidance), clarification that praying on private land requires permission, and correction of inaccurate statements about the pillars and articles of faith. Offered written wording. Corrections accepted by group. Closing Katie Dickens summarised that most issues were minor corrections and recommended not printing a static document due to ongoing refinement. Suggested future SACRE meetings include ASC slots for adjustments. Proposed a final vote on approving the entire document with recorded amendments. Jo Williams supported moving to the vote. Jo Williams (Chair) Clarified that ASC voting must occur by groups, requiring one vote per group. Noted that unanimous agreement would simplify the process, but if not unanimous, group-based voting is mandatory. Sought guidance from Heather due to technical problems affecting group allocation. Heather Mendham (Clerk) Reported technical issues in Microsoft Teams preventing her from assigning some attendees to breakout rooms. Suspected differences in app versions or update issues. Noted that some participants were not appearing in the assignable list. Katie Dickens (RE Adviser) Confirmed that amendments to the syllabus can be made at any time by SACRE members. Explained the importance of not printing the syllabus due to national developments: RE may move into the national curriculum, with programmes of study already being drafted. Warned that the agreed syllabus may only have a short shelf life if national curriculum RE is adopted by Easter 2027. Suggested a pragmatic approach with a dynamic online document. Proposed interim voting solutions, such as each group nominating a representative to vote if breakout rooms fail. Ramesh Mepa (Hindu Representative) Asked whether future amendments to the agreed syllabus were permissible. Confirmed understanding after Katie's explanation. CIlr Rachel Eden	
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	Suggested that if the group was unanimously in favour, a single unanimous vote might be quicker—unless anyone felt unable to speak freely. Later acknowledged the group voting rules require private discussion time. Fiona Murray (Secondary Teacher Rep) Stressed the need for private group discussion before voting, based on previous ASC practice. Suggested members switch from the Teams app to the browser version to fix the breakout room assignment issue. Requested that Heather repost the meeting link to allow members to rejoin via browser. Dr Shira Solomons Briefly suggested voting by group without breakout rooms but accepted Katie’s clarification that private discussion was required. Suggested phone-based workarounds such as WhatsApp if needed. Members rejoined the meeting ready for a successful deployment to the online breakout rooms. Nikki McVeigh Emphasised that the ASC must follow the formal voting procedure even if the decision seems straightforward. Explained the procedure: group discussion, internal vote, selection of a spokesperson, and reporting back. Jo Williams (Chair) Clarified that groups do not need unanimous agreement internally; each group votes by majority, and this majority becomes the group’s official vote. Dr Shira Solomons Reiterated that internal group decisions must be by majority vote. Katie Dickens Suggested councillors could confer by phone if breakout rooms failed. Confirmed only Groups A and C needed breakout room allocation for the final vote. Christine Ferreira Reported she could not be assigned due to Teams not recognising her name. Confirmed she could still express her group’s stance verbally. Jo Williams Checked directly with Chris whether she supported the changes; Chris confirmed she had discussed them and supported them. Breakout Room Deployment	
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	Heather Mendham opened breakout rooms and allocated approximately two minutes for discussions. Monitored participation and recalled members as needed. Breakout Discussions Conclude & Voting Begins Group A – Dr Shira Solomons Reported unanimous agreement in Group A. Noted remaining minor wording adjustments from Mohammed would be added to errata. Group B – Jo Williams Confirmed Group B was fully in agreement. Group C – Fiona Middlehurst Reported Group C (teachers) were satisfied and approved the final draft. Group D – Cllr Rachel Eden Confirmed Group D also approved the entire document. Katie Dickens Thanked all members for their patience, professionalism, and detailed contributions. Recognised the constructive discussion and technical perseverance. Offered special thanks to Dr Shira Solomons for extensive work and attention to detail. Jo Williams (Chair) Thanked Katie for guiding the meeting. Expressed gratitude to all members for their involvement through multiple revisions. Celebrated completing the work on time and formally closed the meeting.	
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Chair closed meeting at 8pm

Chair

Dated: 17 June 2026

