

Slough Borough Council

Report To: SACRE

Date: 16 July 2025

Subject: Review of the Membership of SACRE

Chief Officer and Contact Officer: Sukdave Ghuman (Monitoring Officer)

Ward(s): All

Exempt: NO

Appendices: Appendix A – Minutes of SACRE meeting held on 2 November 2023

1. Summary and Recommendation

- 1.1 Council considered a report at its meeting held on 25 April 2024, which invited it to review the terms of reference of the Council's Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) following a request from a humanist for full membership in committee 1 and in light of a recent High Court decision¹ ("2023 judgment").
- 1.2 At that meeting, Council resolved **not** to amend the membership at that time, but that SACRE carry out a review of the membership during the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

Recommendation:

- 1.4 That SACRE review the membership of SACRE (at a separate meeting after its meeting of 16 July 2025) , by applying the principles set out in the 2023 judgement and, based on the review, to recommend that the Council note the outcome of the review and adopt the proposed criteria in its Terms of Reference.

Reasons:

- 1.5 The membership of SACRE needs to be reviewed from time and time and the review should align with the principles set out in the 2023 judgment.

Commissioner Review:

- 1.6 Commissioners have not been consulted on this report.

2. Report

Background

- 2.1 SACRE advises the Borough Council on such matters connected with religious worship in community or foundation schools, which do not have a religious character, and the religious education to be given in accordance with an agreed or other syllabus

¹ R(OAO Bowen) v Kent County Council [2023] EWHC 1261 (Admin)

as the Borough Council may refer to it or as it may see fit. SACRE further advises on methods of teaching, the choice of materials and the provision of training for teachers.

- 2.2 SACRE is comprised of four groups representing Christian denominations and other religions and denominations which appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in Slough; (Committee 1); the Church of England (Committee 2); Representatives of Teacher Associations (Committee 3) and Representatives of the Borough Council (Committee 4).
- 2.3 Following a request that a humanist be made a voting member of SACRE on Committee 1, there were various discussions at meetings of SACRE on 3 March 2023 and 17 June 2023 as to whether there was any scope to propose the expansion of Committee 1 to include representatives from non-religious groups and if so, whether Council should be asked to amend SACRE's terms of reference.
- 2.4 According to the Terms of Reference, Committee 1 is comprised of 12 members who represent the following faith groups:
- The Free Churches (1)
 - The Black Free Churches (1)
 - The Roman Catholic Church (1)
 - Hinduism (1)
 - Islam (4)
 - Judaism (1)
 - Sikhism (2)
 - Baha'is (1)
- 2.5 A humanist is already a co-opted member of Committee 1 who participates in discussions but does not vote.
- 2.6 According to the 2021 Census, the denominations and the number of adherents in Slough were as follows:

Based on the 2021 Census for Slough	
Denominations	Adherents
Christian	50,664
Muslim	46,661
No religion	20,726
Sikh	17,985
Hindu	12,343
Buddhist	776
Other religion	716
Baha	8
Jewish	85
Humanist	6

- 2.7 As stated above, six residents specifically consider themselves to be humanists.

3. Legal Context

- 3.1 The decision to appoint members to SACRE is made by the Local Authority. SACRE may provide advice or recommendations to the Authority in this regard.
- 3.2 Section 390 (4) to the Education Act 1996, requires that the membership of SACRE must consist of 4 groups as follows:
- Group A must include representatives from Christian denominations and other religions and denominations of such religions which appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area.
 - Group B must include representatives of the Church of England
 - Group C must include representative of an association of teachers.
 - Group D must include representatives from the local authority.
- 3.3. The number of representative members should be based on the proportionate strength of that denomination or religion in Slough area².
- 3.4. The SACRE may also include co-opted members in accordance with Section 390(3) and (7) to the Education Act 1996 but they have no voting rights. Each representative group has a single vote.
- 3.5 Non-religious beliefs may be represented on SACRE if they are 'analogous to a religious belief'. The test for this is one of 'cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance, based on 2023 judgment .
- 3.6. The appointee to SACRE must represent the belief system³.
- 3.7. It is proposed that there should be a list of the selection criteria for appointing members to Committee 1 of Slough and that the selection criteria is as follows:

- (i) Suitability of the religion or belief to be represented on SACRE.

Cogency:

- the belief systems is compelling and persuasive in nature.

Seriousness:

- the belief system is earnest and sincere in character and possesses gravitas.

Cohesion:

- the belief system and its adherents are integrated and unified (organisationally and/or conceptually).

Importance:

- the belief system is of significance and standing in society.
- The belief system is widely represented on other SACREs or is otherwise recognised by similar statutory bodies.

² Education Act 1996, s 390(6).

³ Education Act 1996, s 392.

- Reflects the principal religious traditions of Slough and their proportionate strength.
- What percentage of Slough residents self-identify as adherents of the religion or belief system in census data and/or other demographic data.
- Does membership or attendance records show the presence of a local community of faith or belief of proportionate size to the other principal religious and non-religious traditions Slough
- Whether there is an active and locally engaged presence of recognised leaders, teachers, clergy, celebrants, or similar individuals present in Slough.

(ii) Availability of a suitable representative.

- Is the proposed individual is able to represent the religion or belief by virtue of their knowledge and experience.
- Does the proposed individual hold a position of responsibility within the religion or belief.
- Is there a representative organisation exists which is capable of providing a nomination and vouching for the suitability of the individual.
- Does the proposed individual understand and accept the aims and objectives of Slough SACRE.

3.8. The indicators should be used to aid an assessment of whether the criterion is met, but none of them are to be regarded as prescriptive in and of themselves. The fact that a particular indicator is not met does not automatically mean that an appointment should not be made. Each case should be considered on overall merit when determining whether SACRE should advise the Local Authority to make an appointment.

4 Consideration of the matter by SACRE

4.1. At its meeting on 2 November 2023, SACRE considered whether to make a recommendation to Council that a Humanist representative be appointed to SACRE as a full voting member of Committee 1 (Christian Denomination and Other Faiths) It has transpired that a full review of the membership should first be carried out.

5. Next Steps

5.1 To review the membership applying the test set out in the 2023 judgment. Based on the review, to recommend that the Council note the outcome of the review and adopt the proposed criteria in the Terms of Reference.

6. Background Papers

None.