

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

MINUTES of a meeting of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 3 March 2026.

PRESENT: Mr S Dixon (Chair), Mrs M Paddison-Chapman (Vice-Chair), Mr S Bowen, Ms N Brownfield, Ms K Burke, Mrs N Cheema, Mrs M Lawson, Mrs B Naden, Mr J Paul, Mrs S Polden, Mr John Philpott, Miss E Pope, Ms N Ralph, Ms C Russell, Ms H Williams and Mrs P Williams.

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms P Smith-Orr (Consultant Advisor), Mrs M Stanley (Education Lead Advisor) and Mr J Clapson (Democratic Services Officer).

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Apologies for Absence/Substitutes

(Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Wigg, Mrs Elapatha, Mrs Goldstein, Mrs Porteous and Mr Shepherd.

2. Declarations of Interests

(Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2025

(Item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2025 were correctly recorded, and that they be signed by the Chair.

4. RE Advisor Verbal Update

(Item 4)

The 2025-26 Development Plan

1. The Development Plan had been updated and was shown in the agenda for consideration. Progress was detailed in the right hand column and members were encouraged to let Mrs Smith-Orr know if any additional updates were required.

Kent SACRE Annual Report

2. The Annual Report had been completed and circulated as required. The Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee would receive the Report on 17 March 2026 for information and noting.

3. RESOLVED to note the update.

5. Verbal Update on Local Network Groups

(Item 5)

1. Ms Brownfield shared that she had a small group of regular attendees who met three times per year. Their next meeting was planned for the summer term. The group discussed hot topics, shared ideas and supported each other. One of the attendees had also recently applied for the WIRE Award.
2. While Mr Shepherd was unable to attend the meeting, he provided a statement about his group that was read by the clerk as follows:

2.1 We have a strong group of members who regularly attend and enjoy a good catch up, sharing upcoming events and discussing what is working well in our classes. We work closely with ACTS and Prayer Space to offer their services out to our schools. Recently, numbers of attendees have levelled slightly, and we are struggling to reach out to other local RE lead teachers. We are trying to work out why this is and how it could be resolved. I am also trying to step down from the 'role' of network meeting leader, as I no longer lead RE in the school. I am on a senior leadership course and leading maths across the school amongst other UPS responsibilities, so it is challenging for me to commit time to effectively lead network meetings with up to date discussion points. I still attend, and would still wish to do so, as the teachers are all wonderful and I am keen to still stay in the know.

3. Ms Ralph advised that her group meetings were usually held online, but the intention was to hold one in person each year. She added that the teachers wanted the meetings but found it difficult to attend due to conflicting priorities and pressures on their time.
4. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - If the group leaders advised Mrs Smith-Orr of the upcoming meeting dates, she would arrange for the dates to be published on the KELSI Website. This could help raise the profile of the meetings.
 - Some schools were working closely together within trusts or in geographic groupings. They often had networking and sharing sessions that would include discussions about teaching RE.
 - Members thanked the group leaders for their efforts recognised the excellent work that was taking place.

5. RESOLVED to note the update on Local Network Groups.

6. Curriculum and Assessment Review Update

(Item 6)

1. Mrs Smith-Orr drew members' attention to the summary included in the agenda pack and advised that the SACRE had provided comments as part of the Curriculum Assessment Review.
2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - The review recommended ending compulsory RE for 16 to 18 year olds. This was perhaps in recognition that the existing system was not working well enough.

- It was generally felt that bringing RE into the National Curriculum could help remove some of the variation in teaching quality that was seen across the country. It could also help some schools to prioritise the importance of RE teaching more evenly with other national curriculum subjects.
- A national syllabus would probably be fairly high level and overarching. It was likely that would still be a need for the input of local knowledge into what was taught.
- So far many of the Government's discussions were not public knowledge, however, a report on progress was expected by 30 March 26.
- Mrs Smith-Orr offered to keep members updated if she became aware of any further information.

3. RESOLVED to note the update.

7. The Kent Agreed Syllabus - Sept 2027 Update (Item 7)

1. Mrs Smith-Orr introduced the item.

2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:

- The future requirements of the syllabus may become clearer when the Curriculum and Assessment Review update was released towards the end of March.
- RE Today had confirmed that it would be possible to extend the existing syllabus licences for a year.
- It was possible that there would be a need for some form of local syllabus or guidance to supplement a national syllabus in the future.
- Local Government Reorganisation was planned to take place in 2028 and this would have an impact upon the SACRE.
- There was a general lack of uptake to study RE from key stage 5 and older students which was seen across the country.
- The abolishment of compulsory RE in schools for 16-18 year olds would not have a direct impact upon the number of students choosing to study RE subjects at key stage 5 and above.
- The Chair would consider writing to schools following the update on the Curriculum and Assessment Review, to offer reassurance and support if appropriate.
- The law required RE courses to have at least 50% of their focus on Christianity. The percentage of students sitting Christianity based exams far outweighed those of any other religion.
- Some parents and students may not understand what was taught in RE or Philosophy at key stage 5 and above.
- Schools had a duty to inform students and parents what the subjects were about, and should strive to provide experiences to the students that captured their imagination.

3. RESOLVED to note the update.

8. School Website Review Update and Next Steps (Item 8)

1. Mrs Smith-Orr thanked everyone who had assisted in reviewing school websites so far.
2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - Mrs Smith-Orr would review the 40 schools identified so far that appeared not to specify which syllabus they used.
 - Some schools did not use the Kent Agreed Syllabus that was made freely available to schools. In some cases, schools paid for an alternative syllabus that was heavily based upon the Kent Agreed Syllabus.
 - Some schools may feel that they needed to pay for a syllabus that was easily accessible and had ready-made resources. However, the Kent Agreed Syllabus was very good and had everything a teacher needed.
 - It was anticipated that the project would be complete by the time the SACRE meet in June.
3. RESOLVED to note the update.

9. NASACRE Webinar Training Programme 2025/26 and 2026 NASACRE Conference *(Item 9)*

1. Mrs Smith-Orr introduced the item
2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - The Conference was usually a very interesting event and a good chance to meet people from other SACREs and RE backgrounds.
 - Miss Pope, Mrs Smith-Orr and Ms Ralph indicated that they would like to attend. Other members were encouraged to get in touch with the clerk by the end of the week if they wished to attend.
 - There were two NASACRE webinars coming up that might be of interest, and in April there was an online session called NASACRE In Conversations. This was an opportunity to hear what people were doing elsewhere.
3. RESOLVED to note the training programme, and to advise the regarding attendance of the NASACRE Conference.

10. The WIRE Awards *(Item 10)*

1. Thanks were offered to everyone who had presented the awards to schools recently. Mrs Smith-Orr asked for any photos be sent to her if possible for inclusion in the Annual Report.
2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - There was general support to award both schools with the WIRE Award.
 - Mrs Brownfield offered to present the award to Trottiscliffe C of E School.
 - Mrs Cheema offered to present the award to Kings Farm Primary School.
3. RESOLVED that the WIRE Award be awarded to Kings Farm Primary School and Trottiscliffe C of E School.

11. Budget Update

(Item 11)

1. Mrs Smith-Orr introduced the budget.
2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - Some of the budget would be spent on the event to be held in the afternoon of 30 June 26.
 - Consideration should be given to reserving some budget from both the 2025-26 year and 26-27 year, to pay for the extension of the Kent Agreed Syllabus.
3. RESOLVED to note the budget update.

12. Planning for the afternoon of the Away Day 30 June 2026

(Item 12)

1. Mrs Smith-Orr introduced the item.
2. During consideration of the item the following points were raised:
 - The 30 June SACRE meeting would take place at 10am. It was hoped that members would stay for the afternoon event if possible. Unfortunately, some KCC Councillors would need to leave to attend an afternoon meeting scheduled for 2pm.
 - Teachers would be invited to arrive from 12:30pm for lunch. The event would start at 1:30pm and finish at 3:30pm.
 - The event would be based around the elements of the WIRE Award and include an update on the latest position of the Curriculum and Assessment Review.
 - Faith and world view representatives would be invited to give a brief overview of their beliefs and answer questions. The clerk would provide Mrs Smith-Orr with the contact details.
 - Ms Ralph offered to assist in creating a flyer that would be circulated to schools and put on the Kelsi website.
 - The Chair offered to speak to the Cabinet Member for Education to help raise awareness of the event.
3. RESOLVED to note the preparations for the afternoon of the away day.

13. Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent

(Item 13)

SACRE Membership

1. Members noted that the SACRE had some vacant membership positions and highlighted the importance of filling these vacancies in order to support diverse points of view at meetings.
2. The clerk offered to circulate the current membership showing the existing vacancies.

