

Luton SACRE: meeting 3 of 2024-25

- **Date:** Monday 7 July 2025
- **Time:** 1.30 to 3.45pm
- **Location:** Hillborough Junior School, Luton

Attended

- **John Williams (JW): Co-opted - Chair**
- Noshin Hussain: headteacher – Chantry Primary School
- Clare Hodgson (CH): Co-opted Teaching and Learning Consultant – Luton Council
- Kay Kokabi (KK): Co-opted, Luton sixth form college
- Patricia Hyman (PH): Clerk to Luton SACRE

Group A

- Rehana Faisal (RF): Luton Council of Mosques Representative
- Sujel Miah (SM): Luton Council of Mosques Representative
- Carol Green (CG): Judaism Representative
- Farzad Forghani (FF): Bahá'í Representative
- Charles Baily (CB): Humanism Representative

Group B

- Luke Larnar (LL): Church of England Representative
- Peter Farquar (PF): Church of England Representative
- Ryan Parker (RP): Church of England Representative

Group C

- Grietje Reid (GR): NASUWT Representative
- Elif Ucar (EU): NASUWT Representative
- Sharon Welburn (SW): NASUWT Representative

Group D

- Caroline Dawes (CD): Luton Council - Head of Standards & Effectiveness in Education
- Councillor Gillian Fry (GF): Elected Member Representative
- Councillor Mahmood Hussain (MH): Elected Member Representative
- Tahmina Saleem (TS): Elected Member Representative

Apologies

- Mark Sherwin-Peddie (MS-P): NAHT Representative
- Roisin Kendall (RK): University of Bedfordshire
- Jamia Islamia: Ghousia Trust

Group A

- Yogesh Mistry (YM): Hinduism Representative
- Paul Quinton (PQ): Pentecostal Representative
- Lawrence Patterson (LP): Free Churches Representative – Vice Chair
- Jasvinder Singh Nagra (JSN): Sikhi Representative
- Masood Akhtar (MA): Luton Council of Mosques Representative
- Muhammad Rayhan (MR): Luton Council of Mosques representative

- Pauline Cuddihy: Roman Catholic Representative

Group C

- Paul Wagstaff (PW): Luton Council - Director of Education
- Ryad Khodabocus (RK): Luton Council of Faiths Representative
- David Mingay (DM): NEU Representative
- Tazeen Rashid (TR): NEU Representative

Group D

- Councillor Ghulam Abbas (GA): Labour Representative
- Councillor Maria Lovell (ML): Elected Member Representative

1 Welcome and apologies

1.1 The Chair, John Williams (JW), welcomed all members to the meeting of Luton SACRE held at Hillborough Junior School.

1.2 Attendees introduced themselves. Apologies were noted, as above, and will be recorded.

2. Minutes and matters arising

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed.

2.2 RP will provide the Clerk, (PH), with the corrected wording for item 5.7 of the last meeting.

2.3 LL raised that RF's offer to put herself forward as Chair made during the previous meeting, and rejected, had not been minuted.

2.4 CD clarified the confusion regarding RF's SACRE status, confirming that RF has been and is still an official Group A representative for the Mosques.

2.5 RF expressed her concerns regarding her prior removal from the SACRE mailing list and representation, despite her longstanding involvement. She asked how and why she was removed and replaced without consultation. CD stated that the removal was unintentional and extended an apology.

2.6 RF stressed that decisions on representation should not be made by the Local Authority, and that the process was not handled appropriately.

2.7 SM expressed disappointment in how RF's role had previously been overlooked and hoped that such errors would not be repeated. SM also reiterated the ongoing importance of the Luton Council of Faiths and its role in guiding such decisions.

2.8 EU raised the importance of minuting that RF had previously put herself forward for Chair.

3. Clerk's update – representatives appointed from Luton Council 2025

3.1 The Clerk, Patricia Hyman (PH), provided an update on the confirmed appointments to Group D (Elected Members) of SACRE for the 2025–2026 period. The appointments, which are confirmed annually at Luton Council's Annual General Meeting in May, include the continuation of Gillian Fry, Mahmood Hussain, and Aziz Ambia in their representative roles.

3.2 Tahmina Saleem has been newly appointed to the group, replacing Ghulam Abbas and Maria Lovell, who have completed their term of service. There remains one Labour vacancy in Group D, which is expected to be filled in due course.

PH invited members to welcome the newly appointed representative and extended thanks to outgoing members for their contribution to SACRE.

3.3 EU expressed concern that TS had returned to SACRE despite previous assurances from PW (Director of Education) that she would not. EU stated that this should be formally noted.

CD responded that SACRE is now operating under a new constitution, which is clearer and more compliant, and she expressed hope that members could now move forward with a professional outlook.

EU expressed disagreement, stating that TS's return was not appropriate and should not have been allowed, suggesting it represented a breach of trust.

RF objected to CD's remark referencing a 'new level of professionalism,' suggesting it implied there was none before.

JW acknowledged the tension and stated that the Local Authority must take responsibility for restoring trust, particularly in relation to TS's reappointment.

3.4 TS responded, stating that she had not been informed by PW that she should not attend SACRE, but had stepped down and that was surprised by the level of acrimony that existed. She claimed to have apologised to both EU and JW and expressed her wish for this to be put behind them, acknowledging the group's successful work on the syllabus.

3.5 SM felt strongly that this issue should not have been debated openly in the meeting, noting it was deeply disappointing and unfair to JW. NH stated that previous issues were poorly managed, and that lessons need to be learnt.

3.6 EU proposed a motion for a change in representation concerning TS's place on SACRE.

3.7 MH raised a point of order, asserting that the matter was not within SACRE's remit and that the underlying issue was about the absence of a sincere apology, not a constitutional breach.

3.8 TS issued a formal apology to JW, who accepted the apology.

3.9 R H suggested that a future SACRE meeting revisit the values and principles of public duty, particularly regarding expectations of conduct and respect among members. She also confirmed that the Local Authority cannot overturn SACRE representation decisions unilaterally.

3.10 JW noted that if PW had made a promise regarding TS's participation, then SACRE would need to vote on this matter. LL expressed that calling a vote would be unfair to those who were not present during the original incident and suggested that anyone wishing to raise concerns should do so through their local council channels.

3.11 RF expressed dismay at the public nature of the discussion, stating it was difficult for all involved and counterproductive to the work of SACRE. FF stated he was deeply uncomfortable with the tone of the discussion and encouraged members to act with forgiveness and compassion.

3.12 JW concluded by stating that any formal objections should be submitted to the Clerk, who will pass them on to the appropriate body.

4 Procedures for recruitment of members, including co-opted members – Caroline Dawes

4.1 CD led a discussion on the SACRE constitution and the procedures for the recruitment and appointment of members, including co-opted members.

4.2 CD provided a detailed overview of how SACRE membership is structured, explaining the composition of the four statutory groups (A, B, C, and D) and the role of co-opted members. She emphasised that the process is grounded in clarity, structure, and fairness.

4.3 CD highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Luton Council of Faiths continues to be actively involved and well-represented, especially within Group A, which encompasses representatives of all faith groups. She noted that she had consulted NASACRE for further guidance to help SACRE develop broader and more inclusive representation.

4.4 CD stressed the importance of being transparent in all aspects of membership appointment and reiterated her commitment to maintaining diversity of representation. While the constitution belongs to SACRE, she explained that the Local Authority plays a significant role in facilitating the process, and that this needs to be reviewed annually.

4.5 LL stated for SACRE to maintain integrity and compliance, any appointment to membership must be reviewed and approved through a formal vote by SACRE members.

ACTION: Members will be presented with an **updated membership list**, and any new appointments must be reviewed and approved by SACRE through a vote.

4.6 CB commented on Group C (Teacher and Union representatives), noting that these individuals are often self-nominated volunteers without political agendas—ordinary professionals bringing valuable expertise and perspective to SACRE.

4.7 RF raised the issue of religious representation, stressing that the starting point should be the actual classroom demographics within Luton’s schools. She asked members to reflect on whether the current composition of SACRE truly reflects the diversity of the student population.

RF cautioned against tokenistic representation and advocated for the genuine inclusion of individuals who reflect the cultural and demographic realities of Luton’s communities.

Building on this, she noted that while organisational affiliation plays a role, it should not be the sole basis for appointments. Instead, SACRE should prioritise meaningful representation that aligns with the lived experiences of children in Luton’s schools.

In support of this, CB added that SACRE must prepare young people for a diverse and global religious landscape, and that national and international worldviews should be part of the conversation. He proposed incorporating a more humanised approach to religion—emphasising understanding, empathy, and lived experience as essential components of the SACRE’s work.

4.8 CD acknowledged the importance of that perspective but clarified that her starting point is the legislative framework under which SACRE operates. She then outlined the scope and structure of Luton SACRE, including the number of dominions represented and how these decisions are guided by both legal and educational standards.

There was further discussion on balancing legislative compliance with authentic representation.

4.9 CD confirmed that the SACRE constitution includes an established process for managing membership and ensuring compliance. In light of recent discussions and evolving needs, she suggested that it would be beneficial to revisit the constitution with the current SACRE membership to assess whether any updates or clarifications are required.

ACTION: CD to review the SACRE constitution and bring forward any proposed amendments or clarifications for consideration by SACRE members.

5 Feedback on funded activity – teachers’ manual – Clare Hodgson

5.1 CH provided an update on the progress of the teachers’ manual, explaining its current structure and purpose. She noted that the manual is being developed as a key tool to support schools in designing and delivering RE curriculum content that aligns with the locally agreed syllabus.

5.2 CH invited members to send her any relevant content, suggestions, or resources they would like to see included—especially materials that reflect their faith perspectives or teaching priorities. She emphasised that the manual should serve schools across Luton and reflect the diversity of its community.

5.3 The manual includes a curriculum overview, and CH noted that she is currently considering how to best incorporate Christian tenets into the broader framework, ensuring they are appropriately and meaningfully embedded within the learning journey.

5.4 CH shared that while she is nearing completion of the current draft, there may be the possibility of being re-commissioned to expand or continue developing the resource in the future.

5.5 As part of her work, CH has visited schools to observe their RE curriculum delivery, which has helped shape the structure and priorities of the manual.

5.6 A key decision still to be made involves the placement and organisation of supplementary materials, ensuring they are accessible and logically structured for teachers to use.

5.7 KK confirmed that he has been actively supporting CH in the development of the Teachers' Manual, working collaboratively with other members of the working group. He noted that he has been liaising closely with LL, and commended LL for his extensive subject knowledge and valuable insights.

KK agreed to consolidate and share these contributions with CH to help further enrich and strengthen the final version of the manual.

ACTION: KK to share extensive subject knowledge and valuable insights received from LL with CH.

6 Feedback on NASACRE conference: 'SACREs Taking a stand: positive responses to controversial issues' - Farzad Forghani

6.1 FF provided feedback on the recent NASACRE National Conference held in London on 19 May 2025, titled 'SACREs Taking a Stand: Positive Responses to Controversial Issues'.

6.2 FF shared that the conference was thought-provoking and relevant, with a range of workshops covering timely and complex issues affecting religious education and SACREs nationwide.

6.3 FF encouraged members who were unable to attend to request access to the recorded sessions or presentation materials, as a link can be provided for further exploration of the content covered during the event.

7 Development of the non-statutory materials - Ryan Parker

7.1 RP provided an update on the development of non-statutory materials, explaining the approach taken so far. He confirmed that no formal statutory materials have been produced, but that a clear working strategy is in place, and the team continues to develop guidance and resources to support schools.

7.2 RP asked members how they would like to progress this work moving forward, inviting feedback on the current direction and whether any adjustments should be made.

7.3 KK responded in support of the current approach, suggesting that the working group should continue with the existing strategy, which has been positively received and remains aligned with SACRE's aims.

7.4 CH referenced the Religious Education Council's guidance handout, noting that this will be mapped into the curriculum overview and will provide helpful structure and national alignment.

7.5 KK mentioned an upcoming RE conference, encouraging all members to attend and engage with wider conversations around religious education. He thanked everyone involved in the working group for their contributions so far.

8 Constitution amendment for headteacher representation

8.1 The committee revisited a previous suggestion to formally appoint a headteacher representative to Group C (teacher associations and schools), which would potentially require a constitutional amendment.

8.2 KK expressed that Headteachers are already represented within the current SACRE structure and therefore believed no amendment to the constitution was necessary.

8.3 SW proposed that Headteachers be formally recognised as a named sub-group, allowing for consistent representation while enabling alternates to attend when a designated headteacher is unavailable.

8.4 MH supported the inclusion of Headteachers, stating their involvement could significantly contribute to decision-making and strategic direction.

RF proposed a more flexible model through a Leadership Team comprising school leaders, rather than relying solely on individual appointments. This approach was broadly welcomed. Suel Amar agreed, supporting the leadership team model as a practical and inclusive approach.

FF emphasised the importance of ensuring representation from both primary and secondary schools within any leadership team structure.

CD confirmed that such a structure would allow, for example, a nominated representative from the Leadership Team (for example, a secondary head) to attend SACRE meetings as needed, ensuring continuity and flexibility.

8.5 Members discussed whether this change required a formal constitutional amendment.

- Rehana proposed a pragmatic route in which schools are informed of their designated representatives through the leadership team without the need for immediate constitutional change.
- Roisin Hussain suggested proceeding with this structure and reviewing its effectiveness in a year's time.

9 Appointment of new chair

9.1 JW invited nominations for the position of Chair of Luton SACRE, as this meeting marked the end of his term.

9.2 EU nominated RH for the role. The nomination was seconded by SW and SA.

9.3 The nomination was put to a vote and carried unanimously by SACRE members.

9.4 RH was formally appointed as the new Chair of Luton SACRE.

9.5 Following the confirmation of RH as the new Chair, members took the opportunity to express their sincere thanks and appreciation to the outgoing Chair, JW, for his years of dedicated service to Luton SACRE.

SA offered a warm and heartfelt tribute, thanking JW for the depth of commitment, care, and passion he brought to the role. He acknowledged the heart and soul he had invested in SACRE's work, often making its priorities his own. He praised his calm leadership, fairness, and tireless advocacy for inclusive, high-quality religious education.

MH echoed this appreciation, describing JW as a leader who had shown immense personal sacrifice, humility, and dedication over many years. He thanked JW for his quiet strength and unwavering integrity, noting that his efforts had played a vital role in maintaining the group's cohesion during challenging times.

CD then spoke on behalf of the Local Authority and the wider education community in Luton. She thanked JW for his service, not only to SACRE but to the schools and learners of Luton.

She described him as a trusted and respected figure who had contributed meaningfully to ensuring the voice of SACRE remained relevant and valued. She added that he would be greatly missed by colleagues across the system.

EU paid tribute to JW's integrity, humility, and strength, noting that he had been a model of principled leadership. She acknowledged the personal sacrifices he had made in ensuring that SACRE remained grounded, respectful, and focused on its mission.

She expressed that JW's example should serve as an inspiration and benchmark for all members in their service to the committee and the wider community.

10 Any other business

10.1 CD informed members that membership details for NASACRE, which contains useful documents, resources, and national updates, would be circulated to all SACRE members.

ACTION: The Clerk, PH, to send the login credentials (username and password) to enable members to access the NASACRE members' area.

11 Date of next meeting

11.1 The next meeting of Luton SACRE is scheduled to take place on: