

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE:** 30 MAY 2023**REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER:** CLARE CURRAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND LEARNING**LEAD OFFICER:** LIZ MILLS, DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING**SUBJECT:** SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL'S ADOPTION OF THE REVISED SURREY AGREED SYLLABUS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA:** EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THAT HELP THEM SUCCEED IN LIFE**Purpose of the Report:**

The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) must be reviewed by the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) at least every five years. This has been done and a new syllabus has been approved by the Surrey SACRE, however, before it is recommended to Surrey schools, it must be adopted formally by the County Council.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet formally adopts the 2023 revised Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education in Surrey.

Reason for Recommendations:

There have been a number of changes in curriculum delivery, content and in guidance from the Department of Education since the existing syllabus was adopted in 2017, meaning it was no longer fit for purpose. The revision period has enabled a comprehensive engagement including the adoption of the recommendations from Ofsted in relation to curriculum design, set out as follows:

- It should be sequenced in such a way that the 'curriculum is the progression model'
- It should help pupils to make connections across their learning, build strong schemata.
- It should set out what it means to get better at RE in substantive, disciplinary and personal knowledge, across ages and stages of development.

There has been a complete review of the content by qualified teachers and the Advisor to the Surrey SACRE, and the revised syllabus can now be recommended to the Cabinet for teacher training and implementation from September 2023 and first teaching from September 2024. The action being proposed will have benefits for the residents of Surrey in as much as teachers will be able to begin a new academic year by teaching a more relevant RE curriculum that complies with national guidance, prepares young people well for

examination courses in RE, and more accurately reflects the values and beliefs of citizens in this country.

Executive Summary:

Background/Context

1. The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) must be reviewed by the local Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) at least every five years. This has been done and a new syllabus has been approved by the Surrey SACRE.
2. The Agreed Syllabus for RE will be used in Maintained and Voluntary Controlled (VC) schools from 1st September 2023. Academies and Free Schools will continue to be encouraged to also use the Surrey Agreed Syllabus. The locally agreed syllabus is only required to be followed by community, foundation and voluntary controlled schools. Academies and free schools can use any curriculum they choose provided it meets the requirements of an agreed syllabus (see Section 375 (3) of the Education Act 1996). Many do continue to use the Surrey syllabus but there is no requirement for them to do so. Voluntary Aided (VA) schools can use their own Diocesan syllabus, but Guildford DBE are meeting on May 9th to formally approve the decision that they will also now use the Surrey Agreed Syllabus. VA Church of England schools will also be using the Surrey Agreed Syllabus, following a formal vote to adopt this syllabus in their schools from 1st September 2023. Catholic VA schools will continue to use their Diocesan syllabus.
3. The Surrey SACRE resolved to commence a review at a special Agreed Syllabus Conference meeting on July 19, 2021, in readiness for implementation in September 2022. This timeline was extended in February 2022 due to the impact of COVID-19 during the first few months of the revision process.
4. This review was led by the Surrey County Council SACRE RE Adviser and a number of suitably qualified RE teachers from Surrey Primary and Secondary schools. A number of revisions have been made in line with the most recent practice and statutory guidance and the Surrey SACRE approved the revised syllabus at its meeting on 10 May 2023.
5. The Surrey County Council SACRE RE Adviser, as part of the existing SACRE contract, was commissioned by Surrey County Council to promote the revised syllabus in a series of teacher training events, these events are planned for the second half of the summer term 2023 and into the academic year 2023/24.
6. This will enable schools to begin teaching the new syllabus from the start of the new academic year in September 2024. There is no cost for schools to attend this training; the cost was included in the 2023/25 SACRE contract between Surrey County Council and the Diocese of Guildford.
7. **Key changes in the Surrey Agreed Syllabus for RE:**
 - Whilst the subject is still called Religious Education in statute, the syllabus uses the term 'worldviews' in the development of pupils' subject knowledge. This term is more inclusive and accurate, reflecting the reality that everyone has a worldview, which may be influenced by a number of factors, including religious or non-religious beliefs.
 - Concept maps (created in partnership with local faith and belief communities) outline agreed content across the whole of the syllabus. What this substantive knowledge looks like for different ages and stages is described in the units of work as 'sticky knowledge'.
 - Disciplinary knowledge is shaped through key questions reflecting theological, sociological and philosophical approaches (called 'God', 'Community' and 'Identity' in the Primary phase) and ensures that pupils RE learning is not one-dimensional. · Pupils' personal knowledge is linked with their learning: key

questions throughout the units of work help pupils to use skills and articulate their views, insights and understanding in increasingly sophisticated ways.

- End of phase expectations reflecting the theological, sociological & philosophical approaches help teachers to understand & articulate progression through the syllabus. · Materials for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) reflect current practice and are linked to the Early Learning Goals, as outlined in the statutory EYFS Framework.
- A more flexible approach to content at KS3, enabling schools to design a curriculum that reflects their local context (e.g., set across multiple schools within an academy chain) and the specific needs of their students, including transition into provision at KS4.

Consultation:

8. Consultation with the dioceses and schools has taken place via discussion at the SACRE termly meetings, beginning in 2021. The statutory review was conducted by the SACRE between the Autumn term of 2021 and Spring term of 2023, under the supervision of the professional adviser for RE and with the assistance of a number of suitably qualified RE teachers in Surrey Primary and Secondary schools. Teachers were able to ensure the new LA agreed syllabus would meet the needs of all learners and attention was paid to ensure it would support learners with additional needs and learners who do not have English as their first language.
9. The various faith and non-religious belief groups represented on the SACRE have added their views during the drafting process. The outcome of this consultation has been that SACRE has unanimously approved the finished syllabus and commends this to the council and to Surrey schools.
10. The Lead Cabinet Member for Education and Learning has been consulted on the content.

Risk Management and Implications:

11. The Council has a duty to ensure that there is an agreed RE syllabus to comply with education law and the Surrey syllabus has been reviewed to comply with the requirements of this duty. This revised syllabus now needs to be formally adopted to complete the process.
12. The previous syllabus is now putting teachers and pupil/students at a disadvantage as it does not take account of current Department of Education and Ofsted thinking and expectations in relation to curriculum design and lesson planning. The revised syllabus reflects all current guidance and should better prepare pupils for the world in which they live.

Financial and Value for Money Implications:

13. Supply cover for the teacher writing group to work on the review of the syllabus and teacher training programme is covered within the existing SACRE budget. This is paid for by Surrey County Council through existing funding arrangements.
14. In order to reduce costs, the syllabus will be available in electronic form only. Once adopted the syllabus will be put onto the Diocese of Guildford website for schools to download. Members of SACRE have also received an electronic copy.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

15. Significant progress has been made in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and the financial management capabilities across the organisation. Whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the increased cost of living, global financial uncertainty, high inflation and government

policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to be forward looking in the medium term, as well as the delivery of the efficiencies to achieve a balanced budget position each year.

16. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2023/24 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, in order to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.
17. As implementation costs are already within the existing SACRE budget and there are no further ongoing financial implications, the Section 151 Officer therefore supports the proposal.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

18. The requirement for the Local Authority to adopt a syllabus is contained in the Education Act 1996, specifically Schedule 31 para 10 which states:
“Where a local authority in England causes a conference to be convened for the purpose of reconsidering any agreed syllabus:
(1) if the conference unanimously recommends that the existing syllabus should continue to be the agreed syllabus, or unanimously recommends a new syllabus to be adopted in substitution for the existing syllabus; and
(2) it appears to the local authority that the syllabus or, as the case may be, the new syllabus, reflects the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain, the local authority may give effect to the recommendation.”

Equalities and Diversity:

19. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached as an appendix to this report. The agreed RE syllabus will not negatively impact on residents or council staff with Protected Characteristics. As with all curriculum content schools have a general duty to ensure that every student can access the curriculum and this syllabus is designed to enable the content to be differentiated for pupils of all abilities, including those with disabilities.
20. The key impact of this complete syllabus review is that teachers following this syllabus will be better equipped to effectively deliver RE content in their lessons at all Key Stages of learning. The syllabus, and its associated free training for all Surrey teachers, also gives helpful guidance on how to encourage students to ask big philosophical questions, enables them to challenge prejudice and discriminatory behaviour in the classroom, and underpins the teaching of British Values across the curriculum. It supports specialists in RE and non-specialist teachers and promotes religious tolerance and understanding to all groups.
21. The recommended learning and teaching styles, and the revised content, intrinsically promote equality of opportunity and treatment towards all. The Approved Syllabus therefore enables schools to address inequalities and bias towards people and groups, especially those with Protected Characteristics in law, by establishing opportunities within the curriculum to explore these issues with pupils of all ages and abilities.
22. Similarly, school staff with protected characteristics will not be negatively affected by the changes made to the content or proposed delivery of the new syllabus.

Other Implications:

23. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	The breadth of the RE syllabus overlaps with other subject areas such as Physical Social and Health Education, Humanities or English there are many opportunities for addressing potential discrimination against looked after children by children or by staff. This is the role of the Head Teacher and Senior Pastoral staff in every school and is not restricted to the RE curriculum.
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	No direct implications expected.
Environmental sustainability	No direct implications expected.
Compliance against net-zero emissions target and future climate compatibility/resilience	No direct implications expected.
Public Health	No direct implications expected.

What Happens Next:

24. Consult with Special School Teachers to identify how SACRE can support professional development or creation of further non statutory materials.
25. The professional development opportunities for teachers in Surrey schools will commence in the summer term 2022/23.
26. The revised syllabus will be placed on the Diocese of Guildford website once the syllabus has been adopted by Surrey County Council.
27. Professional development will continue into the school year 2023/24 and schools should start teaching the new syllabus from September 2024. The revised syllabus will be brought to the attention of all schools and academies through the Schools Bulletin and Governor briefings.

Report Author:

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Consulted:

Surrey SACRE, Clare Curran Cabinet Member for Education and school representatives for RE teaching

Annexes:

Annex 1: Equality Impact assessment

Annex 2: The Surrey revised Agreed RE Syllabus, 2023-2028

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