

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	23 August 2021
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Appointment of Third Religious Representative to Education Operational Delivery Committee
REPORT NUMBER	COM/21/165
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
CHIEF OFFICER	Fraser Bell
REPORT AUTHOR	Stephanie Dunsmuir
TERMS OF REFERENCE	7

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Council of the applicants for the vacancy of Third Religious Representative on the Education Operational Delivery Committee and to request that Members make an appointment to the role.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:-

- 2.1 note the details of the five applications contained in section 3.6 of the report; and
- 2.2 having regard to the comparative strength of all the churches and denominational bodies having duly constituted charges or other regularly appointed places of worship within the city, and taking into account the two appointments already made, make an appointment from those applications to the vacancy of third religious representative on the Education Operational Delivery Committee with immediate effect, subject to a satisfactory Disclosure Scotland check being undertaken.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Education Operational Delivery Committee (EODC) consists of thirteen Councillors and seven external members – three religious representatives, two teacher representatives and two parent representatives. The external members have full voting rights. The Council is obliged by law to include one representative of the Church of Scotland and one representative of the Roman Catholic Church and these appointments have previously been made following nomination of representatives from the respective religious bodies – Reverend Shuna Dicks, Church of Scotland and Mr John Murray, Roman Catholic Church. The Committee currently has a vacancy for the third religious representative. In accordance with Standing Order 2.9, the current external members and the new third religious representative will be members of EODC until the local government elections in May 2022.

- 3.2 In appointing a third religious representative, the Council is required to have regard to the comparative strength of all the churches and denominational bodies having duly constituted charges or other regularly appointed places of worship within the city. It must also take into account the two appointments already made.

Extract from Section 124 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973

- (a) *one representative of the Church of Scotland, nominated in such manner as may be determined by the General Assembly of the Church;*
- (b) *in the case of the education authority for each area other than Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Western Isles, one representative of the Roman Catholic Church, nominated in such manner as may be determined by the Scottish Hierarchy of the Church; and*
- (c) *one person or, in the case of the education authorities for Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands and Western Isles, two persons, in the selection of whom the authority shall have regard (taking account of the representation of churches under paragraphs (a) and (b) above) to the comparative strength within their area of all the churches and denominational bodies having duly constituted charges or other regularly appointed places of worship there.*

- 3.3 The most recent data available in respect of the comparative strength of all churches and denominational bodies in Aberdeen is as follows:-

Census 2011 – Aberdeen

Census Category	Responses
No religion	107197
Church of Scotland	56267
Roman Catholic	19751
Religion not stated	15992
Other Christian	15030
Muslim	4293
Hindu	2301
Buddhist	884
Other religion	794
Jewish	155
Sikh	129

School Data – from SEEMIS

Census Category	Responses
No religion	13492
Christian	7058
Religion not known	1977
Muslim	1526

Other religion	1106
Religion not disclosed	818
Hindu	506
Buddhist	115
Sikh	18
Jewish	9

- 3.4 Previous practice has been to hold a public meeting which faith groups attended, and those who had applied would speak to their application form. Where there were competing applications, a ballot would be held with each faith group represented having one vote, and the result of that ballot was reported to Council for ratification. However, due to the closure of places of worship and the restrictions on public gatherings, the vacancy was advertised on the website and through the Interfaith group during April and May 2021 following which five applications were received. The five interested applicants were invited to attend individual meetings with the Chief Officer – Education and the Committee Officer and Legal Adviser to the Education Operational Delivery Committee on 19 July 2021.
- 3.5 The purpose of these informal meetings was to enable the applicants to find out more about the Committee and the role of the External Members, as well as to hear detail on the Education service, its priorities and the type of business conducted at meetings of EODC. Applicants were also given the chance to expand upon their applications and explain what they would bring to the role if they were successful.
- 3.6 Details of the applications are set out below. The application form template is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' information and the text below relates to the final two questions on the form. Applicants also provided additional information at the informal meetings as to the size of their congregations and this is also listed below.

Peter Murray – The Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney of the Scottish Episcopal Church

Reasons for applying:- Education is key in maximising the potential of Aberdeen and those who live within it. Not least as a Burgess of Aberdeen, Guild and Trade, I am committed to our city. As a Christian I also have a duty to my neighbour and am happy to volunteer for the greater good. Aberdeen has been good to me and my family and this is a way I can give something back.

I have extensive committee and board experience across the church, the law, financial services, education, the environment and social care. For some years I acted as a business mentor through a scheme run by Scottish Enterprise. I am committed to encouraging positive working cultures and collaborative working and enjoy positive communication across the Diocese. I am used to supporting executives whilst helping set long term priorities and the strategies that achieve those priorities. For over 25 years I have been a practicing commercial solicitor and would also hope to bring to the Education Operational Delivery Committee some of the skills I have gained through that profession. In terms of being a religious representative, I am a former member of the management committee of St Devenick's Church (Bieldside) and for

the last 13 years I have been the Registrar and a Trustee of the Diocese of Aberdeen & Orkney (Scottish Episcopal Church). This application has the support of the Bishop of Aberdeen & Orkney.

I am a graduate of Aberdeen University. I have three children who attend school in Aberdeen, one in the state sector and two in the independent sector. From 2005 to 2016 I was a governor/vice-chairman of Albyn School, during which time the school became co-educational and significantly increased its number of bursaries. I am the company secretary of a small children's nursery in the city. Since 2016 I have been a non-executive director of VSA (which includes Linn Moor School). Alongside Aberdeen City Council, VSA helps support some of the most vulnerable people in our community and seeks to give them the best of lives.

Mr Murray advised that there were nine churches in Aberdeen with approximately 1044 members. The Scottish Episcopal Church would fall within the 'other Christian' category in the 2011 census.

Vimal Subramanian – Aberdeen Hindu Association

Reasons for applying:- I'm passionate about enhancing Educational Delivery in the City and ensuring there is fairness in access, equity, and participation. As an External Member on the Education Operational Delivery Committee, I bring valuable diversity to the Committee to help reduce groupthink. Through my contributions, I would like to actively engage diverse groups and communities in local Educational governance. I'm the Secretary of the Aberdeen Hindu Association (AHA), a registered Scottish Charity (SC041762) that offers voluntary Educational services to Children and families from the Hindu Community. Having worked closely with Aberdeen Inter-Faith Group and Interfaith Scotland, I hope to work closely with the 13 Councillors and 7 external members of the Committee.

As a father of a 10-year old Son, I'm committed to improving Educational Delivery in the City by providing oversight, monitoring performance, and making recommendations where appropriate. I am keen to increase the number of local schools taking advantage of international visits. I bring extensive leadership experience honed from years in Higher Education (at the University of Aberdeen and Derby) and Further Education (Vision West Nottinghamshire College), and the Foreign Office (FCDO). I bring many transferrable skills to this role such as attention to detail, analytical reasoning, and relationship building.

I hold a BEng Mechanical Engineering and MBA Knowledge Management, I work as International Strategy Officer at the University of Aberdeen and bring to the role a broad understanding of the challenges faced by the Region and have a strong sense of the road to recovery beyond the Pandemic. I am also a Race Equality champion and Co-Convenor of the University's Race Equality Network. I am an experienced board advisor, comfortable contributing to a Board in its decision-making, development, and assessments, and in addition I work frequently with boards and individual Chairs on further development. My role is to reach out to other religious organisations and I work closely with Interfaith in this regard.

Mr Subramanian advised that the congregation consisted of between 500 and 600 members at larger scale events and that they had a mailing list of approximately 400.

The Aberdeen Hindu Association would fall within the 'Hindu' category in the 2011 census.

Madhav Regmi – Aberdeen Hindu Association / Aberdeen Hindu Temple Trust

Reasons for applying:- If we see globally, education is going through an adjustment period these days. Those of us who have been in the profession have own experiences. I am one of them and I have started feeling that the modern pedagogy is in lack of moral values nowadays. People who are not in the profession may not know the value of how it impacts on the upbringing of students in school environment. In my opinion education needs a little revolution. Honesty, sympathy, kindness, tolerance these are few of the attributes which can help the society to keep in harmony, and I think if I am involved in the committee, new generation of schools will have some insights that we have learnt and done in the past. I am happy to share my experience and thought in keeping the students harmonious and more vigilant towards the moral values accepted in the society. I will share my thoughts and the way we legislate our educational system. If decisions were made by a panel representative of all education stakeholders, the children would get benefitted and in turn the community where they are brought up.

I was a teacher for about more than 12 years in schools and colleges. I worked as a head teacher, director and coordinator of the schools and educational institutions and I can say that I have some know-how of the pedagogical activities and children's learning environment, how it can be boosted in the context of local, national, and international environment. Currently I am acting as an honorary Priest of the Hindu Temple in Aberdeen as well. I also work for the NHS and take part in the hospital chaplaincy and am involved in an interfaith group in Aberdeen as well as being involved in charities and educational activities. More about me can be found in <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/madhavregmi>

Mr Regmi explained the Hindu faith in more detail and advised that there were approximately 300 to 400 members of their congregation with 3200 to 3600 attending festivals three to four times a year. The Aberdeen Hindu Association would fall within the 'Hindu' category in the 2011 census.

Olushola Ajide – Fountain of Love

Reasons for applying:- With regards to the External Member on the Education Operational Delivery Committee as the third religious representative of the Aberdeen City Council, empowered by the education authority as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which monitors the delivery of educational services among other duties, I wish to indicate my fit and highlight my qualifications for the role. As an inspirational and outstanding professional with years of experience and an engaging lecturer with years of teaching and developing learning materials for both online and face-to-face students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, I believe that my current knowledge and experience will be an asset in enhancing the best value and delivery of the Council's agreed outcomes, commissioning intentions, service specifications and service standards.

I hold a PhD in Management, an MSc in Management Information System, and a Post Graduate Diploma in Business Management. I am a member of the British Academy

of Management, an associate member of the Energy Institute and I am the founding president of the Nigerian Environmental Society, UK chapter. I believe I have the experience for this role because of my passion of ensuring students have positive educational experience and ensuring that hindrances to their learning should be eliminated. Moreover, I am a parent of school age children at primary and secondary levels in the city. Also, my experience of delivered teaching at higher education and primary levels with evidence of successful student learning outcomes qualifies me for the role. The Fountain of Love is involved in many initiatives including a befriending service, job club, help for substance / alcohol abuse, after-school club and the provision of hot home cooked meals to those in need.

Mr Ajide advised that their congregation consisted of approximately 600 members, including 250 children. Aberdeen is the Regional office for the church in Scotland and there are also parishes in Aberdeenshire. The Fountain of Love Church would fall within the 'other Christian' category in the 2011 census.

Jayashree Venkatraman – Aberdeen Hindu Association / Aberdeen Hindu Temple Trust

Reasons for applying:- The reason I am interested in the role is to promote and facilitate teaching of Hinduism within the educational system. To be involved in developing teaching resources content on Hinduism and training teachers. I have been involved with and leading the Shloka group of the Aberdeen Hindu Association for the past 10 years. I have been teaching: Shlokas/Sanskrit mantras to children (evidence has shown this can improve children's memory), stories based on Hindu mythology and epics, stories promoting moral values, organising and coordination plays/talks for children based on religious learnings, Hindu traditions and rituals. I am also the proud Mum of two boys, aged 16 and 14, who are both actively engaged in our spiritual, cultural and community activities. I am keen to promote the use of yoga in local schools and would be happy to arrange professional learning for school staff to support their delivery of RME. Due to my role as a GP I also have experience of children with additional support needs and can offer advice to the Committee in this area.

Ms Venkatraman advised that until recently the Association did not have its own place of worship and had to rent premises. There would be 30 to 50 people in attendance each fortnight, with up to 100 for special occasions and 400 to 500 people for bigger events. After the pandemic, it was hoped to open the temple more frequently. The Aberdeen Hindu Association would fall within the 'Hindu' category in the 2011 census.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Council has a statutory obligation under section 124 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to appoint three religious representatives to the Education Operational Delivery Committee, the purposes of which include advising the authority on any matters relating to the discharge of their functions

as education authority. If the Council fails to appoint a third religious representative, it will be in breach of a statutory duty.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	Failure to appoint will leave the Council in breach of its statutory duty	L	Council makes an appointment to the Committee from the interested applicants
Operational	N/A	N/A	N/A
Financial	N/A	N/A	N/A
Reputational	N/A	N/A	N/A
Environment / Climate	N/A	N/A	N/A

7. OUTCOMES

7.1 The proposals in this report have no direct impact on the Council Delivery Plan.

8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Not required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 None.

10. APPENDICES

10.1 Appendix 1 – Application Form

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Stephanie Dunsmuir
Title	Committee Services Officer
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Appendix 1

Application – Vacancy of Third Religious Representative

First Name	
Surname	
Home Address	
Telephone Number	
Email Address	
Religious Organisation you represent	
Address of Religious Organisation	
If your religious organisation has a website, please include the web address	
Please state your reason for wishing to undertake the position of External Member on the Education Operational Delivery Committee / what you feel you would bring to the role	
Please state any experience you have of education – for example, you may have school age children, or you may have a background in education	

Please return your application to:- committeeservices@aberdeencity.gov.uk