# Coronavirus

# *Advice to area meeting trustees*

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## Introduction

This is a developing collection of advice for area meeting trustees, in these uncertain times. It has been prepared by BYM staff with input from some experienced Friends across BYM. It aims to help guide your thinking, and focus on Quaker aspects, rather than being exhaustive advice.

You will need to consult Government guidelines and other official advice as it is published and as it changes – links are included at the end. Government guidance will be different for different aspects of a meeting house: for Places of Worship, and for ‘Multi-use Community Facilities’ as many meeting houses are effectively community centres.

## Quaker specific documents

These are published on [BYM’s coronavirus webpage](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/coronavirus-advice-for-quaker-meetings). In particular, you are offered:

* [9 steps to re-opening Quaker meeting houses and worship spaces safely](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/9-steps-to-re-opening-meeting-house) which covers some aspects in more detail, and has a list of key decisions in an appendix.
* A model [COVID-19 Risk assessment](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/meeting-house-handbook-template-covid-supplement) adapted for Quaker use. This uses the same format as the risk assessment in the Meeting House Handbook template, which is available on the [‘Property advice’ page of the BYM website](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/property-advice-1).

## Our worshipping community

Worship and community are central to our Quaker meetings. While these are primarily the responsibility of other roles such as elders and overseers, their successful continuation is key to achieving your charitable objectives. So it would be wise for trustees to be sure that these aspects are being considered and supported.

## Worship spaces

Meetings in your area may be beginning to explore the options for restarting or continuing their worship once lockdown restrictions ease, whether separately, online, in-person, or with a combination of these. Any plans for resuming in-person worship will need to take full account of how this can be done safely. Meetings should refer to relevant government guidance as it is published for ‘places of worship’.

Some aspects may need to change, for example holding worship in-person but without the usual socialising afterwards. The number of people who can worship in your meeting rooms may be greatly reduced by social distancing, or by the time it takes for handwashing. There are options for meeting outdoors, or at several times of day - See the BYM advice on [holding meetings for worship outdoors](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/thoughts-on-outdoor-worship-during-pandemic).

However, there is likely to be a long period when many worshippers are unable to join in-person worship.

For meetings wanting to run combined or ‘blended’ online and in-person meetings, this may require smaller or larger investment in technology to enable this style of worship. The technology will also be useful for other building users facing the same need to meet in person and online. See BYM see [advice on blended worship](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/thoughts-on-blended-worship).

## Meeting houses – room lettings

Meeting houses that let rooms for meetings and similar activities can be considered as community centres, so you need to refer to the [English ‘Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities’](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities) and equivalent guidance for Wales and Scotland as published. (A very small number of meeting houses might appropriately be regarded as hospitality, and should follow that guidance.)

Government restrictions on numbers and households meeting indoors may well mean that it is either not allowed or not feasible to open for group lettings as early as opening for worship.

## Meeting houses – discrete areas and functions

Some meeting houses will contain offices, or discrete workspaces like counselling rooms, which will be subject to [Government guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19) for their sector.

Facilities such as nurseries are already permitted to open. Meetings which host nurseries should be working with the provider, local authorities and trustees on this, and consulting relevant [official guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020).

Some meeting houses may be hosting essential voluntary or public services, such as food banks or homeless services. Official guidance should also be sought on these.

## Meetings which rent their worship space

The government guidance for ‘multi-purpose community facilities’ referred to above (or equivalents in Wales and Scotland) will govern the ability of many community facilities to open. In England, the guidance on ‘places of worship’ applies where worship takes place in buildings like community centres. Initially this may be more permissive than for other users of the building.

## Buildings – overall

Trustees and local meetings may wish to use the Quaker guide ‘[*9 steps to re-opening Quaker meeting houses and worship spaces safely*](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/9-steps-to-re-opening-meeting-house)*’* which offers more advice.

Government and [Health & Safety Executive guidance](https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm) should be followed, for example regarding cleaning and hygiene measures. Trustees need to be clear about which aspects are your responsibility, and which aspects are the responsibility of those using your buildings. You, or local premises committees, may need to amend terms and conditions of hire.

You will need to have a risk assessment for each meeting house. A model adapted for Quakers is available on the [BYM’s coronavirus webpage](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/coronavirus-advice-for-quaker-meetings). You should also ask for copies of risk assessments of other users of your buildings.

One of the most complex aspects is likely to be where different users of the building overlap, for example, entrance routes, use of toilet and other shared facilities, and when one group follows another. It may be necessary to open for some users and not others: some prioritisation may be needed. Indeed, it may be appropriate to open a building for some uses while not opening for Quakers, or vice versa..

Whilst it may be legally possible to re-open, you may decide that this is not practically feasible, for example if you do not have the time and energy to fulfil all the necessary requirements. You may also find it is not financially feasible, as it may cost more to open a building with low occupancy than to keep it closed or limited.

Each site will need individual consideration, assessing the risks. Local circumstances may mean that different buildings can be open to different extents and timescales. You will need to take account of the capacity of the local meeting community, or employees, to manage the building in these new circumstances. (See below about decisions and involvement.)

## Finances

You need to review your budget projections, reserve levels and reserves policy, and act accordingly to preserve the future financial stability of your meetings.

Many area and local meetings will face a major fall in income from lettings and potentially other property income. This may last for a long period beyond the formal Government restrictions, as community organisations and individuals choose to be cautious about meeting together, or making commitments. Your donations, legacies, investment income and the value of investments may all fall. Some costs may rise, for example: cleaning; hardship funds; technology (to meet changed hirer needs or to hold blended worship – combining online and in-person); meetings needing to move to alternative premises. Employment costs will need to be met, including possible redundancy costs.

If you find your area meeting might be in financial difficulties in 2020 or 2021 please give BYM early warning of this, by emailing [supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk).

## Employees, volunteers and contractors

Quaker guidance for employers is here: [www.quaker.org.uk/employers](https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/coronavirus-employment-advice-to-meetings03-2020)

If there is a warden living on site, their need for a safe living and working environment needs to be thought through. Some employees may need extra protection if they are vulnerable or in a high risk category.

Area meetings also have a duty of care towards their volunteers (on and off-site), and to contractors, so you will need to consider Government guidance with them in mind too.

## Beyond money, employees and buildings

Trustees may need to consider aspects such as safeguarding (including online), burial grounds, data protection, cybercrime, and other governance issues during this emergency period.

## Phases of the pandemic

To help you think through phases of the pandemic, the table on the final page offers a view of different aspects of our Quaker community, and how they can affect one another. You could use the table to prompt discussion of the issues and possible timescales. This version is only a starting point, to encourage you to explore different perspectives.

## Decisions and involvement

These are unprecedented times, full of difficult decisions and a lot of uncertainty. People involved may have very different perspectives and experiences of the pandemic. Many people cannot visit a meeting place at all at the moment, because of medical concerns, and this will continue beyond the dates when government restrictions are lifted. That might affect the value of re-opening, if attendance will be small, or some people feel excluded. It might also affect the number of people who could help with tasks. There is a wealth of new guidance to consider, and some complex issues. Some people will be very uncomfortable with re-opening now, perhaps for reasons of personal health, or out of concern for others. We must not pressure one another, either to agree a decision or to participate in the work needed to re-open. So care, kindness and listening will all be important, alongside official guidance and practical good sense, seeking the right way forward.

Our Quaker structures and practices can have many layers and inter-dependencies. Trustees need to take a lead, and will need to take some difficult decisions.

You probably need to meet more frequently than usual, and you may need to delegate in new ways. However, you will need to take particular care to communicate, involve and consult. Consider which issues need to involve particular roleholders or individuals within meetings, and which issues may depend on the decisions of: local premises committees; employees; local treasurers; local business meetings; area meeting; elders; clerks; registering officers and those responsible for funerals; major users of buildings; users with particular needs.

It may be helpful if your discussions with a local meeting involve some trustees from outside that local meeting.

If local meetings do want to go ahead, remember that while this is a local decision, based on local circumstances, it is not *only* a local decision: area meeting trustees hold the legal responsibility for safety. Decisions on re-opening need agreement by area meeting trustees as well. You will therefore need to decide what process you will use for such agreement, and set this out clearly.

We need to listen for the guidance of the spirit.

The general advice ‘Do not rush’ is valuable. We need to pay attention to relationships and people. While we will may have the opportunity to re-open, this does not necessarily mean that we should, nor that we must do it as soon as possible.

Remember, Quaker worship does not depend on buildings, on sacred spaces, or special times.

*Do you consider difficult questions with an informed mind as well as a generous and loving spirit? Are you prepared to let your insights and personal wishes take their place alongside those of others or be set aside as the meeting seeks the right way forward?* From *Advices & Queries* 15

## Further support

You can contact Britain Yearly Meeting staff at [supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk)

You can get useful advice from colleagues in other area meetings:

* A conversation with neighbouring trustees may be very useful.
* You can join the Property Advice e-group [here](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/support-for-meetings/property-advice-1).
* You can join the Wardens e-group, by scrolling down to Support [here](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/employers-wardens#heading-1),
* You can find out about the Wardens Talking sessions under Training and Events on the same page [here](https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-roles/employers-wardens#heading-1).
* You can find sessions for Online Worship Facilitators [here](https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/about/online-mfw/setting-up-mfw/).
* Your area meeting treasurer can consult colleagues on the Treasurers e-group.

## Guidance links

### Britain Yearly Meeting coronavirus advice

* [www.quaker.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.quaker.org.uk/coronavirus)

### Government guidelines

* England: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
* Scotland: <http://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>
* Wales: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus>

Note that the most relevant links to Government guidelines will be shown on the [BYM coronavirus](http://www.quaker.org.uk/coronavirus) page. In particular, you may need to read guidance for both Places of Worship and for community centres for your lettings – in England this is covered within ‘Multi-use community facilities’.

* See also general [Government guidance about risk assessment and COVID-19](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm)

### Health and Safety Executive guidelines

* <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm>

### Regulators:

* Charity Commission: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector>
* OSCR: <https://www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/covid-19-guidance-for-charities/>

### Medical updates

* England: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)
* Scotland: [www.scot.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.scot.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/)
* Wales: <https://covid19-phwstatement.nhs.wales/>

### Resources from some other churches

* United Reformed Church <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3365-urc-issues-coronavirus-advice-to-its-churches>
* Church of England <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

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| **Government rules** | **Original firmest lockdown** | **Restrictions initially ease**  Some activities and work return.  Social distancing continues. | **Restrictions gradually ease**  Places of worship and hospitality phased in. | | | | **Fewer restrictions**  Some continue. May increase. | | | **“New Normal”** |
| **Time – months are uncertain** | March, April, May  Longer in Wales and Scotland | Earliest June | Earliest July | | | | ? Autumn | | | ? well into 2021 |
| **Job Retention Scheme** | Scheme in place to end July | | | | Scheme modified to end Oct | | | | Unknown (potentially scheme ended) | |
| **Quaker member and attender behaviour** | Isolated, bar some workers.  Many online, some not.  Sense of community.  Some ill. Some die. Grieving. | Isolated. More workers return.  Many online, some not.  Sense of community  Some ill. Some die. Grieving. | Older, frail and health vulnerable still shielding/isolated.  A few can meet in person. Others cautious.  Some keen on normal.  Some ill, some die. Grieving. More workers return. | | | | | | | Legacy of isolation, ill health and losses.  Increased use of online methods. |
| **Quaker meetings** | Online worship. Non-tech worship.  Newcomers and Returners. Less social and learning. Some people not online, by choice or limited by technology.  Some people lost. Lost meetings?  Role-holders missing. People stepping into roles and greater involvement.  Some online business meetings and committees. Activities Postponed. | Online and non-tech worship continuing  New online social & activities continuing  New ways of working emerging / stabilising  Some people newly recognised or participating  More online committees and meetings for worship for business (MfWfB). Online learning  Newcomers/returners settling in  Some Quakers drift away. Some role-holders missing.  Some meetings may crumble. | | Online meetings continue  Physical worship and community return for some people  Blended online and physical worship emerges  MfWfB and committees begin mixing online and in person  Memorial meetings catching up  Activities and agendas catching up  New plans and opportunities.  What gaps are left? Energy levels? | | | | | | “Normal plus”  Online worship continues.  Blended online and physical worship continues.  Some committees and MfWfB online and blended.  Opportunities?  Gaps ? Losses ? |
| **Children and Young people** | Isolated, missing school  Missing out if internet not available or slow  Online children’s meeting. Opportunities for online youth groups regionally and nationally.  Sense of community | Main Quaker connection for many young people - regional residential summer events or YMG -cancelled. Some young people drift away.  Differences exacerbated: some shielding with families; some can meet; internet inequalities.  Online opportunities continue and develop including opportunities to develop all age faith conversation. Some schooling returns physically. | | Some more schooling returns physically - more pressure, less time to engage with Quakers.  Physical worship and community returns for some people  Online meetings continue  Mixed Physical + Online worship and community emerges | | | | | | Legacy of mental health conditions, interrupted schooling and milestones.  Physical events return.  Online youth groups continue as replacement and continuation of national physical events |
| **Events (not worship)** | Many postponed or cancelled.  Some moved online | | Planning lag  Some moved online | | | Some events possible, but not others. Reduced attendances. Residential unlikely, many cautious (esp. about public transport). Opportunities to gather in different ways or with different groups. | | | | “Normal”  Legacy of digital explosion for physical events |
| **Room hirers** | Not allowed | Some re-start eg Nurseries | A few users restart eg counsellors Most unable or choose not to. | | | | Gradual rise | | | Normal  Legacy of digital explosion |
| **Wardens and other local Quaker workers** | Some furloughed, some not  A few with buildings open  Uncertainty Preparations for re-opening | | | Much less work for some time. Some part-time furloughing.  Changed work where buildings open ‘Covid-19 secure’.  Catching up on backlog and re-bookings.  Some meetings face financial crisis. | | | | | | Normal  Some face implications of financial losses and hirers’ changes |
| **Meeting Finances** | Lost income. Drawing on reserves. A few financial crises.  Area meetings decide how to support any local meeting in financial difficulties. | | | | | | | Still lost income  Some financial crises | | Depleted reserves. |
| **AM Trustees** | Rapid decisions. Furlough? Reserves? Absentees. Uncertainties. Pull together  Pausing some work. | Managing properties with fewer people available.  Decisions re opening or not and for what - complexity and involvement.  New furlough decisions. Some AMs or LMs facing financial crisis.  Still many uncertainties. A chance to face strategic issues? | | | | | | Still financial issues.  Legacy of disjointed period.  Some issues clearer.  Opportunities for changes. | | Longer term reconsideration. |
| **Reflections** | Learning new tech & new ways of living. Stresses.  Dreaming of new normal. | Reflection on what is essential in life & Quakerism.  Dreaming of new normal Preparing for new normal  People having different experiences of pandemic. | | | | | | Pressures of “back to normal”  Make some changes  Reflections continue | | Longer term reconsideration |

### Possible phase of the pandemic