

Meeting House Matters notes (ongoing)

An ongoing record of the notes taken at online Meeting House Matters meetings.



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Archive of notes

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18 October 2023 – Controversial bookings AND warm spaces

Our theme for this discussion was controversial bookings AND warm spaces.

The next session will be in person on Tuesday, 14 November at Westminster Meeting House. There is a booking form linked below to book to attend in person.

<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-23/>

There will also be an online blended session on Tuesday, 14 November at 2.00pm. You do not need to register in advance to attend online, just turn up using the joining details below.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVDdsMFI0MUZ3WEpmUT09>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: WT-online

Notes

Controversial bookings

We held a conversation in relation to controversial bookings following the experience of some Quaker meetings, including Friends House, Euston, cancelling bookings made by the Socialist Workers Party. The information below was not discussed at the online session but has been jointly written by BYM colleagues to help Friends discernment on whether a booking can go ahead.

Dear Friends,

We have been hearing from meetings receiving request to host events relating to Palestine and Israel. The Quiet Company has also been approached to host many such events at Friends House.

Here are some key principles we use to guide our room lettings in relation to Palestine and Israel and we hope this is useful to share with you, as you make your own decisions about lettings:

- One of the key principles of our room letting policy is not to give space to any group calling for violence in any form. This is because Quakers have a longstanding commitment to peace and nonviolence, and we therefore cannot host an event calling for any kind of violence or armed struggle.
- We support the right of the State of Israel to exist and the right to self-determination for Palestinians and we therefore cannot host any groups denying these fundamental rights.
- Quakers in Britain has made a commitment to become an **anti-racist** organisation. We believe that all forms of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia, are barriers to building a just and peaceful world. We abhor the history of antisemitism and Islamophobia in the UK and around the world and the current rise in antisemitic and Islamophobic attacks. We therefore cannot

host any event which uses racist language or hate speech, or might in any way build intolerance or prejudice.

- We are non-partisan. We are not pro-Israeli or pro-Palestinian. We are not, however, neutral in terms of **international law and human rights**. We are unwavering in our belief that any practice used to occupy territory or to resist occupation must comply with international law (we call this 'Principled Impartiality').

Overall we choose not share our physical resources – including financial resources and hired spaces – with those who advocate against the Quaker testimonies to peace and equality and the principles outlined above: nonviolence, anti-racism and respect for international law.

For more information on how you can take action, and support groups working for a just peace in the region, please refer Friends to our website:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/international-work/responding-to-the-current-situation-in-israel-and-palestine>.

BYM can and will offer support on difficult room bookings. Remember that it doesn't have to be a simple 'yes' or 'no'. You can ask an organisation what its position is and also engage with them on particular speakers or messaging that you find problematic. If there is a chance that challenging messages are going to be spread about Quakers on social media, BYM asks that meetings get in touch as soon as possible. This might be before a booking has got to the point of being cancelled as this helps prepare to respond if things get difficult. For support, contact the BYM communications team using media@quaker.org.uk.

Socialist Workers Party (SWP)

On the basis of the principles above, we have decided not to give rooms at Friends House to the Socialist Workers Party at this time. This is because, on the SWP website, there are many articles calling for increased militancy and stating that 'we unconditionally support Hamas when it is engaged in military or non-military struggles against Israel'.

We have written to the SWP to explain our principles and why we cannot let rooms to them at this time.

We ask meetings to consider booking requests from the SWP carefully in the light of the Quaker commitment to nonviolence, and again, contact us if you would like support.

General notes from the discussion

- Trustees hold responsibility for premises and there needs to be a swift way for decisions to be made.
- Parameters which lettings clerks or wardens can make a decision within but also know when to escalate and who to escalate to.
- Simple messaging to the hirer, ideally taken directly from trustees. Pre-written text may be helpful if it can be written in a generic for that can then be adapted to new situations.

- You can refer to [Quaker faith & practice 14.27](#) on use of premises and Quaker values. This is part of the picture and needs additional thought and discernment to help build a framework that decisions about hirers and bookings can be made within.
- Keep copies of hire agreements or terms and conditions up to date and publicly available on the AM/LM website so that they can be referred to easily by hirers and workers.

Due diligence and things that can help avoid difficult situations

- Have a contract with all hirers which is renewed annually.
- Don't take bookings for more than a set period ahead and not past the contract renewal time.
- When checking new hirers:
 - Do not confirm their first booking until you have checked them thoroughly;
 - Ask for references;
 - Check their website, if they have one, and follow links to umbrella or close partner organisations;
 - Search the internet for the organisation's name to see if there is any information about them from credible sources that helps with discernment;
 - Speak on the phone instead of handling all communications by email;

Warm spaces

Is your meeting planning to offer a warm space again this winter or set one up for the first time?

The Warm Welcome campaign offers advice and support for organisations wishing to use their venue to hold a warm space. Visit, <https://www.warmwelcome.uk/>, to find out information for your Quaker community.

If your meeting wants to be involved but for some reason your meeting house isn't the right place to hold a warm space there are opportunities to connect with other venues in your meeting's locality.

Bullet points from the discussion at the meeting

- Some Local Councils are offering grant support for organisations willing to host warm spaces. The only national grant available appears to be offered by the National Lottery Community Fund and may not be one that meetings wish to apply to.
- Don't be disappointed if not many people come in the first few weeks.
- Even though in a good location could not get the volunteers so tried to work with others and host the space.
- Is your MH efficient enough that it makes it worthwhile heating it to run a warm space?
- If your meeting house is going to host a warm space be in touch with other local venues to ensure that you coordinate when each venue opens so not all on the same day / time.

- Meeting was open from November to March with a soup lunch. Needed people trained in safeguarding, food hygiene. Lots of training but few people came.
- Not got the human resource to open the meeting house but have got together with other churches via churches together.

Unexpected outcome

- Local community group contacted the meeting house to host the warm space. The MH was provided for free to this group. The group then have used the building on a paid basis through the rest of the year.

15 September 2023 – Open discussion and topics for 2024

This time we held an open session for anyone to bring a topic along to.

The next online session will be on Wednesday, 18 October at 2:00pm. The joining details are below and will also be shared again by email nearer the time.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVFdDsMFIjTUjN3WEpmUT09>
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Notes

New fire safety guidance came into force on 1 October 2023

www.gov.uk/government/news/new-fire-safety-guidance-comes-into-force-on-1-october-2023

Legionella

There is a section in the [Meeting House handbook template](#) on legionella. You should be careful if you have water that stands, in a tank or a (dead end) pipe, for a period of more than about a week.

You need to be careful if your premises has a system such as a shower that creates steam from water, or an air conditioning unit that allows water to sit and stagnate near something warm, which in turn can create water vapour.

Legionella is present in all water but is only dangerous when present in vapour form and when the water is not warm enough to kill the bacteria. The bacteria will begin to die off at 50°C and needs to be at around 60°C to kill it rapidly.

Flushing the water system frequently (weekly if the building is not being used regularly) should be part of the checks on the building and the process should be noted in the building risk assessment.

Paying for taxis for people to attend worship

Should meetings pay for taxis to attend worship? Could the fare for the cab be paid from the collection plate?

Yes, meetings do have the option to pay for taxis for people to attend worship. If a Friend requires the support of a taxi to attend worship a LM or AM business meeting could write a minute to agree to them being collected and to pay for the cab for them.

Could it be paid for from the collection? If everyone who donates to the collection knows that it might be used for that purpose then yes, if the meeting has agreed for it to happen. A good system to ensure that all of the money that has been donated is accounted for needs to be put into place. A petty cash voucher like the one in the image could be used for this to keep track of any cash used to pay for taxis or other items that might be required.

Petty Cash Voucher		Folio	
For what required		Date	
		AMOUNT	
		£	p
Signature _____			
Passed by _____			

Making the most of donations

You can also claim Gift Aid on small anonymous donations through the Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme (GASDS). This applies to individual donations of up to £30 that are given in cash. See below for information for treasurers on GASDS.

- Information about the scheme, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/gasds-info-sheet-2019-1>
- GASDS recording sheet, <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/gasds-recording-2019-at-meeting-1>

Topics for 2024

- Fire safety and the introduction of the new guidelines.
- Hallmaster: update on heating controls as well as building entry security.
- Working for a local or area meeting. What are the employment / appointment processes within AMs and how we all fit in together.
- Building surveys and inspections.

15 August 2023 – Websites

Our theme for this discussion was our meeting websites. We explored a few of the sites to get a feel for their features and what they do to promote Quakerism and our lettings businesses.

The next online session will be on Friday, 15 September at 10.30am. The joining details are below and will also be shared again by email nearer the time.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVEdsMFIjTUUN3WEpmUT09>
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We looked at the following sites during the session:

- <https://bradfordonavonquakers.weebly.com/>
- <https://www.lewesquakers.org.uk/>
- <https://alton.quakermeeting.org/>
- <https://bolton.quakermeeting.org/>
- <https://bristolquakers.org.uk/>

The sites vary in provider from those that are hosted freely using a platform that advertises on the site to other that are paid for domains and web packages. Many meetings have started moving towards using Quaker Meeting Network, <https://quaker.app/about/>, and are finding the additional service that are provided with it helpful.

We need websites that are:

- accessible to everyone.
- are easy to train a range of people to update and take responsibility for.
- easy to navigate.
- are nice to look at and make the user want to look for longer or at more.

Photos

Some of the sites are using images to help tell the story and to break up the pages. It is good to:

- Have people in images.
- Think about what the image is for, does it tell a story of community? Or does it help sell a room for hire?
- Have an image that helps to say something that could remove some of the text from a page?
- Make images that are accessible to everyone?

Naming rooms on your website

Why are you naming a room?

- Does the Quaker community want to have a room named after a beloved Friend or a Quaker value?
- Does it help to describe a space that is available for hire?
- Could a number or a different name help to make the room's use clearer?

Quaker Meetings Network

- Lots of good support and very responsive team.
- Intranet for internal AM / LM use is really helpful.
- File storage helps to manage the archiving and indexing.
- Easy to set up and good support and can maintain current domain.
- There are some films that help set it up and good things that have been said about it. See, <https://quaker.app/about/discover/>.

Integrations

- Hallmaster, see the film made about Hallmaster at our previous MHM session, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKW55XBJLc8>.

18 July 2023 – Property AND Living our Quaker values through our premises (Leeds)

This time we had an in-person session at Carlton Hill Quaker Meeting in Leeds. The theme topic for the in-person event was *Living out our Quaker values through the use of our premises*. The blended session's topic was on *Property: Use, Maintenance and Ownership*.

The next online session will be on Tuesday, 15 August at 2pm. The joining details are below and will also be shared again by email nearer the time.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVEdsMFIUMUN3WEpmUT09>
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Session 1: How do we live out our Quaker values through our premises?

How we use our property

How do we witness our Quaker values? If underused should you have the property? How do we adapt it to make it work? Positive things we can do! Now / Small.

Suggestions or things that are already happening

- Loving Earth exhibition
 - brought Friends in
 - Linked to the climate emergency group
 - Growth – selling cards
- Local writers – Peace Plays – asked to use the space to perform
 - offered space free for rehearsals
 - outreach by proxy
- Find ways to talk about our testimonies via the building “we are using X thing because of our testimony to the environment
- Engaged local environmental group & churches together
- Outreach and fundraising posters on the walls
- Tension – what are we using our meeting houses for?
- Mental health – Mind events
- Including people on the sex-offenders register
- Meeting has provided rooms for free and offered partnerships
- Eco church – what's the process, working with Woodbrooke
 - Awards scheme
- Be generous and welcome people, form relationships around the property
- Heritage open days
- Hold a hirers event with tea and cake
- What can we learn from initiatives such as warm spaces. Is this something that there will be a greater need for in the near future. Can we plan for it?
- Getting started and finding the energy, what are the baby steps?

- What is your Meeting House's Ministry?

How premises are operated

- One set rate for all room hirers – testimony to equality
- Choose to support one group for free – perhaps a current concern of the meeting. Refugees?
- Quaker meeting house as a camp site
- Should the money used from letting the meeting house be used for outreach?
- Follow interests of local Friends
 - more community involvement
- Clear policies
- Offer the space in conjunction with other activities, such as community events or things that happen in the locality
- Review of lettings
- Be straight with people
- What is the purpose of having buildings?
 - Revenue / surplus
 - Sustaining the church, financially and as a community
- Difficult for a small community to manage the hirers and building
- Clear boundaries and policies that help hirers to know their responsibility in areas such as safeguarding.
- How do people find out about the building or community? Do people always have to find you?
- Working group to think about premises and use across the whole AM.
- How do people define themselves or their roles?
 - Manager
 - Warden
 - Residential Friend?
- Informal and occasional contracts to strengthen our mission and message.
- Use of resources to benefit others who are working in the same way or on the same pieces of work.
- Try to take Friends on a journey together (with paid staff, role-holders, building users) to discern what is needed or not needed.

How does our property look to others?

- Think about how the building presented
- Tatty / uncared for – makes people associate the worth for themselves
- Faded noticeboards
- Lots of older property can make upkeep costly.

Things to avoid

- How to help people to not take the place for granted?
- How to stop some hirers from feeling ownership of the building. How to manage?

Session 2: Building on how our buildings are used

Themes

- Diversity of users and engaging with a wider community. Can we use the space differently to attract new users in?
- Seeing our premises as assets. Use them, sell them, what is the position. How to use to benefit people. Are they sustainable as buildings and for the community?
- Quaker decision-making. Where is the trust? How to engage the right people in decision-making and take them on a journey?

Diversity of users and engaging with a wider community. Can we use the space differently to attract new users in?

- Vulnerable groups – older / young
- Visibility of meeting house
- Maintenance of meeting house
- Nature diversity project in burial ground
- What do meeting houses bring to the community?
- More assets than are needed by Quakers
- Position of the building – not on the high street – advertising
- Making buildings sustainable
- Meetings not managed well – can AM help?
- Create energy between lively meeting house and Meeting – tension to be aware of.

Seeing our premises as assets. Use them, sell them, what is the position. How to use to benefit people. Are they sustainable as buildings and for the community?

Assets

- Central position is helpful, some meeting houses are very rural. Central helps with lettings
- Other property location affects the care of them. Location is Key.
- Meeting house close / good for the community?
- Central locations let commercially and provide income to support Quaker work and subsidise other meeting houses.
- Employing a worker to support Quaker property / employment / lettings / compliance / health & safety & trustees work – through using cash from core assets.
- Important discernment by Quakers – allows Quaker energy into worship & witness.
- Asset can be financial, be showing our witness in the world, raising our energy in the meeting.
- Buildings as asset but 'energy' is seen as being sapped by them, especially trustees in some places.
- Buildings used in a project that Friends want actually raises energy level
 - The energy is there when discerned vision is realised

- Having variety of gifts on the trustee group is invigorating and exciting = vision & possibility.
- Investment in the fabric of the property, our energy invested in the meeting and community.
- Trying to use the building to the best of our abilities and be creative and different in the way they are used.

Use them

- Meeting houses and other property – we can use these in different ways to benefit people.
 - Can we sell a meeting house and make a house for those needing it?
- If on balance a charity is not getting benefit - money / hassle / burden
 - should we sell property?
 - Is there a risk involved?
 - Are there other factors such as tenancy agreements to consider?
- Is the meeting house useful to Friends and accessible for people to use for worship?
- Who can use the building? Could we use the Meeting as a community centre?
 - This is paying our way in the community as we are exempt from Council Tax – we balance that.
 - Do we limit the people who can use our meeting house – if letting there can't be any discrimination (eg all political parties).
- No hirers on a Sunday because Quakers need it – but changed policy – May be able to rethink and let if worship happens at a different time.
 - Changes of use are not for all time – groups can use on a trial.
 - 8-10 use for worship
- Afternoon worship on a Sunday – growing church group (Christian) good growing relationship with the Q community on a trial basis for a year.
- Let people use the building generously and without interference or interruption. Or say no. Stay adaptable to accommodate people.
- Social housing level rental can bring in income whilst you are supporting the local community – balance that with not being so kind that you get taken advantage of.

Sustainability of meeting houses

Eco sustainability

- Not environmentally friendly electric heating.
- Hard to get lettings property up in the EPC ratings especially in the future.
- Worth getting involved in Eco-Church ~ could be doing this with all our properties.

Financial sustainability

- To what extent is the building a way to raise funds?
- Find the right balance of using the building for Quaker or charitable purposes and hiring. Must have a split that meets our core purposes!

- Quinquennial survey of meeting houses – do we do this for commercial properties?

Is it viable to keep them all?

- Selling can raise funds to upgrade other buildings owned by the AM.
- Selling can be easy but is it good stewardship?
- What happens to Meeting House must be because of discernment at local meeting level. Other bodies such as AM and trustees are there to help with the process of selling and may make final decisions based on the wishes of the local community.
- Is it significant that not all of our properties are purpose-built?
- Can there be a way to unify responsibility for all premises across and AM or wider area such as a group of AMs?

Quaker decision-making. Where is the trust? How to engage the right people in decision-making and take them on a journey?

What is discernment?

- Listening to each other / God / spirit
- Corporate
- Preparation needed (intellectually)
- Building a loving community
- Deliberate intentional commitment
- Don't waste each other's time – why we prep matters.
- Waiting
- Space
- Discipline

Decision-making, Trust? Right people?

- Discernment – Nominations process = Decision
- Employment = job description (LDWs can advise on best practice in other LMs)
- Have policies pre-agreed.
- Double-discernment – sometimes meeting review discernment. (Eg. premises committee is given responsibility, but LM/AM wants to discern again).
- Give people authority.
- Make 'Actions' clear.
- Memorandum of understanding.
- Trustees need to understand & engage with their roles and responsibilities.
- Provide potential trustees / role holder / Nominations committee with clear guidance on what role entails. (role-descriptions & packs)
- Be a reader of words!! (not sure if this refers to things being too wordy?)
- All role-holders get together to discuss potential nominations.
- Looking at where decision-making lies. People need to be involved / engaged but may not be the decision-makers.
- Building trust is key to decision-making, need to do things together to build trust which then helps when we come to make decisions.

- Work with groups who share similar values – working with the local community may be a mismatch.

Session 3: Property – Use, Maintenance and Ownership

Use

This was a presentation about how to manage hire requests from organisations that may not have values that align with those of Quakers.

A presentation will be circulated separately.

Maintenance

The presentation by John Dash was recorded and is available here, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxC9aFm4mog>. The slides are also attached to the email.

Are our buildings to be the best they can be?

- Take meeting community on a journey
- What do we want to say about ourselves?
- Welcoming – that they say we care and care for those who use them
- How do you feel when you walk in?
- Living an breathing spaces
- Do we ‘make-do-and-mend’ too much? Does that mean our premises look tired or shabby?
- Can simple values translate into buildings that are used by the community and appear loved and cared for by their owners?

Are they fit for purpose?

- Even when new they are not at their best
- Accessibility is an issue in many places
- Architecture and sound can be a challenge
- Do they meet their needs and can they be places where people can be supported equitably?

Ownership

Vision in ownership 10-20 years time

Historic buildings

- Emotional attachment
- A success story – the only place of its kind left in a small town or village
- Loved
- Friends will no longer be using it/them - some will not be ‘ours’ anymore
- Rainy day
- Some replaced – not managed decline
- Part of a process for different use – planning for something more wonderful

Pathways

- Need to do it while there is energy
- Going on a journey with the local community – action before it is too late

- LDWs can help with conversations and plans
- Try not to be afraid
- Opportunity – need for action
- Avoid letting the thought about change become depressing
- Creating network with people and groups with who we feel aligned. Find the energy!
- Fluid use

14 June 2023 – Accessibility and responding to the Swarthmore Lecture

This session was an opportunity to hear about accessibility issues that affect Quaker premises. The session has been directed at venues rather than those with accessibility needs to try to identify ways to be inclusive.

The next online session will be on Tuesday, 15 August at 2pm. The joining details are below and will also be shared again by email nearer the time.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
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The next in-person session is going to be on Tuesday, 18 July and will be in Leeds at Carlton Hill Meeting House. You can register your interest to attend using this online form, <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-23/>. Part of this session will be held blended enabling online and in-person participation.

Notes

The first part of the session was help in breakout rooms to identify what is currently in place in our meeting houses and what we would like to put into place in the future.

Feedback from the breakout groups

Current position for those present

- Lots of places with step-free access.
- High contrast painting or taping on steps where they have not been able to be replaced.
- Many accessible toilets but an example of the wheelchair space to one side of the toilet being used as storage space.
- Flashing lights linked to alarms for people with hearing impairments.
- Hearing loop.
- Blended equipment in many Quaker premises.

Challenges

- Listed buildings, trying not to be held back by planning restrictions.
- Meeting room doors not wide enough to meet British standards.

Solutions

- Alarms not loud enough in toilet so additional sounders added.
- Frame put into a restricted toilet space to enable people to get up more easily.
- Bringing a disability group or people with disabilities to make suggestions about improvements.
- Not giving up at the first hurdle, especially where planning restrictions are in place.
- Disability access audit at area meeting level.

- Stick a photo of each cupboard (full) and stick it to the cupboard so people know what is in the cupboard.
- Whole building is flat on one level and many groups use the building.
- Provide a safe haven for lots of groups who feel the building is 'theirs'.
- Need to respond to requests for things to be changed, this is great for customer satisfaction and will bring a wider range of people into our premises.
- Disability awareness training to get better informed about the types of access needs, attitudes, language etc.
- Adjustable surfaces in kitchens and other areas. Think about this at the time refurbishment is being planned, not when it is being installed.
- Holistic approach to accessibility which benefit everyone overall rather than having them as add-ons.

Support

Quaker Disability Equality Group (QDEG) has advice and guidance on their website:

- Sample access audit: <https://quakerdisabilitygroup.org.uk/sample-basic-access-audit-form/>
- Template LM accessibility statement: <https://quakerdisabilitygroup.org.uk/sample-access-statement/>

Grants

There are a couple of places that offer specific grants for upgrading premises to be more accessible or to help with feasibility assessment for carrying out improvement work on buildings.

- BYM Meeting Houses Funds: www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/grant-making/meeting-houses-fund
- BYM Sawell Family Fund: www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/grant-making/sawell-family-fund-grants-for-meeting-houses
- National Churches Trust: www.nationalchurchestrust.org/get-support/buildings-maintenance/major-grant-funders
- Through the Roof (collection of grant providers) specific grants for accessibility improvements: <https://throughtheroof.org/forchurches/obtaining-funding-to-make-disability-related-improvements/>

19 May 2023 – Tensions in governance

This time we had a topic of tensions in Quaker governance looking at the areas of responsibility in Quaker structures, discernment and where the tensions cross between the decision-making bodies. Notes from the session are below.

The next online session will be on Wednesday, 14 June at 2pm. The joining details are below and will also be shared again by email nearer the time.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
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Tensions in Quaker governance

Purpose

To identify the tensions that exist within Quaker structures between bodies of the Area Meeting which hold responsibility for its activities. And the places that decisions are made.

It has been developed with meetings that have businesses to try to help understand more about the tensions that exist when running a Quaker business. How do these tensions play out when decisions may need to be made in an agile way to reflect the speed at which business sometimes needs to move.

Introduction to local Quaker structures and decision making

How are Quaker meetings structured?

Looking at Quaker structures using material that was used by Woodbrooke to describe Quaker structures in the preparation sessions for Yearly Meeting 2023.

For the purposes of this area meeting the largest body enabling us to focus on the structures that are most familiar to those working locally.

Some Quaker communities will be structured slightly differently to others but it should be possible to recognise components that make up your community.

An individual Quaker

When we refer to Quakers we mean members are attenders. Individual Quakers are at the heart of Quaker structures. Each part of the Quaker structure has been built to enable individual Quakers to take part in decision-making.

Quakers believe that each person has an individual connection with God or the divine or whatever they choose to refer to their spiritual experience.

When Quakers make decisions they search for the will of God which arises from the Friends who are present. This is why decision-making is rooted in the individual

Friend, because any Friend can be a channel for the will of God. Quakers call this discerning the will of God, or discernment as shorthand.

Local Meeting

A local meeting is the place where Quakers come for worship. They are communities of individual Friends. They are places where newcomers are welcomed and people of all ages can be involved in the Quaker community.

They manage local issues, including taking care of premises and working with other churches and faith communities. Local Meetings keep in touch with Area Meeting.

The term Local Meeting also refers to the place that decisions relating to the Local Quaker community are taken. This is called a Meeting for Worship for Church Affairs. This might be referred to as Local Business Meeting.

As referred to previously, each individual Quaker can come to the Local Meeting for Worship for Church Affairs and take part in decision-making.

Local Meetings should have a Memorandum of Understanding with their Area Meeting which states where responsibility is held, or if the delivery of an activity is devolved from the body that holds responsibility for it. The responsibilities are not the same for each Local Meeting, even within the same area, so there should be one document for each Local Meeting. These are Area Meeting documents but are often held by Area Meeting trustees due to their overall responsibility for areas of compliance.

Area Meeting

Area Meetings are collections of Local Meetings within a geographical area. They are the administrative centres of Quaker activity locally. Each Area Meeting is a Charity which has responsibilities to the relevant charity regulator. The Charity Commission in England and Wales or the Office for the Scottish Charity Regulator (OCSR) in Scotland.

Area Meetings oversee and support Local Meetings.

Area Meeting appoints people to serve in positions of responsibility such as eldership, which holds responsibility for the spiritual lives of the community. Or as trustees who are required by the regulators to have responsibility for the stewardship of Quaker charities. It is responsible for marriages, recording deaths and holding funerals, owning property and managing finances.

Area Meetings can communicate on behalf of Local Meetings with Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting. These two bodies are part of the national structure.

As with Local Meeting, Area Meeting also refers to the Meeting for Worship for Church Affairs where decisions about the Area Meeting are taken.

All individual Quakers in the Area Meeting are welcome to be part of the decision-making. In some Area Meetings attenders need to ask permission to attend. There are a few items, such as decisions on membership, where attenders may be asked to step away from the decision-making. But they can take part in most other items of business.

Area Meeting is responsible for setting the vision of the area meeting, such as:

- The spiritual life of the community
- Pastoral care for the community
- Decisions about purchasing or selling property
- Decisions about allocating money, usually based upon recommendation of the treasurer or trustees.

Quaker membership is held at Area Meeting level. As a member of an area meeting Quakers are also members of the national Society or Church.

Governance at local level

Area Meeting Trustees

Area Meeting Trustees are appointed role-holders with a specific responsibility for Area Meeting Charities. They hold responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the charity regulators are met and that our charities are legal and compliant.

Trustees are appointed by Area Meeting and the trustees report to Area Meeting. This is an unusual arrangement as they are seen by the regulators to have ultimate responsibility for the charity.

Although the regulators see our trustee bodies as having ultimate responsibility and authority for our AM charities. Quaker church governance considers Area Meeting the ultimate authority of the charity.

Sections from Quaker faith & practice 4.01 and 4.02

4.01

Until 2007 area meetings were known as monthly meetings. The change was made to give more emphasis to the area meeting as a spiritual community rather than a regular event, and in the interests of accuracy because many monthly meetings no longer met monthly.

Monthly meetings were an important part of the gospel order established by George Fox, which played a large part in ensuring the survival of the young Society of Friends. From 1659 onwards monthly meetings were set up, first for men only, then for women and finally joint; they combined business with social ties, caring for the poor and prisoners, education and ministry. By 1676 they were the unit of authority for membership, marriages, property, records, the recognition of ministers (until 1924) and the recognition and laying down of local meetings; most of these functions continue today. So too does their formal responsibility, completed by 1789, for the appointment of elders and overseers.

4.02

The area meeting is the primary meeting for church affairs in Britain Yearly Meeting. Its role is to develop and maintain a community of Friends, a family of local meetings who gather for worship and spiritual enrichment. It should provide that balance between worship, mutual support, administration, learning, deliberation and social life which can make its meetings enjoyable occasions and build up the spiritual life of its members.

Area meetings act as facilitators and co-ordinators, ensuring that their constituent local meetings have access to opportunities for fellowship, spiritual

development, and spiritual and pastoral care, including the care of children and young people. They also provide mutual support through the shared testing of concerns.

Area meetings also carry responsibilities for ensuring the right stewardship of local and area resources. Each area meeting is a separate charitable entity and it may be required to be registered as such with the relevant charity regulator. Area meetings which are registered or preparing for registration will operate under a formal governing document, which amongst other matters should set out the arrangements for trusteeship.

Other administrative committees or groups within the AM structures

Premises, House, Wardenship, Stewardship committees

These bodies are often at local level as sub committees of Local Meeting. Some Area Meetings have been experimenting with having some of the functions as sub committees of Area Meeting or Area Meeting Trustees.

They often hold local responsibility for property, employment, volunteering, supporting the Quaker worship and community, outreach, safeguarding.

They are usually comprised of Friends from the local community. They may have representation from Area Meeting or Area Meeting Trustees. And they may also be represented at these bodies.

They may carry out duties as per the agreements made in their Local Meeting's Memorandum of Understanding, but they do not hold overall responsibility for areas of compliance. The responsibility cannot be delegated to them.

Why is this a problem?

As well as the local structures there are some other things that add to the tensions that exist in Quaker governance. Quaker meetings are primarily places of worship. To hold charitable status we are required to have charitable objects that guide our charitable activities.

Area Meeting Charitable Objects

Suggested Area Meeting Charitable Objects in the BYM template area meeting constitution or governing document:

- strengthening the life and witness of Quaker meetings both in the area of X Area Meeting and beyond;
- spreading the message of Quakers and interpreting and developing the thought and practice of the Religious Society;
- undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
- funding the concerns that Quaker meetings in the area of X Area Meeting or beyond have adopted or agreed to support;
- providing for the pastoral care of individual members and Attenders including assistance to those in need and for education;
- maintaining and developing Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world;
- administering and maintaining the organisation of X Area Meeting and contributing to the support of Britain Yearly Meeting.

It does not say anything here about running a conferencing or room hire business. The primary purpose of an Area Meeting is not the provision of conferencing or venue hire.

Yearly Meeting 2023

At YM2023 we heard about the challenges and tensions that exist between Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings.

The tensions arise because there are two bodies that have similar roles within Britain Yearly Meeting. They are both responsible for some of the vision within the organisation.

Meeting for Sufferings is the body that is responsible for the vision of the Church. It oversees the work of bodies the departments Quaker Life and Quaker Peace and Social Witness, has a remit to connect with Friends elsewhere in the world and other faiths.

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees are responsible for the charity. As such their vision is for the stewardship of the resources of BYM. They set budgets, are responsible for employment and help to enable all the things that Meeting for Sufferings is responsible for to happen.

The problem is that there are times when these two visions cross paths and it isn't always easy to spot before there is tension that needs some attention to work through and understand.

And added to that, because the Quaker way of working is based on individual Quakers having the opportunity to make decisions, there are times that it can feel like too many people are driving decisions.

There is a similarity in the Structure of Britain Yearly Meeting and Area Meetings in that there are two bodies which jointly hold a responsibility for the vision of the church and the charity. They each do different things but often they cross over.

Area Meeting Trustee Bodies being separated from Area Meeting

Some ministry was suggesting it was a problem that Britain Yearly Meeting trustees became a separate body in the early 2000's(?) at around the same time that Area Meetings were required to do the same.

One Friend's ministry helpful reminded us that in before trustees were a separate body there were still trustees, but at that time the whole of Meeting for Sufferings were trustees. This at that time was some 200 Friends. Decision-making was slow and it wasn't an adequate way to make agile decisions.

We heard moving ministry from the Recording Clerk about how challenging it would have been with a trustee body of that size had there been a global pandemic at that time. When decisions needed to be made quickly.

A smaller trustee body can move more quickly and now with many meeting largely online can be agile and make decisions fast. They hold responsibility for decisions that most of us don't need to know about or be part of.

We need to recognise that there are tensions that exist and find a way for them to be part of our process, not to fight against them.

Bringing the tensions to the surface

As I have been going through the introduction to local Quaker structures and Quaker decision making. Have you identified areas where there is potential for tension?

My examples from the text:

- Enabling individual Quakers to be part of decision-making.
- Area of legal compliance are often managed locally when the responsibility is held by Area Meeting Trustees who may not always be on hand.
- Area meeting sets the vision but trustees are often required to implement decisions.
- Trustees are appointed by AM but they hold ultimate responsibility in law.
- Local committees and groups may carry out duties but do not hold responsibility for the actions they might take.
- The visions for an Area Meeting is held jointly by Area Meeting and Area Meeting Trustees.
- The cross over between the areas of vision that Area Meeting holds responsibility for and the vision that Area Meeting Trustees hold responsibility for.

Time in separate groups

Splitting into groups by the nature of the work that each person does. The groups can be self-selecting. Ask for a show of hands for each first to be sure that there will be enough people in each group. The groups are:

- Conferencing
- Residential
- Governance

In your group you are going to think about the following questions (write up on flip chart in advance):

- Which bodies in you AM / business setup have cross-over in their decision-making / responsibility?
- Are there specific decisions or responsibilities cause the tensions?
- Could you create an agreement within your organisation's structures that to make the lines of responsibility and decision-making clearer?

What might need to happen to enable this to be put into place?

18 April 2023 – Health & Safety AND Living our Quaker values through our premises (Bristol)

This was the first of three in-person sessions that we are running for Meeting House Matters in 2023. It was held at Bristol Central Quaker Meeting. The over all theme for the day was around the use of premises to live out Quaker values. There was a 'blended' part of the meeting between 2pm and 3.30pm with a topic of health and safety.

The next online session will be on Friday, 19 May at 2pm. The joining details are below and will also be shared again by email nearer the time.

- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVDdsMFIUMUN3WEpmUT09>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: WT-online

The next in-person session is going to be on Tuesday, 18 July and will be in Leeds at Carlton Hill Meeting House. You can register your interest to attend using this online form, <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-23/>.

How do we use our premises to live out Quaker values?

Session 1 Introductions and topics for discussion.

QF&P 13.33, <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/passage/13-33/>

Support:

- (QL) Quaker Life, Local Development workers –
- Wardens Talking and e-group.
- AM relationship and AM property and health and safety committee. Good and not so good
- QLCC
- Variety of confidence and experience
- Links to role holders
- Wardenship of virtual space
- **Dynamics of supporting users-chaotic and wonderful challenges – community partnerships**

Wardens

- No Paid help. A second person in the mix is great. Friends covering to support.
- Pair the real living wage
- Resident/non- resident
- Quaker/non- Quaker – what difference does it make?
- Hiring officer and managers
- Informing our own faith
- Communities in decline – unsustainable
- **Property – powered-stewardship – decision making- process.**

Simpler

- Meeting House as a community space- Mental Health- dispossessed-ex-offenders
- Simpler meetings
- Finding the joy
- Reengaging the community
- How to make the best use of our resources

The Vision – the challenges of decision making.

- The 'We'
- Community partnerships
- Visioning exercises
- Threshing
- Factions
- Sell
- Use to the full- stewardship and inheritance.
- Grants
- Being Radical
- Challenges of decision making

Using space to the full

- H&S
- Helping hirers to tolerate each other.
- Using for outreach and promotion
- Base money hirers good

Maintenance

- Investment needed.
- Limited resources
- Decorating
- Health and Safety

Pandemic

- Legacy
- Zoom and online here to stay.
- Blended tech – setting it up well- getting it working well- available for hirers?
- Use of grounds inc. burial grounds

Session 2

Expressing Quaker Values through our meeting houses

Is there a tension? – Real estate management – demographic time bomb Supporting worship and community

- **Relationships** – with traders and staff show our truth and integrity – pay on time, this is critical and has implications for willingness to return to work for us- be good with the tea and biscuits.

- **Hospitality and welcome**- make it as comfortable as possible – Love- Loving inclusive all age. Being present in your community. Use our skills, approaches and methods.
- Use the building to show what Quakers are about.
- **Meeting Houses and their communities**- Do it together – not just on Sunday – wardens are not wardens or managers of the meeting
- How the quaker community inhabits the space.
- How the wider community inhabits/uses the space- interfaith and chaplaincy.
- **Active**- Sustainability and net Zero – supporting community groups- Fairtrade, wildlife management. Beware of partnerships but they can work Collaborative working and cooperative models of ownership
- **Well known and widely understood.** - outreach – spirituality – offering our space

Break out groups.

Using property to the full – relationships, hirers, meeting etc.

- Have an awareness of which meetings are breaking even.
- Primarily a place of worship- e.g., no parties in worship space. Cancel hirers if necessary.
- Having a balance between serving the community and generating income while having respect for the nature of the building. The building has impact even on passers by
- Have different rates.
- Keypads are an advantage.
- How do you fill your spiritual bucket?

Using technology

- If we even have the equipment, are we really using our earths precious resources.
- Confidence in using tech – in zoom itself – not many friends have the confidence to use- those that are tech savy are thin on the ground.
- What works well – discrete smaller screens for small meeting houses. dedicated laptop. £150 for a basic or second hand
- Wide angle camera
- Instruction and training
- A sound bar.
- Speakers, remotes wall mounted.
- A microcosm of meeting house use?
- Are we sharing our toys- damage risk, security, easily stealable. How do we get locking a way working well.
- AM and LM tensions – possessive friends v being available at all times. over specified tech, tech not being used.
- And how do we do our Q process adapt to online elements.
- Not recognizing diversity and importance in a changing world and help for disabled people.

- Not accepting virtual MfW as a spiritual experience – not respecting discernment

Visioning

- Developing a vision – energy – Tools – support all needed- revisioning- a continual process.
- Listening is v. important.
- Holding difference – a middle way
- Listening Space (Restoring Relations [Quaker Listening Space - Restoring Relations](#) Dragon dreaming [Dragon Dreaming International – Everything is a temporary node in a process of flow](#)- external facilitation
- Balance between exploring possibilities and consensus around a way forward- a shared purpose brings energy.
- Recognizing limitations in the group
- How do we feel in AM/LM? What are the things that separate us?
- I try and remember we are all human.
- Communicate and be welcoming – give to others and share values.
- Conflict can be peaceful but Anger/rage (not directed at a person) can also be energy.
- Recognize what individuals have to offer gifts skills energy.
- Process can include mistakes (Eggs, Omelets, Apples, Carts)

Session 3: Health and Safety Management

Brian Sutleiff joined us from his company called Veilig to give us a presentation and answer questions on health and safety management.

The presentation that Brian gave was share with follow-up notes after the session. If you would like a copy of the presentation email oliverw@quaker.org.uk to be sent a copy.

A film of the presentation was made and is available to be viewed on YouTube at the following link, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TySTb4ZsJk>. The film is roughly edited from the recording made on Zoom which may affect the quality for some viewers.

If you have questions that Brian wasn't able to answer during the session you can contact him by email at,

Questions

The following

Does storage of hazardous substances need to be documented? How?

- What is the risk?
- If there is a fire is it in a contained space?
- What quantity is there and is there a place to keep it safely?
- Make sure to disposal of redundant materials.
- Record to demonstrate that you have been acting with care.

Meeting House is near to the hospital where people are often ejected at all times of the day and night. Should there be something in our policy about how to keep employees and Friends safe.

- Yes, should be reflected in the policy and there should be a risk assessment.
- Frequency likelihood of times that people are released when the MH is in use.
- What is the severity or danger?
- Can you get some training on dealing with the situations?
- Additional security onsite?
- Key thing is to have a balance of what is reasonable to protect people and what is affordable for the organisation.

Often H&S comes down to good housekeeping and having people who are familiar with how the meeting house works.

- Yes, all good and housekeeping is the right way forward.

Comments on children's activities especially when the venue is not their usual meeting house?

- Have to assess with children and other vulnerable groups in mind.
- Supervision may be part of the mitigation.
- Need to think about how to limit the access to things that might cause harm.
- Need to pay attention to whether there are specific the rules are for a vulnerable group.

Does including common sense in policies makes it all a bit fluffy?

- Every organisation is formed of different individuals and we can't know what would seem like common sense to others. That's why the Health & Safety Executive says there's no such thing as common sense – but when estimating the likelihood of harm, you have to take common sense into account.

Should we apply our lone worker policy to our self-employed / contracted cleaner?

- You could ask the agency to take responsibility and insert something into their contract that says they need to have lone worker policy / support.
- If the worker is self-employed you need to treat them as an employee in terms of lone working – which needn't be too onerous e.g.
 - ensure you know when they are going to be in the building.
 - ask them to text someone when they leave.
 - carry out a lone-worker risk assessment to see if there are other things that need to be covered.
- If you are relying on mobile phone signal check that there are not weak-signal parts of the premises.
- Lone working procedures need regular testing e.g. ask the cleaner to deliberately not text you when they leave sometimes. This will make sure you are aware and you have to put into practice your planned response.
- Managers need to consider the mental health impact on themselves of having sole responsibility for monitoring lone working.

28 March 2023 – Hallmaster

This time the session was on [Hallmaster](#) with a demonstration of the software and the opportunity to ask questions.

Meeting House Matters in-person events in 2023

If you would like to attend the first in-person event in 2023 hurry now to register before **registration closes on 11 April**. Please use the booking form linked below to register for any of the events in 2023, <https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-23/>

Please ensure that you register in advance so we know how many people to expect in person!

Next online (blended) session

The online session will take place as part of the in-person event and will be a blended session with a topic of health and safety.

- Tuesday, 18 April 2.00pm
- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVFdDsMFIjTUjN3WEpmUT09>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: WT-online

Hallmaster

Hallmaster is an online platform for managing bookings and invoicing. It is used by some Quaker venues. For a quick look at what the software does look at the [Hallmaster promotional film on Youtube](#). At this stage I should say that Hallmaster isn't the only bookings and invoicing solution that Quaker meetings can use.

Gemma, the representative from Hallmaster came and talked through the parts of the software in the order below:

- Dashboard and contacting for support
- Scheduler and calendar
- The bookings database
- Managing bookings
- Invoicing
- Invoicing database
- Bulk invoicing
- Billing
- Customer database
- Reports
- Administration
- Template emails and website integration

The presentation was recorded and I am not sure yet whether I can share it widely or not. I will let you know if I am able to let you have access to the recording.

Questions and answers from the session

Q) How does storing the customer information sit with GDPR data law?

A) Hallmaster is data processor, they do not do anything with the data other than what the data controller tells them to do.

Q) What about the right to be forgotten?

A) Hallmaster is going to look into this and clarify how right to be forgotten works in this instance.

Q) Can you leave time for carrying out due diligence on new customers?

A) There are presets for the time before a booking is accepted but these can be overridden on a booking by booking basis.

Q) Hallmaster thinks that money is owed because a booking that has been paid for has been cancelled

A) A credit note can be added to the account so that any discrepancies can be amended

Q) Can Hallmaster be linked to a heating system or door lock system?

A) Yes, testing Inspire Heating and Remote Locks systems now and introducing it with a few providers to test.

Q) A barrier to using Hallmaster is setting it up with a complex building and a lot of hirers. Can you offer any reassurance in supporting this to be set up?

A) We are very happy to work with a customer and set up the charges together. When in license we can send template spreadsheets that can be sent to customers. There is no additional charge for support.

Best to take setup a few steps at a time, Quaker stuff first as this gets premises committees excited.

Q) Can you add photos into line items?

A) Not at the moment but would be good feedback. Check they have booked the right room by a visual clue.

Q) Does the iCal feed work with other calendars such as Google?

A) Yes, and google is particularly good as people are often linked into Google

Q) Can you duplicate an email address

A) You can leave the first character/line blank to avoid this issue

Q) Can you put a different person on the invoice?

A) Not at the moment, but you can override the group name for the customer

Q) How does reconcile work with Quickbooks for recording payments.

A) Reconciliation is still a manual process

21 February 2023 – Marketing

Thanks to everyone who joined the session this week. We had a good discussion on marketing with lots of great ideas fed in. Deb Arrowsmith joined and shared some of the thinking about how they have been marketing the space at Oxford Meeting.

Meeting House Matters in-person events in 2023

We are going to offer 3 in-person events in 2023 to bring Friends together to look at topics of shared interest and for peer learning and support. Please use the booking form linked below to register for any of the events in 2023.

<https://forms.quaker.org.uk/mhm-23/>

Most of the day will be in-person with one session online blended. At the event in Bristol on 18 April the blended session will be on health and safety.

Next online session

- Tuesday, 21 March 10.30am
- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVEdsMFIUMUN3WEpmUT09>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: WT-online

Marketing

General notes

What is the purpose of marketing your meeting house?

- Is it because there is a lot of space in a good location which can generate income for the Quaker community?
- Is it because you want people to know that there is a certain ethos to the premises attracts people into the space?
- Is the main reason for the building for Quakerism to flourish but there are a few rooms available that people might like to use for a small fee?

Think carefully about what the purpose of the building is and what you want to tell the audience and ultimately what you want to sell to the audience.

These examples of purpose show a range of the purposes of marketing. If your meeting is wants to offer a professional conferencing opportunity, the rooms will need to match the offer. If you are trying to reach an audience that wants the space for birthday parties on a Saturday afternoon, you will choose a different way to talk about what you have available.

It was helpful to hear about the link between marketing and Quaker outreach. Done well they will both bring us as Quakers or as businesses into contact with new people. What do we do to support their activity? Is there an annual budget for outreach which includes marketing as a specific activity?

We are reminded that marketing is a profession and that we should not assume that it can be done by anyone. Who in your meeting community is skilled in this work?

Would they be willing to lend their expertise to the meeting? How can they work with other role-holders, such as wardens or other workers?

Tips

When you know the audience that you are marketing your meeting house to think about the following.

Signage

- Make sure that there is good external signage to help people find the meeting house.
- Is it clear how to get into the building once you have found it?
- What does the internal signage say about the building and its community and other users?
- Does it look how you hope it might? Professional? Welcoming? Caring? Simple?
- Is it cluttered?
- Does the tone sound positive or negative?
- How would you feel if you walked into a different premises with signage similar to those in your meeting house?

Advertising

- Can you help people see what you have to offer?
- Could you put a picture of each room on the external notice-board so that people passing or arriving can see what the space looks like?
- Is there a locality magazine that you can put an advert, or write an article for? (Articles might be free and mean you can talk about a Quaker event)
- Online (see more below about social media).

Tools

Leaflets

- With clear information on it
- include the date and valid until if printing with prices
- Images that show the spaces and what hirers can expect
- Testimonies from other hirers

Website

- Information (as leaflets)
- Timetable of updating to ensure that it remains current.
- Hire related information able to be updated by the person who manages the lettings so it is always in date.
- Change the images annually so the client always sees what is currently on offer.

Social media platforms

- Nextdoor
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Halls for Hire
- Google Maps: verify your building / address.

- Eventbrite: verify your address so that Google finds it.
- Meet-up: use their spiritual events category.
- Other platforms and websites are also available.

Social media tips

- Choose one or more but don't overwhelm yourself.
- Stick with what works for you and your premises.
- Post regularly and try to rotate content.
- If you have events add them early.
- Give a bit of time for scheduling routine posts so that you are not doing it as it happens.

Involving Friends

- Created a set of leaflets for Quakers to hand to other groups they attend to see if they would like to use the meeting house instead.
- Use Quaker communication channels such as the newsletters to talk about the space.
- Involve a group of Friends to open and close the meeting house when the warden is not working or on annual leave.
- Internal notice boards for information about what the building is used for:
 - One for the Quaker community
 - One for building specific things
 - One for the hirers.
- Hold an open day for the Quaker community and invite hirers to come along.
- Ask members of the meeting to give tours of the building to encourage hirers to see what is now on offer.

Possible hirers or ways to get business

- Office space once a week for small charities.
- NHS, healthcare and other large public organisations. Try to get your meeting house onto their approved supplier list.
- If you have a day that is not popular keep it as free as possible for organisations that require a training space and are not fussy about the day.

25 January 2023

It was great to see everyone who was able to join the first session of Meeting House Matters, the newly re-branded Wardens Talking online discussion network.

As a reminder there is a slightly revised format for the discussions as well as a name change. There will be a topic each week which will be led by one of us or by someone joining us to share their experience.

In 2023 we are planning to hold three events in person. We have done this in the past and are keen to see if we can get people together again to spend a day together. The in-person sessions will be held in locations across Britain and we hope there will be one near enough for everyone to be able to come to one. We are working on the following dates and locations.

- Tuesday, 18 April, Bristol
- Tuesday, 18 July, Leeds
- Tuesday, 14 November, London

Please save the date of the nearest to you, and others if you would like to join more than one. More information will come soon about the in-person events and will be sent by email and other comms channels.

Next online session

- Tuesday, 21 February 2.30pm
- Join Zoom Meeting:
<https://quaker.zoom.us/j/81586087624?pwd=VHk3MW9sTHJUVEdsMFIUMUN3WEpmUT09>
- Meeting ID: 815 8608 7624
- Passcode: WT-online

What is considered a success

This week our theme was *What is considered a success?* We were thinking about success being:

- That our meeting house is finding a good balance between generating an income that covers the cost of keeping the building open.
- And that the building is being used by Quakers and a variety of groups in the community and providing community benefit as per our area meeting charitable objects.

We spent some time in breakout groups with the following question to help us think about success from a variety of perspectives:

- What do you as a warden or manager consider a success from their position?
- What might hirers think of as a success?
- What would your finance and premises committee see as a success?
- What would Friends see as a success?

Combined feedback from the breakout rooms

General points – some may already happen, others we might like to bring in

- Our witness in the works is to run the premises as sustainably as we possibly can.
- How we treat employees, Friends, hirers. We must get that right first!
- Inclusive to the community – welcoming and open.
- Vibrant use of the building.
- Range of groups within similar fields (e.g. support groups, political, arts) signpost to other hirers services – positive cross pollination groups supporting each other creating a community within the meeting house.
- A meeting house for the community IS the ministry.
- Balance and range of hirers, income from hirers regular, one off, training week secure base financial income and security from a few significant hirers plus ample room for a broad range of hirers throughout the year across the MH.

Hirers

- Wifi / internet, we provide a space for them where they don't have to think about the practicalities – can just walk in do what they came to do and go back out.
- A place to hire a room that is affordable offers reliable invoicing and booking arrangements and offers good value for money.
- Calm atmosphere
- Would like to have the best experience that they can with the least effort or work for them
- Don't need to think about it as there is reliability.
- Reliable Wi-Fi.
- Has all the health and safety in place to avoid major issues that could occur (a robust system to deal with incidents).

Finance and premises (Quaker committees)

- To be able to have the worshipping community able to meet in a suitable space, and to have the resources to do what the worshipping community want to do as a Quaker community.
- Be able to support the building so it isn't a cost to the Quaker community.
- That enough income is generated to run the premises and make a surplus.
- London Quaker Property Trust is the mechanism that supports property across London. Income is pooled from the whole area meaning there are funds to maintain the premises and support the worship and witness across the whole region. Area meetings operate in a similar way but on a smaller scale.
- Higher proportion of charities and organisations that use the buildings than profit-making organisations.
- Variety of hirers (social and culturally) have a broad range for a healthier mix of £ and diversity rather than x 2 big hirers (good financially but also a risk if one leaves, plus not enabling a space for a broader amount of groups to benefit from venue facilities).

Quakers / Friends

- To see the building animated – full of other groups and people. An asset and connection to the wider community.
- A building they don't have to think about or give input to?
- SO many want people to come to the building and then and come to Quakers.
- That there is a place for worship and the activities of local Quakers.
- Now a small number of meeting house in relation to the meeting community so the meeting house is used for AM activities more than it was before.
- Not just what happens in worship but are able to carry out activities in the premises that bring the community together. People have come to join in with this who have not been around for a long time.
- Greater membership to contribute to the presence and energy of the venue.

Workers

- A welcoming safe environment for people to meet - Qs and hirers. A space that works for the different groups that we have coming in - meeting their needs.
- We are not just random employees, we are employees of a Quaker meeting house, many of whom are Quakers. It is a vocation as well as work.
- Where there is clarity over the tasks that are required and who does them in the community.
- In answering the first question it is important to answer the other three. If hirers, committees and Friends feel it is a success then the warden should be able to consider their job done.
- Outreach activities.
- All within a framework of ethical behaviour.
- Fellowship with anyone and everyone who works through the door (hirers and Friends).
- Provide a safe, very clean, uncluttered space for hirer so that they feel it is their space (taking ownership).
- Respect – respecting the community we sit in the middle of and sharing upmarket space at a reasonable cost.
- Supporting hirers to generate an atmosphere of respect.
- Best experience when hirers are all in place and it all works with finance too.

What brings you joy

- The people who use the building.
- Adults with learning difficulties spontaneously dancing with a children's group in the corridor.
- Seeing marginalised people comfortable in the meeting house.
- People.
- Foodbank being run from the meeting house.
- Photo of foodbank with shopping bags all in all the rooms of the meeting house in Walthamstow (boxes of support).

- Garden an oasis gives peace to a community especially if that is the only bit of green space within the urban area.
- People who are loyal and enjoy the atmosphere and want to come back in spite of the shortcomings of the building – they feel at home and therefore take ownership.
- Opportunity to do stuff together in person, to work and working with a purpose that's a benefit to more than just us.
- Connection (can't always tell what is happening) when you see the connection in community (it's like watching theatre / music before your eyes) nothing to do with you directly, even though you have enabled it by being there as a venue.
- Celebration and connection.
- Spring in the MH peace garden under the stars.