

Calling letter



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

22 February 2022

To members of Meeting for Sufferings

Dear Friends

It seems a very long time since our last meeting and I am very much looking forward to welcoming you all, whether online or in person, to the first meeting of 2022, from 4-6 March.

As you know, this is not the residential meeting the Arrangements Group had hoped for. The weekend consists of five sessions spread over three days, with plenty of breaks and opportunities for virtual or actual socialising, as well as epilogues to close the day.

You will see from the package of papers that our focus on the Saturday will be on how we organise ourselves as a worshipping community. Since adopting the aim of being 'a simple church supported by a simple charity to reinvigorate Quakerism', Friends across the country have been looking at ways in which we can simplify our meetings. The pandemic has accelerated this process and some change has been unavoidable. Representatives in the last triennium will remember our minute calling for 'a more co-ordinated approach to our review process, considering the interrelationship between bodies...' (minute 2020/12/08), and I hope you will see that this is what we are trying to achieve.

Talking about 'process' is not everyone's cup of tea, but making sure we have smooth processes that are fit for purpose to underpin the work of putting our faith into action will free us all. At this meeting we will have the opportunity to hear from different review groups and look at how we will respond to the Yearly Meeting minute asking us to review Meeting for Sufferings itself.

By way of preparation, our evening session on Monday 28 February, led by the Recording Clerk, will focus on our current governance structures and the work they do, and explain the background to the items on simplifying structures on our agenda for Saturday.

Other business:

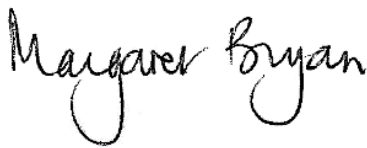
- On the Friday evening we will begin with some of the usual administrative matters and also hear from BYM Trustees
- On Saturday the Yearly Meeting clerk will speak to us about this year's meeting, and
- On Sunday the session is divided between other routine items and a generous period of worship together.

I'd like to conclude with a quotation from *Quaker Faith & Practice* 8.25. It reminds us that we have wrestled with our structures before. How will we do this time?

For some of us this does not seem sufficiently religious. I remember an outburst in Meeting for Sufferings, when Friends felt that Britain Yearly Meeting was becoming "just a well-run charity". "I don't want to be part of a well-run charity, I want to be part of a religious group, a church", said a weighty Friend. The point is that we need to be an ordinary well-run organisation, with good structures and sensible practices, which we then make extraordinary by transcending, not discarding them.

Beth Allen 2007

In peace,



Margaret Bryan
Clerk

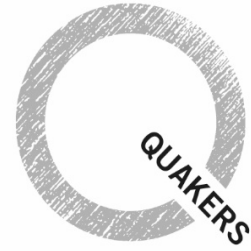
Papers enclosed with this mailing

Agenda

- MfS Arrangements Group December 2021 and February 2022 meeting minutes
- MfS 2022 03 03 Membership (to follow)
- MfS 2022 03 05 Prison and Court Register
- MfS 2022 03 06 Quaker Recognised Bodies
- MfS 2022 03 07 Membership appeal to Meeting for Sufferings
- MfS 2022 03 08 BYM Trustees report
- MfS 2022 03 11 Church structures fit for the next generation
- MfS 2022 03 12 Interim Report of the Group to Review YM & YMGs
- MfS 2022 03 13 Taking forward the review of Meeting for Sufferings
- MfS 2022 03 14 Reporting arrangements for QCCIR and QWRC
- MfS 2022 03 15 Simplifying BYM structures: progress report and next steps
- MfS 2022 03 18 Quaker Peace & Social Witness changes
- MfS 2022 03 21 Appointments
- MfS 2022 03 22 Meeting for Sufferings report to Yearly Meeting
- MfS 2022 03 23 Responding to racism
- MfS 2022 03 24 CGAG Suggested changes to *Qf&p*
- MfS 2022 03 25 Letter of Greeting to Ireland YM
- MfS 2022 03 26 Use of the term 'overseer'

A reminder of how you can prepare for the meeting

- If you haven't already done so, register for the Meeting and register for the optional online session on 28 February to hear from the Recording Clerk on our current governance structures and the work they do, and the background to the items on simplifying structures
- Read the agenda and papers in good time
- Contact the other representative/alternate from your area meeting or body
- Send any comments or questions to the clerks (sufferings@quaker.org.uk), before the meeting to be received by morning of **3 March**



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

Agenda

Meeting for Sufferings, 4–6 March 2022

By video conference and in person at Friends House, 173 Euston Road,
London NW1 2BJ

Friday 4 March

Large Meeting House and Zoom open for arrivals from 18:30 for 19:00 start

	Item	Paper
19:00	Session 1	
1	Opening worship	
2	Welcome and introductions	
3	Membership	MfS 2022 03 03 To note
4	Agenda Adoption and acceptance of the agenda	
5	Prison and Court Register	MfS 2022 03 05 For decision
6	Quaker Recognised Bodies To approve and register an application to be Quaker Recognised Bodies	MfS 2022 03 06 For decision
7	Membership appeal	MfS 2022 03 07 To agree
	Shuffle break	
8	BYM Trustees report To receive a report from the clerk of BYM Trustees	MfS 2022 03 08 For information
9	Epilogue	
21:00	End of Session 1	

Saturday 5 March

Large Meeting House and Zoom open for arrivals from 9:30 for 10:00 start

	Item	Paper
10:00	Session 2	
10	Opening worship	
11	Church structures fit for the next generation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction 	MfS 2022 03 11 For discussion
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim report from the group to review Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gatherings 	MfS 2022 03 12 For discussion
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Meeting for Sufferings 	MfS 2022 03 13 For decision
	Shuffle break	
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QCCIR and QWRC reporting arrangements 	MfS 2022 03 14 For discussion
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplification of BYM structures 	MfS 2022 03 15 For discussion
12:30	End of Session 2	

12:30 Lunch break

14:00	Session 3	
16	Yearly Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YM 2022 agenda To receive an oral report from the Yearly Meeting clerk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YM 2023 dates 	For information MfS 2022 03 16 For decision
17	Breakout Groups An opportunity to explore the issues on our agenda in small groups. There will be separate groups for in-person and online participants	Discussion
	Shuffle break	
18	Quaker Peace and Social Witness Changes To receive a report from the Head of Witness and Worship	MfS 2022 03 18 For information
19	Reflection on today's business	
16:30	End of Session 3	

18:00 Supper at Friends House for those attending in person

Saturday evening

19:00	Social/reflective time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Friends House following supper • Online between 19:00 and 20:00 	
	Social and reflective time	
20:00	Epilogue	

Sunday 6 March

Open for arrivals from 9:30 for 10:00 start

	Item	Paper
10:00	Session 4	
20	Opening worship	
21	Appointments	MfS 2022 03 21 For approval
22	Meeting for Sufferings annual report to Yearly Meeting To receive the draft Annual Report	MfS 2022 03 22 To approve
23	Responding to racism To receive a minute from Mid-Wales Area Meeting	MfS 2022 03 23 For information
24	Church Government Advisory Group proposed changes to <i>Quaker faith & practice</i> To receive revisions to Chapter 16 Marriage	MfS 2022 03 24 For decision
25	Letter to Greeting to Ireland Yearly Meeting To receive and approve	MfS 2022 03 25 To approve
26	Use of the term 'overseer' To remind Area Meetings to report on experimenting with the role and terminology	MfS 2022 03 26 For information
10:45	Shuffle break	
11:00	Closing worship and reflection	
12:00	End of meeting	



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

Held online from 19:00 – 20:15 on 14 December 2021

Minutes

Present: Margaret Bryan, Robert Card, Ivan Hutnik, Jane Mace, Jean Scott Barr, Jane Wilde, Anthony Woolhouse

In attendance: Neil Jarvis, Juliet Prager

Prevented:

1. Matters arising

Further to minute 5 of our meeting held 2nd November, we note the advice to consider the pattern of reports from standing committees, to keep under review the various substantive matters delegated to Meeting for Sufferings, and to be alive to the possibility of determining items for the agenda ourselves.

2. Minutes from Meeting for Sufferings held 4th December

We have reviewed the minutes of the meeting held 4th December 2021.

We have not identified any “Gold minutes” or any continuing minutes not already known.

3. Report from Support Group

We have received the report from the Support Group and noted the points made.

We encourage the Support Group to keep these matters under review and to address them as seems best.

4. Correspondence and feedback

We have reviewed other correspondence and feedback received subsequent to the meeting and have noted the points raised.

In particular, we have considered the different views regarding the gains to sustainability obtained by holding meetings online versus the accessibility difficulties that some Friends find with online meetings. We are not at this time of uncertainty minded to change the decision that we made at our last meeting.

5. Date of next meeting

There being no further business for us to take, we part, looking to meet again online at 19:00 on 1st February to plan for the March session of Meeting for Sufferings.

We note that we expect subsequent meetings to be held as follows:

- 15 March, 7pm (to review March MfS)
- 31 May, 7pm (to plan July MfS)
- 12 July, 7pm (to review July MfS)
- 30 August, 7pm (to plan October MfS)
- 11 October, 7pm (to review October MfS)
- 1 November, 7pm (to plan December MfS)
- 13 December, 7pm (to review December MfS)

Signed on behalf of the meeting,

Robert Card, Clerk



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

At a meeting of

Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

Held online from 19:00–21:00 on 1 February 2021

Minutes

Present: Margaret Bryan, Robert Card, Ivan Hutnik, Jane Mace, Jean Scott Barr, Jane Wilde, Anthony Woolhouse

In attendance: Neil Jarvis, Juliet Prager

1. Meetings attended by the clerks and others

There have been no relevant meetings since we last met.

2. Forward agenda

We have considered our forward agenda, which informs our planning.

We have noted that the issue of representatives and alternates raised by paper MfS 2019 02 11 was referred to Arrangements Group for further consideration. We are aware that current deliberations on the constitution of Meeting for Sufferings and simplification of area meetings are liable to impact on this issue. We therefore resolve to leave this until concrete proposals arising from such reviews are brought to us.

3. Meeting for Sufferings in March 2022

We have reviewed the arrangements and possible agenda items for the session of Meeting for Sufferings scheduled for March.

We have noted minutes received from Area Meetings as detailed in the table of minutes received. We agree to bring the minute from Mid-Wales Area Meeting regarding responding to racism before Meeting for Sufferings for information. We are not minded to bring the other minutes before Meeting for Sufferings at this time but have taken action as indicated in the table.

We have taken time to consider the practical arrangements for holding our March meeting. We uphold the staff and Support Group in their efforts to facilitate this.

We welcome the Recording Clerk's offer to lead a preparatory session on the 28th of February on our current structures as background for the various simplification issues raised.

We ask the clerks, in consultation with staff to finalise the details.

4. Any other matters

We agree to try holding a very brief review meeting after each session of Meeting for Sufferings, expecting that the planning meeting is liable to be somewhat more extensive.

5. Date of next meeting

There being no further business for us to take, we part, looking to meet again online at 19:00 on 15th March to review the March session of Meeting for Sufferings.

We note that we anticipate subsequent meetings to be held as follows:

- 31st May, 7pm to plan July Meeting for Sufferings
- 12th July, 7pm to review July Meeting for Sufferings
- 30th August, 7pm to plan October Meeting for Sufferings
- 11th October, 7pm to review October Meeting for Sufferings
- 1st November, 7pm to plan December Meeting for Sufferings
- 13th December, 7pm to review December Meeting for Sufferings

Signed on behalf of the meeting,

Robert Card, Clerk

Record of minutes received by Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group

This is a record of all minutes received by Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group since the last Meeting for Sufferings with information about any decisions that have been taken. It also includes minutes received in the past where there are updates. If representatives wish to see a copy of a minute, or wish to contact the Clerks, please email sufferings@quaker.org.uk.

Minutes received since last Meeting for Sufferings

Lancashire Central and North AM	21.9.1 Employment practices in BYM	8/11/21 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG asked Deputy Recording Clerk to engage with Area Meeting and relevant bodies (eg Employment Committee, Trustees, Management Meeting, QLCC) with aim to return to MfSAG for including in agenda at MfS later in 2022.		Preparing for including at MfS later in 2022
Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee	YMAC 2021 10-2 09 and 10 Discernment of YM22 agenda	10/11/21 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG agreed to include this in March agenda		At MfS in March 2022
West Weald AM	21/23 Minute to MfS [Trustees and Membership]	15/11/21 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG asked staff to correspond with Area Meeting on background and rational for current practice		Pending further correspondence with AM
Cumberland AM	21/46 Application procedure for	1/12/21 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG		Complete

	international membership	MfSAG agreed the Yearly Meeting isn't responsible for this matter and asked staff to respond to Area Meeting so that the concern can be raised with the appropriate body (FWCC)		
Mid-Wales AM	53/21 Minute to MfS [responding to racism]	4/12/21 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG agreed to share this minute for information with MfS at the meeting in March		At MfS in March 2022
Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee	YMAC 2021 12 16 Date of YM23	13/12/21 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG agreed to include this item on the agenda in March		At MfS in March 2022
Worcestershire & Shropshire AM	22.04 Tabular statement	14/1/22 Minute received 1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG noted the correspondence between the Recording Clerk and the Area Meeting on this matter which is ongoing and decided not to take this item at present. MfSAG will reconsider at a future meeting if necessary.		Pending further correspondence with Area Meeting

Updates to previously received minutes

Body sending minute	Minute	Initial steps and decisions	Subsequent steps (if any)	Status
Central Nominations Committee	2019/11/28 Membership question: attenders serving on central committees	01/12/20 Minute received 11/1/21 Tabled at MfSAG MfSAG agreed to include this in the February 2021 meeting.	6/2/21 MfS determined to set up a review group. Terms of reference will return to future meeting 4/21 Terms of reference agreed 12/21 Review group appointed	Ongoing
Group to Review Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gatherings	YMRG 2021-10-03 Work so far	11/10/21 Minute received 2/11/21 Minute tabled at MfSAG Received minute and allowed time at meeting in March 2022 on agenda to receive interim report	1/2/22 MfSAG agreed to include the interim report from the Group at MfS in March 2022.	At MfS in March 2022

Prison and Court Register

Introduction

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) was established in 1676, to consider the sufferings experienced by Quakers for their faith. Gradually the practice of recording Friends' names in the 'Great book of Sufferings' lapsed; but in 1997 MfS decided to maintain a register of Friends before the courts or imprisoned for matters of conscience. This enables us to record events, as well as to uphold the Friends concerned and to share information about their witness.

The purposes of recording an entry in the register are:

1. To enter the details of the matter into the permanent records of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), acknowledging Friends' witness and their willingness to face its consequences;
2. To remind ourselves that being a Quaker does not come without cost;
3. To record the Society's prayerful upholding of Friends who are suffering for their faith;
4. To serve as a record of the actions of the State in restricting our freedom to worship and witness.

Normally, area meetings are responsible for establishing the facts, and that Friends are or were acting under concern and wish the matter to be recorded. Including information in the register doesn't imply that MfS itself has tested the Friend's concern and necessarily agrees with or condones their action.

Two matters are brought to this meeting:

Maria Huff, a member of Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting, appeared at City of London Magistrates' Court in January 2022. Maria was found guilty after a trial for failing to comply with an instruction by a police officer at an Extinction Rebellion (XR) protest in central London in August 2021. Maria was ordered to pay £797 and given a nine-month conditional discharge. This is Maria's second charge for XR, the first being in 2020 from an action in 2019.

Arne Springorum appeared in court after participating in an Insulate Britain action asking the government to commit to a programme of insulating all Britain's energy-inefficient homes by 2030. Arne worships with the Quaker worship group in Prague and is in international membership of Friends World Committee for Consultation. He is known as an attender at Wandsworth Local Meeting (Kingston and Wandsworth Area Meeting).

Arne, along with eighteen other defendants, was ordered to appear at the High Court. Sixteen were convicted of contempt of court for defying injunctions banning their protest blockades of the M25 during a campaign of civil disobedience last autumn, five were given custodial sentences and eleven received suspended

sentences. Arne, along with two others, was freed after the judge ruled there was insufficient evidence to prosecute them. Arne returned to the High Court the following day to hang a banner reading "insulate or die" from a balcony overlooking the great hall. Led by his faith, Arne made a statement that he acts out of love.

Quaker Recognised Bodies

Introduction

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to register a Quaker recognised body (QRB).

Background

In 2015, Meeting for Sufferings agreed a way for BYM to relate to other Quaker bodies (minute MfS 2015/12/17).

There is a list of current QRBs along with guidelines for groups that would like to be a Quaker recognised body on the [BYM website](#).

A QRB is an independent group where concerned Friends explore a common interest, seek affirmation, or carry out witness. It wishes to be recognised as a Quaker body because its Quaker roots are an important part of its identity or constitution.

There are four different options:

External (regulated externally) – with a constitution, a board or management committee, and regulated by an external body such as the Charity Commission, Scottish Charity Regulator, Companies House, Ofsted, or Care Quality Commission.

Linked – by minute or appointments to part(s) of BYM's formal structure, such as: area meetings, central committees, MfS, General Meeting for Scotland, Meeting of Friends in Wales.

Free-standing – Quakers who have come together to learn about or work on a particular topic. Groups are likely to have members who are geographically dispersed; with membership open, but not necessarily restricted, to all interested Friends and attenders.

Emergent – new groups can be listed for up to two years, and usually treated as free-standing groups.

Experience tells us that groups are different; they don't all fit neatly into these categories, but the system is 'good enough' to be sure the groups are recognised and celebrated. It also ensures that centrally-managed work can offer support, in a way that's appropriate, useful and transparent.

The process aims to clarify benefits and responsibilities for QRBs and BYM. It's also a way to strengthen links between centrally-managed work and the wide range of exciting Quaker work done by other groups, helping build a vibrant Society of Friends.

This system includes a review process (this month there are no reviews required).

Quaker Truth and Integrity Group (QTIG)

The Quaker Truth and Integrity Group (QTIG) has applied to become a Quaker recognised body. Staff have looked at the documentation provided by the organisations and consider that the criteria for listing it as a QRB have been met.

Action required

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to approve this organisation as a Quaker recognised body for a period of five years.

Name: Quaker Truth and Integrity Group (QTIG)

Aims:

- to promote the place of truth and integrity in the public discourse;
- to discern what role Quakers might have to play in this, either independently of working with other groups/bodies;
- to draw the attention of Friends and others to the depth of the problems we face and ways in which they can be countered, for example through interviews with well-informed individuals.

Governance:

Structure: QTIG has a Steering Group consisting of eight members, with consideration given to equality, diversity and inclusion. Ad hoc working groups may also be set up. The QTIG clerk, and members of the Steering Group are nominated by a Nominations Group and appointed at plenary meetings. The meeting may decide to appoint an assistant clerk or co-clerks.

The Steering Group appoints a membership secretary from its ranks to maintain the membership database.

QTIG has a [website](#), including a forum for members to exchange views.

Conduct of meetings: Meetings of both the plenary group and the working group are conducted in accordance with Gospel Order. Minutes are drawn up and read out for agreement during meetings themselves and distributed to all members.

Constitution: Governance document adopted by minute of the Quaker Truth and Integrity Group on 6 December 2021.

Type of Group: Linked.

Foundation: Initially a Special Interest Group set up by Meeting of Friends in Wales in 2020; set up as a BYM-wide body in December 2021.

Publications and activities: No publications to date, but interviews recorded with Geoffrey Hosking, Julian Baggini, Catherine West, Ruth Cadbury, and Tania Matthews.

Membership: Membership open to any member/attender of Britain Yearly Meeting. Membership takes the form of notification of interest to the membership secretary, such notification to include email and/or residential address and name of local and Area Quaker meeting. Communication with members by email, or ordinary mail in the case of those not on email.

Finance: Initial expenses are low and currently being funded by private donations. Given the need for advertising, etc, a bank account will need to be set up in the near future. It is hoped that the need for membership subscriptions can be avoided.

Winding up: No specific provisions; would require minute of the plenary QTIG body.

Archives: Records being kept on computer.

Current contact details: Jan Arriens, Assistant Clerk, jarriens@globalnet.co.uk

Phone: 07816 910 315

Website: www.quakertruth.org

Staff link: Oliver Robertson (Head of Worship and Witness)

Michael S Booth
Church Government Advisor
February 2022

Appeal to Meeting for Sufferings

An appeal has been sent to the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings against the termination of a Friend's membership.

Background

Guidance for dealing with disputes among Friends is set out in sections 4.23 to 4.26 of *Quaker faith & practice*.

Briefly: if an area meeting makes a decision to terminate membership, the Friend whose membership has been terminated may appeal to Meeting for Sufferings for the decision to be reviewed, as detailed in section 4.25.

Right of appeal against decisions

[4.25](#) If a member is dissatisfied with a final decision of an area meeting affecting them personally and adversely, and provided that

1. the decision concerns the termination of membership; and
2. the grounds of the appeal are that the decision was not made in right ordering, or was not made with knowledge of the relevant facts, or was unreasonable; and
3. experienced mediators have been involved and the matter is not resolved;

the member may appeal to Meeting for Sufferings against the decision of the area meeting. On receiving such an appeal, the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings shall report this to the area meeting and shall request Meeting for Sufferings to appoint an appeal group of five Friends, who should be independent of the area meeting concerned. The group shall make all such enquiries as seem to them desirable, from the member concerned and from others having relevant knowledge, to consider and determine whether or not the appeal should be allowed and whether any further recommendations should be made. In conducting such enquiries the healing power of worship will be helpful. The decision of the Friends so appointed shall be final and be communicated directly to the parties concerned. The appeal group shall inform Meeting for Sufferings that it has reached a decision and communicated it to the parties concerned, and Meeting for Sufferings shall record this in its minutes without breaking the confidentiality of the parties concerned. Guidelines for the conduct of an appeal group are obtainable from [the Recording Clerk \(offsite link\)](#)..

Action needed

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to appoint an appeal group, on nomination from Central Nominations Committee, to consider and determine whether or not the appeal should be allowed and whether any further recommendations should be made. The details are kept confidential as far as is possible.

Report from BYM Trustees

As has become our norm with one day online meetings, trustees met for three 90-minute sessions (though the middle one did run over). The substantive items we considered are coming to you as agenda items with their own cover papers – so I won't say much about them in this cover note which is, therefore, shorter than usual!

The first session (Minutes 22/02/01 – 22/02/10) started as always with a period of stillness that seems even more important on zoom, and moved on through various routine but important items. At each meeting, we receive numerous sets of minutes and reports and I rarely mention them in this note. Yet each represents careful discernment and considerable work carried out by committees and staff on our behalf.

The Recording Clerk's report as usual shows progress against the priorities developed with MfS and agreed in 2018 for the work of BYM. We are grateful for all that is being done by staff despite the constraints of the pandemic which has hit the Quiet Company particularly hard. A challenge ahead is recruitment of a new Deputy Recording Clerk to replace Juliet Prager – who will be a very hard act to follow. When I speak to MfS, I will say more about some of BYM's work.

Our second session (Minutes 22/02/11 – 22/02/13) was the most substantive and focussed on our third priority of simplification. Numerous reviews and consultations are underway, and discernment for each takes a long time which can mean that the membership of various bodies changes and it's easy to forget what was previously considered.

A paper on simpler central structures is included in your papers. Our main concern at this trustee meeting – and at a threshing session held a few weeks earlier – was to be as clear as possible on what has been discerned so far in preparation for the item on your agenda. We look forward to continued work on this – with MfS – throughout the rest of the year.

QPSW Central Committee too is working on simplification and we were joined for the item by two of the three new co clerks of QPSWCC – Adam Drury and E Elize Sakomoto. We were grateful to have the opportunity for a conversation with the clerks as the committee continues its discernment. Again, there is an item about the QPSW strategy on your agenda.

And again with QCCIR and QWRC terms of reference, a paper is coming to you to test your willingness for these committees to report through you to Yearly Meeting rather than via trustees.

In our final trustee session we were joined by David Loxton, Head of Communications and Fundraising. We heard about achievements and plans, and agreed how trustees and other Friends should feed into the development of a

communications handbook that will provide consistent text for staff to use that describes Quakerism and Quaker bodies appropriately. We also approved work to develop an online Quaker community.

Caroline Nursey, Clerk BYM Trustees

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

Saturday 12 February 2022 by video conferencing

Minutes

Present: Linda Batten (Treasurer), Alison Breadon, Nick Eyre, Kit Fotheringham, Kate Gulliver, Ellie Harding, Carolyn Hayman, Caroline Nursey (Clerk), Silas Price, Graham Torr (Assistant Clerk), Frances Voelcker, Danielle Walker Palmour.

In attendance: Paul Henderson-Grey, Head of Operations; Paul Parker, Recording Clerk; Juliet Prager, Deputy Recording Clerk (from item BYMT/22/02/07); Oliver Robertson, Head of Witness and Worship, Maureen Sebanakitta, Head of Finance and Resources.

Visitors: Adam Drury, E Elize Sakamoto, Co-clerks Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee (items BYMT/22/02/11 to 22/02/12); and David Loxton, Head of Communications and Fundraising (BYMT/22/02/14).

Prevented: Georgina Bailey

Apologies: Jenny Brierley

BYMT/22/02/01 Decision to hold a 'blended' meeting, welcome and introductions, agenda check, conflicts of interest check

We record our decision to hold this as a video conferencing meeting. We follow Charity Commission guidance on running charities during the Covid-19 outbreak published on 19 March 2020 that allows video conferencing where there is no such clause in a charity's governing document. The Charity Commission asks us to record this decision.

There are no unrecorded conflicts of interest.

Since our last meeting, we have reviewed our register of conflicts of interest and this has been updated for all serving trustees.

We confirm our agenda.

During our opening worship, we heard an extract from *Quaker faith and practice*, 13.01.

BYMT/22/02/02 Minutes received

We receive the following minutes:

- Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee 29-31 October 2021, minutes 2021 10-02 09 and 10
- Quaker World Relations Committee 13 November 2021
- Quiet Company 17-18 November 2021
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee 26-28 November 2021 (including minute 21/57 on Governance)
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee 7 February 2022, separated minute QPSWCC 22/03 on Governance

- Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations 28-30 January 2022, separated minute QCCIR/22/01/04 on Draft QCCIR Terms of Reference.

BYMT/22/02/03 Whistleblowing annual report

We have received an annual report from the Recording Clerk and note there were no whistleblowing cases in 2021.

BYMT/22/02/04 Insurance report

We note the annual summary of principal general insurances for the charity. Our questions have been answered.

BYMT/22/02/05 Report from Grants Group

We receive an annual report from the Grants Group on the grants they have made from the funds in their care (paper BYMT 2022 02 05b).

We note the Group's concerns regarding the QPS-General Relief Fund and ask our Finance and Property Committee to consider the matter.

BYMT/22/02/06 Finance and property committee

We receive the minutes from the meeting of the Finance and Property Committee on 25 January 2022.

Supported by a consultant, the committee is looking deeply at procurement processes and practices which will include consideration of ethical criteria. It has also looked at its own terms of reference to include IT and will bring a proposal on this to a future meeting.

We note that the committee is ensuring that we have an appropriate policy on conflicts of interest.

We have briefly discussed our level of reserves.

BYMT/22/02/07 Criminal record checks for Trustees

In June 2021 we considered whether BYM Trustees should receive criminal record checks (DBS checks). Guidance from the Charity Commission and Disclosure and Barring Service is not clear. We receive a paper from staff (BYMT 2022 02 06).

We accept the recommendation in the paper for a basic DBS check to be completed for the Clerk, the Assistant Clerk and the Lead Safeguarding Trustee.

We ask staff to administer these checks for us and maintain records so that checks are kept up to date and completed for future role holders.

At our annual review of Safeguarding we can consider whether our approach remains consistent with prevailing regulatory guidance.

We suggest that the Quiet Company Board reviews the scope of criminal record checks for company board members.

BYMT/22/02/08 Nominations and appointments

We receive a report from our Nominations Group (paper BYMT 2022 02 07) and agree to the following appointments:

Health and Safety Champion

Frances Voelcker, North Wales Area Meeting (2022)

Trustee member of Board of Quiet Company

Carolyn Hayman, North West London Area Meeting (April 2022 – December 2024)

Senior Staff Grievance & Disciplinary Group

Kit Fotheringham, Bristol Area Meeting (April 2022 – December 2023)

We also agree to appoint, as a second **Anti-Oppression Champion**, Alison Breadon, Wirral & Chester Area Meeting (April 2022 – December 2023).

We record that Link trustees have been assigned as follows:

Team(s)	Senior staff member	Link from January 2022
Quaker Life	Oliver Robertson	Silas Price Carolyn Hayman
Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW)	Oliver Robertson	Kit Fotheringham Alison Breadon
Communications & Fundraising	Juliet Prager	Frances Voelcker Georgina Bailey
Events & Committee Services, Library & Recording Clerk's Office	Juliet Prager	[To be decided]
Finance & Resources (Finance, HR & IT)	Maureen Sebanakitta	Danielle Walker Palmour Kate Gulliver
Hospitality & Facilities	Paul Henderson-Grey	Nick Eyre Ellie Harding

BYMT/22/02/09 Recording Clerk's report

We receive an update from the Recording Clerk (paper BYMT 2022 02 08) reporting on updates and news under the headings of BYM's strategic priorities:

- Thriving Quaker communities: recruitment of Local Development Workers; Youth Development Work in Yorkshire; Quaker Stewardship Committee responsibilities; equality, diversity and inclusion; Yearly Meeting 2022
- Sustainable and peaceful world: new Quaker Peace and Social Witness structure; central committee governance changes; ecumenical accompaniers in Palestine and Israel
- Simpler structures and practices: ICT strategy; new finance system

- Distinctly Quaker: communications; support for giving
- Integrated: International Quaker Agencies meeting; Quaker Council for European Affairs; BYM People Strategy
- Well-governed: reorganisation of governance teams; safeguarding; library collections policy
- Operations: people; Friends House; bookshop; Swarthmoor Hall; facilities.

We note that a significant part of the change needed by 2023 is now complete with a new staffing structure in place to support QPSW's new strategy, the final Local Development Worker and further Youth Development Worker posts being recruited to, and the new finance system installed and functioning well. However, we are aware that restructuring processes are not yet complete in other parts of BYM, and that staff are still adapting to hybrid ways of working. We note also how challenging the recovery of the Quiet Company is going to be and that fuel price increases and inflation make cost control difficult.

We note also that Juliet Prager will be leaving the post of Deputy Recording Clerk in late May. She has given such valuable service and brought so much to the role that finding a successor will not be easy.

We were interested to read the epistle from the Heads of Quaker Agencies meeting that was held in London and are grateful that Paul Parker and Oliver Robertson are able to offer support to agencies from other parts of the world at a time when many are in transition.

BYMT/22/02/10 Recruitment of Deputy Recording Clerk

A decision was reached between meetings by Trustees to recruit a Deputy Recording Clerk following the resignation of Juliet Prager.

This minute records our authorisation for the Recording Clerk to recruit to this Management Meeting position and we delegate responsibility for finalising the job description, conducting the selection process and making the final appointment to the Recording Clerk, the Clerk of Trustees and one other Trustee to be chosen by the Clerk.

We record our decision that there is a genuine occupational requirement for the Deputy Recording Clerk to be a practising Quaker (exception under the 2010 Equality Act) because they have to deputise for the Recording Clerk (*Quaker faith and practice* 8.21 "The Deputy Recording Clerk deputises for the Recording Clerk in any aspect of his or her work as required").

BYMT/22/02/11 Simplifying structures

We receive paper BYMT 2022 02 12 placing trustee-led consideration of simpler central structures of BYM within the broader context of other constitutional reviews.

Paul Parker has introduced the item and we have heard from the two trustees leading on this work, Carolyn Hayman and Ellie Harding.

We agree that this paper reflects the process so far and that an updated version is ready to be shared with Meeting for Sufferings in March. We ask that the papers going to Meeting for Sufferings should make it very clear that all the work so far has been driven by what we are hearing from many parts of the Yearly Meeting, give as

much context as possible, and make it clear what is needed from Meeting for Sufferings at this stage.

We agree to publish the report of the Simplification Workshops held last year.

We have considered the descriptions of the four functions (Conscience, Stewardship, Planning and Diplomacy) and think that they are ready to be shared with Meeting for Sufferings for their further discernment and endorsement, subject to some amendments made during our consideration.

We ask that a process should go ahead to work with the Clerk of Meeting for Sufferings, clerks of central committees and others to develop models for possible new structures to fulfil these functions in ways which are simpler, inclusive and sustainable.

We ask our Nominations Group to bring the name of a third trustee to join Carolyn Hayman and Ellie Harding in this stage of the work with continued engagement by our Assistant Clerk and support from staff.

We agree to set aside agenda time later in the year to consult on and assess the merits of these models, before recommending a way forward to Meeting for Sufferings in the autumn, and to Yearly Meeting in 2023.

BYMT/22/02/12 QPSW governance

We are joined by Adam Drury and E Elize Sakamoto, two of the three Co-clerks of Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee.

We receive minute QPSWCC 21/57 from Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee (QPSWCC) on Governance. We note the discernment the committee has done to lead up to its decision to lay down the current sub-committee structure and make changes within Central Committee by the end of June this year.

We also receive minute QPSWCC 22/03 outlining the committee's intention to develop a detailed plan for governance and engagement. Elize and Adam have filled us in on the background to their minutes and on how the three co-clerks are working together and with others.

We thank QPSWCC for their work so far, uphold them as they continue, and look forward to hearing more in due course. We will continue to work closely together to ensure that discernment within various bodies across BYM fits well together.

BYMT/22/02/13 QCCIR and QWRC terms of reference

We have heard an update from Nick Eyre on behalf of the group working on these terms of reference and we have received a separated minute 22/01/04 from QCCIR.

We note that work with QCCIR and QWRC on drafting new terms of reference is nearing conclusion and welcome the various changes proposed.

We ask Nick Eyre, Ellie Harding and Graham Torr to work with the Recording Clerk to respond to QCCIR's minute on the terms of reference and, in particular, the number of members needed on the committee long term, and the right balance between the core members of the committee and co-options to working groups. We note that there will need to be a transition period.

We have previously minuted our agreement to a change in the committees' accountability to Yearly Meeting – to go through Meeting for Sufferings instead of through Trustees (BYMT-2021-06-06) which would give a bigger platform to celebrate their work. We hope that a paper can be taken to Meeting for Sufferings to test their willingness to take a greater interest in worldwide Quaker relations and in ecumenical and interfaith affairs.

BYMT/22/02/14 Communications report

We receive paper BYMT 2022 02 14 reporting on the first year's work since we approved the Communications strategy in February 2021 and setting out plans for the year ahead.

David Loxton has introduced the paper.

We are pleased to hear that the restructure is making it easier for staff to work together and achieve more. The progress on the website, staff intranet, communication with Friends – most notably through *Quake!* – and increased capacity to produce video, and focus advocacy, media and social media efforts, is encouraging (particularly given the pandemic).

We welcome the plans for 2022.

We want to be able to explain who we are – and what each part of Quakers in Britain is – in a clear and consistent way that reflects our spiritual leadings and is accessible to Friends and beyond. We agree to set up a task and finish reference group to advise on tone, branding and reference text for a communications guide, made up of:

- 2 trustees
- 2 members of Book of Discipline Revision Committee (BDRC)
- 1 member of Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC)
- 1 member of Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee (QPSWCC)
- Recording Clerk and Head of Communications & Fundraising.

We ask our Nominations Group to find two trustees to serve by between meetings procedures, and forward this minute to BDRC, QLCC and QPSWCC asking that they find members to serve on this reference group as soon as possible and until the task is completed.

We also ask that:

- A policy document is written that sets out the aims for an online Quaker community that supports engagement between Quakers as well as BYM's work. The guide should include the principles that will be applied for moderation in managing membership and content. This policy will be brought to Trustees for approval.
- Within the parameters of this policy, rules for membership of the community and conduct, and guidelines for moderation of content, are drawn up and will be approved by Management Meeting.

BYMT/22/02/15 Trustees' news

We receive a report of the recent activities of Trustees (BYMT 2022 02 10) including conversations with Quaker Council for European Affairs and Woodbrooke. We hold both organisations in the light.

BYMT/22/02/16 Meeting for Sufferings preparation

We have prepared for Meeting for Sufferings to be held on 4–6 March.

BYMT/22/02/17 Communicating trustees' work

We have considered how to communicate our work to others.

BYMT/22/02/18 Reviewing the meeting

We have reviewed the meeting.

BYMT/22/02/19 Time with Recording Clerk

We have spent time with the Recording Clerk.

BYMT/22/02/20 Time without staff

We have spent time without staff.

Caroline Nursey
Clerk

Church structures fit for the next generation

Each committee has arisen and developed in response to a particular need. Each generation of Friends has been faced with a structure in some respects untidy, and we may be thankful for the clear-minded among us who help us, from time to time, to set our house in better order. But order without life does not work, and our continual task is to ensure that our structures are in harmony with the changing tides of life in Britain Yearly Meeting.

(part of *Quaker faith & practice* 8.24)

Introduction

The passage above reminds us that from time to time our structures need to be revisited, and brought in line with what our community needs from them today.

Over the course of the present triennium, Meeting for Sufferings will be giving a good deal of attention to this work – helping to develop simple, sustainable, inclusive structures that are fit for the purposes we have for them now. The Saturday morning session at this Meeting for Sufferings is given over to several aspects of this work. All of these build on work initiated by Yearly Meeting, BYM Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings itself over the last three years.

These are:

1. Review of Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings
2. Review of the purpose of Meeting for Sufferings: proposed process
3. Reporting arrangements for Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) and Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC)
4. Simplification of BYM structures

There are four papers later in this pack to cover each of these aspects. Each will be taken as a discrete item on your agenda, and introduced separately.

We should remember that these aren't unconnected processes. In 2018, Yearly Meeting commissioned a revision of our book of discipline, *Quaker faith & practice*. This has prompted us to take a hard look at several aspects of our church government. In response to this, and to growing calls for us to simplify and declutter our Quaker organisation, BYM Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings identified Simpler structures and practices as one of three strands of work for becoming a simple church supported by a simple charity to reinvigorate Quakerism in the strategic priorities for BYM's work in 2019-2024.

Meeting for Sufferings is overseeing some of this work directly, other aspects are being worked on by working groups or by BYM Trustees. An important role for Meeting for Sufferings is to monitor progress, and to ensure that all the changes are congruent with one another and with our understanding of our Quaker discipline.

What's happening at this Meeting for Sufferings?

1. Review of Yearly Meeting

Yearly Meeting 2019 asked Meeting for Sufferings to carry out a review of Yearly Meetings and Yearly Meeting Gatherings. Meeting for Sufferings established the Group to Review Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings to do this work in two stages. The first stage was to consider how well Yearly Meeting is meeting its purposes and whether this purpose needs to be changed or updated. The second stage will consider the practical aspects of how Yearly Meetings and Gatherings are held.

The review group is reporting at this meeting on its work on stage one. Their paper (MfS 2022 03 12) is on pages 33-41 of this pack.

Questions for Meeting for Sufferings at this meeting:

- a. Do you have questions or comments on the stage one report?
- b. Do you support the conclusions in part 5 of the report? In particular:
 - That the purposes of Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gathering are not different;
 - That there needs to be a strong focus on making time for worshipful discernment alongside other purposes;
- c. Do you agree that this review needs to take into account outcomes from the work BYM Trustees are doing to simplify central governance structures (see paper MfS 2022 03 15) to enable more participation be more inclusive & sustainable, and be simpler to understand? Can you commit to monitoring that these two strands of work are well-aligned?
- d. Do you agree with the review group's assessment we need to review Meeting for Sufferings alongside Yearly Meeting in order to resolve issues of accountability and transparency? (The mechanism for carrying out this work will be discussed in the next item.)
- e. Do you have any other guidance to offer the review group as they take their work forward?

2. Reviewing the purpose of Meeting for Sufferings

Yearly Meeting 2021 acknowledged that there are issues which impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and that its role may need review. Meeting for Sufferings in October 2021 asked its Arrangements Group, Clerks and the Recording Clerk to plan for this.

At this meeting we will consider the right process for this review. A paper considering options (paper MfS 2022 03 13) is on pages 42-48 of this pack. It recommends broadening the scope of the existing Group to Review Yearly Meeting & Meeting Gatherings to include this work.

Questions for Meeting for Sufferings at this meeting:

- a. Do you agree that the best way to carry out this review is to extend the scope of the existing review of Yearly Meetings & Gatherings?
- b. If so, do you agree with the proposed additions to the terms of reference of the group?
- c. If so, will you ask Central Nominations Committee to search for any additional Friend[s] to serve, and empower your clerks to make the appointments between meetings to avoid delaying the process?
- d. Do you have advice to offer the review group on the scope of this review and any particular questions they should consider?

3. Reporting arrangements for QCCIR and QWRC

BYM Trustees have been reviewing the terms of reference of the Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) and Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC). These two committees manage a range of external relationships with other yearly meetings, churches, faith groups, ecumenical instruments and interfaith organisations on behalf of our national church.

Trustees have been discussing new terms of reference with both committees, and this work is almost complete. Trustees and the committees consider that these relationships are primarily a church matter, and that the accountability to Yearly Meeting for this work would best be through Meeting for Sufferings rather than Trustees.

A paper (paper MfS 2022 03 14) explaining the implications of this change in on pages 49-50 of this pack.

Questions for Meeting for Sufferings at this meeting:

- a. Do you agree that Meeting for Sufferings should take on greater responsibility for external relationships with other yearly meetings, churches and faith bodies, working through QCCIR and QWRC?
- b. Will you take on the responsibility of receiving their annual reports and including their work in your annual report to Yearly Meeting?
- c. If so, will you ask the group reviewing the purpose of Meeting for Sufferings to include this work in their considerations, with a view to asking Yearly Meeting to amend the constitution in due course?

4. Simplification of BYM structures

Since 2019, BYM Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings have been engaged together in discerning how the central structures of BYM's national church and charity can be simplified.

In April 2021, Trustees shared with Meeting for Sufferings a vision of 'a Religious Society of Friends whose discernment, work and witness are all invigorated by the joyful participation of many Friends according to their leadings, gifts, time and

interests.' Meeting for Sufferings also united with an aspiration to make central governance arrangements simpler, more inclusive and more sustainable.

A series of workshops was held with Meeting for Sufferings members in summer 2021, and with the wider Quaker community in autumn 2021.

These workshops led Trustees to identify four key functions – conscience, stewardship, planning and diplomacy – which are needed across the central structures.

A paper (paper MfS 2022 03 15) explaining these conclusions is on pages 51-58 of this pack, together with a report from the workshops held last year. Trustees now intend to work on some possible models for our central structures which meet these functions in simpler, more inclusive and sustainable ways, and to bring these back later in the year for further discernment at Meeting for Sufferings.

Questions for Meeting for Sufferings at this meeting:

- a. Do you have questions about the process so far?
- b. Do the four functions – conscience, stewardship, planning and diplomacy – resonate with your experience of what our church needs of our structures? Do you have further improvements to suggest? Are you ready to affirm these as the agreed basis for further work on simplifying structures by Trustees and in the other ongoing review processes?
- c. Are you willing to receive and comment on possible models for simplifying our central structures at a meeting later this year?
- d. Do you have any further guidance to offer Trustees on the approaches they might take to this work?

What happens next with all of this?

All of the above strands of work will return to Meeting for Sufferings during 2022 and 2023. A number of these will require further discernment here and at Yearly Meeting before changes can be made to the constitution.

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee currently expects that time will be set aside on the agenda of Yearly Meeting in 2023 to consider these matters.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk
18 February 2022

Interim Report of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings

Summary:

This is a report on stage one of the work of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings (known as the YMRG). The Terms of Reference asked the YMRG to consider:

- a) *How well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are meeting the stated purposes of Yearly Meeting as set out in chapter 6 of Quaker faith & practice*

The YMRG found that Yearly Meeting (YM) and Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) are both meeting their purposes as set out in chapter 6 of *Quaker faith & practice*. The purposes of both YM and YMG are fundamentally the same, although the emphases and the ways in which the purposes are met at the two events are somewhat different.

- b) *Whether Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering have an appropriate balance of agenda items (threshing, learning and exploration, discernment, decision, reporting) and other activities to meet these purposes*

The YMRG found that Friends have different opinions on whether the balance of agenda items and other activities at YM and YMG is appropriate to meet the purposes. Some of these concerns are likely to be a reflection of the diversity of what Friends find as personally important.

- c) *Whether any of the purposes of Yearly Meeting or Yearly Meeting Gathering is left unaddressed, or duplicated*

The YMRG found no evidence that the key purposes are habitually left unaddressed and heard no concerns about duplication.

- d) *Whether the purpose needs to be changed or updated to better address the needs of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain*

The YMRG feels that the wording of the purposes could be updated to help Friends understand what YM and YMG are for, and why they may be important to life as a Quaker. However, this is about clarity of expression. The key ideas are those of gathering, worshipping, discerning and learning together: they seem to be highly relevant to the current needs of Quakers in Britain.

- e) *Whether Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering can be simplified in line with BYM's aspiration to simplify Quaker structures and practices*

The YMRG considers it very likely that both YM and YMG can be simplified. Perhaps if Friends were asked to state what they need from YM and YMG then this could point Friends to simpler events. However, the YMRG understands work on simplification as being much more far-reaching than issues about YM and YMG. Simplifying other aspects of Quaker governance will impact on YM and we feel strongly that there must be a co-ordinated and coherent approach to simplification work. We await guidance on how to take this forward.

- f) *How well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are relating to and holding accountable the other national bodies of Britain Yearly Meeting (Meeting for Sufferings, BYM Trustees, and various other committees)*

Minute 28 of YMG 2021 acknowledged unresolved tensions that impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and asked Meeting for Sufferings to consider how it might be reviewed. The YMRG feels that it may be impossible to address issues of accountability and the role of YM properly without a review of Meeting for Sufferings. We await guidance on how to take this forward.

1. Introduction

It is well to be reminded that the history of YMs is not one of stasis but of change: from a representative body to one that was open to all members; from one which continued until all the business was concluded to one that, from 1973, was usually held over four days around a bank holiday. That change was to encourage as many Friends as possible who are in work to attend, yet even now geographical, financial and employment-based pressures prevent all Friends from choosing to attend Yearly Meeting sessions. For those attending there has always been both a residential as well as a social element. The last century saw exploration of more explicitly residential YM events - residential YMs outside London, Summer Gatherings and the current residential YMGs. It has felt increasingly right to include children and young people in YM processes.

Over time the stated purpose of YMs has changed from 'for the better ordering, managing, and regulating of the public affairs of Friends relating to the Truth and the service thereof' to becoming in 1968 'the final constitutional authority of the Religious Society of Friends in Great Britain'. The more explicit definitions in the 5th edition of *Quaker faith & practice* are essentially the creation of the 21st century.

As the group tasked with looking at the results of this evolution for the first time since 1960, the YMRG are aware that any changes made as a result of this review will be part of that continuing history but not the final word.

2. Our task

Minute 6 of YM 2019 asked Meeting for Sufferings to review YM & YMG. Minute MfS/19/12/18 confirmed that this should be a two-stage review and asked Central Nominations Committee to bring forward the names of Friends to serve. The YMRG began work in early 2021.

Our work was split into two stages. Stage one was defined as a 'review of how well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering is meeting its purposes and whether this purpose needs to be changed or updated'. Here we were given 6 areas to focus on:

- a. How well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are meeting the stated purposes of Yearly Meeting as set out in chapter 6 of *Quaker faith & practice*
- b. Whether Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering have an appropriate balance of agenda items (threshing, learning & exploration, discernment, decision, reporting) and other activities to meet these purposes
- c. Whether any of the purposes of Yearly Meeting or Yearly Meeting Gathering is left unaddressed, or duplicated
- d. Whether the purpose needs to be changed or updated to better address the needs of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain
- e. Whether Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering can be simplified in line with BYM's aspiration to simplify Quaker structures and practices
- f. How well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are relating to and holding accountable the other national bodies of Britain Yearly Meeting (Meeting for Sufferings, BYM Trustees, and various other committees)?

The second stage was to 'review of the implementation of Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings in the light of the findings from stage one'. This remains to be carried out.

3. Our process

The process which we have used to undertake stage one has comprised the following:

- **Research** into how other yearly meetings describe their purpose: an internal paper was prepared from websites and books of discipline from a selection of yearly meetings.
- **Survey questionnaire:** a questionnaire was developed based on the 6 focus areas above and trialled with a small group of Friends before wider circulation (using Survey Monkey) to Friends who subscribe to the weekly electronic mailing 'Quake'. An introductory paragraph accompanied the questionnaire to explain its purpose to Friends. It was hoped that the questionnaire would get

responses from as wide a pool of Friends as possible. The questionnaire was available over a two-month period. There were nearly 400 respondents.

- **Structured Interviews:** these were conducted by phone or video-conference with a selection of Friends who are currently, or have recently been, closely involved with YM and YMG. Current or recent staff members were also interviewed as were Friends from various area meetings. A total of 17 interviews were carried out.
- **On-line session at YMG 2021:** some members of the YMRG facilitated a session at YMG to give Friends the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas on the purpose of YM and YMG. Around 30-40 people attended the session.
- **Communication and liaison with other groups** involved in reviewing aspects of the constitutional arrangements of BYM, including the Book of Discipline Revision Committee.

This review has been conducted in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic restrictions. This has meant that its findings have been affected in ways that are difficult to quantify, e.g. the questionnaire could only be made available electronically but the impact of this on the size and nature of the sample is unknown.

Preliminary analysis of the responses to the on-line survey questionnaire indicated that the majority of respondents were long standing Quakers who have attended for more than half their lives. Over half were aged 65-80, and less than 1% were under 25 years old. Most respondents (90%) attend meeting most weeks. Three quarters have at least one formal Quaker role and about the same proportion attend business meetings regularly. As such respondents may not be typical of members and attenders overall. We decided therefore that a statistical analysis of the findings would not be appropriate. We noted however that there was a good response from people who had not been to either event: 40% had never been to a YM or YMG.

4. Key Findings

(i) General response to YM and YMG

We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another's faces, and open our hearts one to another in the Truth of God ... Qf&p 6.02

Most of the people who had attended YM or YMG were broadly satisfied with the events and for many of them attendance was a key part of their Quaker journey. There were only a few areas of difference in the responses to the two events, i.e. YM and YMG do not seem to be seen as very different from one another. Based on questionnaire responses, three quarters of YM or YMG participants enjoyed the events and were encouraged by them. 40% found them difficult – so some of the people who found them fulfilling also found them hard.

People generally seemed to appreciate the togetherness that they were open to all and could be of special value to those in smaller meetings.

(ii) Meeting the current purposes

Questionnaire respondents and interviewees felt that on the whole the events met the purposes as laid out in *Qf&p* chapter 6. Most felt that the events fulfilled their purpose and had a real impact on the direction of Quakerism in Britain. Although some questionnaire respondents struggled with prioritisation, 'worship and spiritual nourishment' was seen as the most important of the twelve possible purposes offered [followed by 'required business' and 'oversight of central activity'].

(iii) Purposes that are important but not explicit enough in *Qf&p*

a) accountability

Reporting by BYM Trustees, Meeting for Sufferings and central committees was seen to take place, but some felt that time and other pressures stopped us properly '*holding them to account*' with limited opportunity to question their reports and influence their activities.

b) learning and teaching

There were a number of responses suggesting that learning about Quaker ways, the discipline of business meetings and passing on culture are purposes which could be strengthened – perhaps the opportunity for learning and teaching was not being sufficiently exploited.

c) building community

This was seen as important, especially at YMG.

(iv) Achieving the stated purposes

a) positive responses

Most felt that the events were well organised, spirit led, had time both for worship and discernment and a balanced agenda. YMG was slightly better rated than YM. Several specifically commented on the good organisation of the events and complimented or thanked staff for their work.

b) what gets in the way

The most common comment was that there was '*not enough time for discernment*' this feeling may be linked to other comments complaining of excessive '*stage management*'.

The '*need for greater inclusion*' was noted. Disabled provision was sometimes seen as patchy, with some specific examples noted. Some found the crowdedness difficult. It was felt '*there were few young people and ethnic minorities.*' The significant minority of questionnaire respondents who did not attend gave many practical reasons. More than half the respondents found attending difficult, largely for

financial, family, travel or health reasons. Some people could not easily get the time off work. Others saw that YM was not relevant to them (other respondents, on the contrary, worried we were becoming congregationalist).

Finally, it was noted that there was sometimes '*a lack of follow-through*', i.e. that BYM processes did not always ensure that action happened following decisions at YM or YMG – this can lead to '*creating waves without continuity*'.

(v) Appetite for change

Friends expressed varying appetites for change. There are those for whom YM/YMG works well as it is; some who would be receptive to modest change and a small number expressing concern that this review could '*miss a trick*' if wider questions about central structures and processes (as in the simplification agenda) are not linked in.

(vi) Areas of potential change

a) are two different event types needed?

There was a view that there was now little difference between YM and YMG. While we heard the suggestion to acknowledge this and drop the distinction; other voices suggested making the two more clearly different from one another, perhaps by hiving off some or all of the formal business from YMG. Others reminded us that YM is more than just an AGM.

b) representation

Some responses focused on the question of representation at YM/YMG as a way of connecting with the Society more widely. Some queried whether we should revert to YM being an event only for formally nominated representatives although some commented on the importance of YM remaining open to all Friends. Should Meeting for Sufferings, as some have suggested, be explicitly an interim YM?

c) preparation

The need for greater preparation for YM/YMG was raised, with a need for education about why things are done the way they are, included.

d) running the event

How BYM delivers YM or YMG merits further thought, with comments about using online processes, sustainability, a '*less overwhelming*' event, more non-Quaker input and learning from other YMs and Quaker resources (Woodbrooke, QUNO, ...).

(vii) Thoughts for the Future

We have not so far explicitly asked what the Society needs or what Friends want from YM and YMG. A significant number of responses in the survey and in the interviews expressed the need to take a wider look at YM/YMG, and the role of Meeting for Sufferings came up frequently. One Friend said: '*The church structures*

feel like they are creaking at the moment. They're ill defined, especially in respect of the roles of Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting itself'. The paths to accountability within our structures are confusing and do not seem to achieve the level of transparency Friends would like. There were a small number of calls for radical change.

We were not asked to consider anything in relation to BYM's central committees. As well as thoughts on how YM relates to Meeting for Sufferings, we heard some questions about how YM relates to Quaker Peace & Social Witness and to Quaker Life Central Committees. Are YM (the event) and BYM (the Friends and meetings) too separate and disconnected? How does YM fit with BYM or Meeting for Sufferings, especially now that we have a 'church' made of multiple (independent?) charities?

Likewise, simplification is an issue of concern to Quakers in Britain. BYM has a small membership and a huge organisation. Does it need to go back to first principles and ask what it is BYM really needs?

We have received detailed comments on some separate aspects such as permission for attenders; the agenda-setting process and whether it could be open to individual Friends to suggest items; and whether the event had become too 'big' so that, through clarification of purpose, the content, especially 'extra-curricular' activities, could be limited.

5. Conclusions

The YMRG's Terms of Reference asked us to focus on 6 areas within stage one of our process. Our key conclusions for the first 4 areas are set out below. These areas relate in various ways to the purposes of YM and YMG. There are two areas that we have been unable to address fully.

(i) Are the purposes of Yearly Meeting being met? The weight of evidence suggests that the purposes of Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gathering, as understood from chapter 6 of *Quaker faith & practice*, are being met.

It is important, however, to distinguish between a purpose and a way of fulfilling a purpose, e.g. 'threshing' is a means to an end and not a purpose of YM. The extra detail included in the current version of chapter 6 may have led to some confusion here so that Friends may be asserting that the means being used are appropriate rather than the purposes are being met. Where there is some doubt as to whether purposes are being met, relates to the accountability of the other national Quaker bodies to Yearly Meeting. However many Friends are content in this regard as well.

A major conclusion of this part of the work is that the purposes of Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gathering are not seen as different. The key purposes of both are seen as gathering, worshipping, deciding and learning together.

(ii) Is there an appropriate balance of agenda items to meet the purposes?

There is considerable diversity in Friends' responses to this question which is likely to reflect the diversity of Friends in their personal goals, learning styles and spiritual needs. The strongest call is for there to be more time for worshipful discernment where there are important questions to be resolved.

In our work we have heard from Friends who want to see one another and worship together; Friends who want to participate in Quaker decision making and in Quaker work; Friends who want governance to be simpler and accountability to be clearer; and Friends who want Yearly Meeting, as our highest constitutional authority, to be more responsive.

(iii) Are there any purposes omitted or duplicated? We have found no evidence that either of these is a matter for concern.

(iv) Do the purposes need to be changed or updated? There seems to be scope for the clarification of the purposes of Yearly Meeting so that they are clearly delineated from the means used to achieve them. Friends also need to understand what YM and YMG are for and why they may be important to life as a Quaker in Britain. The importance of Yearly Meeting as a '*school of the Spirit*' and for disseminating good practice in the Quaker business method could also be stressed.

We are prepared in future work to prepare draft text for a revised Chapter 6.

There are two further areas that the Group has not felt able to address fully because they overlap with ongoing work elsewhere in BYM. They are:

1. *Simplification:* Alongside this review, a sub-group of BYM Trustees has been working with Friends to explore ways to simplify central governance structures that will enable more participation, be more inclusive & sustainable, and be simpler to understand. We feel that we need to see some outcomes from this work before reaching firm conclusions.

2. *Accountability:* We are aware that some Friends are unhappy about the way the key governance bodies in BYM relate to one another. This unhappiness is often expressed in terms of the relationship between BYM Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings, especially in relation to how the vision for the work of Quakers in Britain is set. It could also be helpful to explore what we think 'accountability' means in the context of Quaker structures and the Quaker business method.

Minute 28 of YMG 2021 acknowledged unresolved tensions that impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and asked Meeting for Sufferings to consider how it might be reviewed. We have heard some interesting thoughts on accountability but feel that a review of Meeting for Sufferings may be the best way to get to the heart of what is troubling some Friends.

Our structures must meet the needs of Friends and help Quakerism in Britain thrive. To this end, the group feels it is essential that steps are taken to ensure that all review processes are co-ordinated and coherent.

Sarah Donaldson

Convener, on behalf of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting and Yearly Meeting Gatherings

Taking forward the review of Meeting for Sufferings

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk,
18 February 2022

Background

Yearly Meeting 2021 asked Meeting for Sufferings to consider whether its role needs to be reviewed. Meeting for Sufferings considered this in October 2021 and asked to have more time to discuss such a review and how it could be conducted.

In December 2020, Meeting for Sufferings minuted:

We have heard a call to take a more coordinated approach to our review process, considering the interrelationships between bodies and to take a radical approach to our structures not being constrained by the historical development of different bodies. We look forward to playing our part in achieving this change. (MfS/20/12/08)

In addition, the Group for Reviewing Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings, in their interim report [paper MfS 2022 03 12] to this Meeting for Sufferings, observes:

Minute 28 of YMG 2021 acknowledged unresolved tensions that impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and asked Meeting for Sufferings to consider how it might be reviewed. The YMRG feels that it may be impossible to address issues of accountability and the role of YM properly without a review of Meeting for Sufferings.

These minutes suggest that a review of the role of Meeting for Sufferings is not only desirable but essential. The review will need to align with other constitutional changes which are in process, especially the review of Yearly Meeting and other work to simplify the central structures of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Meeting for Sufferings, as it is currently constituted, is one of the two national bodies which can act for the national Quaker community (the other being Yearly Meeting itself). It is the body which can issue statements on behalf of Quakers in Britain in the intervals between Yearly Meetings, and it fosters good communication between the national structures and area meetings (and a number of other bodies).

However, it is no longer the body responsible for the governance of the national charity, Britain Yearly Meeting, as this role was given to BYM Trustees when they were established in 2006. Meeting for Sufferings retains some responsibilities for holding a vision for Quaker worship and witness at national level, but Trustees are responsible for the allocation of resource and the day-to-day governance oversight of the centrally-managed work. In practice the two bodies work closely together, consulting each other when necessary. However, some tensions exist, and it is not always clear to Friends which body holds responsibility for what, or where to address concerns.

Meeting for Sufferings has also been asking itself questions about how it is constituted, including whether its membership sufficiently reflects the diversity of the Quaker community. This has included attempts to increase representation of younger Quakers, as well as the right balance of online and in-person meetings to enable the attendance of Friends unable to travel regularly to London.

What should a review address?

A review of the role of Meeting for Sufferings might perhaps address the following questions. There may be more to add.

- how Meeting for Sufferings might change as part of a simpler, inclusive and sustainable structure;
- how Meeting for Sufferings can work well to complement Yearly Meeting without duplication or confusion as to the responsibilities of each;
- how Meeting for Sufferings can work well alongside BYM Trustees without duplication or confusion, and in ways which comply with charity law;
- whether there are responsibilities which would better be passed to another body;
- whether there are responsibilities of other bodies which would better be carried out by Meeting for Sufferings;
- what ways exist to foster greater transparency and improve communication between Meeting for Sufferings and the bodies which send representatives to it.

How might a review be conducted?

There is more than one way a review might be carried out. Ordinarily, Meeting for Sufferings might set up a free-standing review group to carry out the work and bring in recommendations. Or Meeting for Sufferings might decide that another body should conduct the review – perhaps suggesting to Yearly Meeting or BYM Trustees that they oversee the process instead. This would have the merit of being independent of Meeting for Sufferings itself.

However, given the number of different constitutional change processes already in train, and the need to ensure they are well-aligned with one another, I recommend that Meeting for Sufferings instead commission the existing Group for Reviewing Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings to carry out this work.

This has a number of advantages. It keeps to a minimum the number of different review groups operating at the present times. It ensures that changes to Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings' roles and ways of meeting happen in a joined-up way, and that recommendations are made at the same time and considered together.

Next steps

If this recommendation is accepted, then the Review Group would need amended terms of reference. A possible draft is appended below, with changes underlined. It would also need at least one additional member. Existing members should be consulted to establish that they are willing to continue to serve and undertake the

additional stage of work required. Meeting for Sufferings will need to set aside further agenda time, later this year, to hear about their work and recommend any changes to Yearly Meeting for consideration in 2023.

APPENDIX: DRAFT Revised terms of reference

Group to Review Yearly Meeting, & Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings

Terms of reference

We did conclude among ourselves to settle a meeting, to see one another's faces, and open our hearts one to another in the Truth of God once a year, as formerly it used to be.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1668 (*Quaker faith & practice* 6.02)

1.0 Purpose

1.1 The Review of Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings is to examine the purpose and function of Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings, and to make recommendations to Meeting for Sufferings of any changes required for Yearly Meeting to better meet the needs of Quakers in Britain. The Review will also examine the role of Meeting for Sufferings and make recommendations for any changes.

2.0 Membership

2.1 Members of the Group are appointed by Meeting for Sufferings on the nomination of Central Nominations Committee.

2.2 The Group shall consist of up to ~~eight~~nine members, including:

- One recent member of YM Agenda Committee
- One BYM Trustee serving at the time of appointment
- One serving or recent CYP volunteer
- One member of Meeting for Sufferings
- ~~Four~~Five other Friends with a range of experience

2.3 Meeting for Sufferings shall appoint a convener from among this number.

2.4 Members will be appointed to serve for three years or until completion of the task, whichever is the sooner. In the event the task takes longer than three years, members may be asked to serve a second term.

2.4 The clerk of Meeting for Sufferings and the Recording Clerk may attend *ex officio*.

2.5 The Recording Clerk will designate a member of staff to act as Secretary to the Group. Meetings without the Secretary may only happen with that person's, or the Recording Clerk's consent.

2.6 The Group may invite other Friends and staff with relevant experience or expertise to attend its meetings for specific items.

2.7 The Group may establish subgroups to undertake specific pieces of work. At least two members of the Group shall serve on any such subgroup.

3.0 Scope

3.1 The Group shall conduct the review in ~~two~~ stages as follows:

3.1.1 Stage one: A review of how well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering is meeting its purposes and whether this purpose needs to be changed or updated, including:

- a. How well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are meeting the stated purposes of Yearly Meeting as set out in chapter 6 of *Quaker faith & practice*
- b. Whether Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering have an appropriate balance of agenda items (threshing, learning & exploration, discernment, decision, reporting) and other activities to meet these purposes
- c. Whether any of the purposes of Yearly Meeting or Yearly Meeting Gathering is left unaddressed, or duplicated
- d. Whether the purpose needs to be changed or updated to better address the needs of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain
- e. Whether Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering can be simplified in line with BYM's aspiration so simplify Quaker structures and practices
- f. How well Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are relating to and holding accountable the other national bodies of Britain Yearly Meeting (Meeting for Sufferings, BYM Trustees, and various other committees)?

3.1.2 Stage two: A review of the current role of Meeting for Sufferings within the structures of Britain Yearly meeting, including comments on and any recommendations for changes to the following:

- how Meeting for Sufferings might change as part of a simpler, inclusive and sustainable structure;
- how Meeting for Sufferings can work well to complement Yearly Meeting without duplication or confusion as to the responsibilities of each;
- how Meeting for Sufferings can work well alongside BYM Trustees without duplication or confusion, and in ways which comply with charity law;
- whether there are responsibilities which would better be passed to another body;
- whether there are responsibilities of other bodies which would better be carried out by Meeting for Sufferings;
- what ways exist to foster greater transparency and improve communication between Meeting for Sufferings and the bodies which send representatives to it.

3.1.3 Stage ~~two~~three: in the light of the finding from stages one & two, a review of how Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings are planned and delivered including comments on and any recommendations for changes to the following:

~~A review of the implementation of Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gatherings in the light of the findings from stage one, including:~~

- a. The most appropriate process & timescale for the discernment of the agenda for Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering, and any implications of this for the agenda for Meeting for Sufferings
- b. The right frequency, location and timing for Yearly Meeting, ~~&~~ Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings
- c. The sustainability of the financial and carbon costs to BYM and to individual Friends attending and how they can be minimised
- d. Any changes required to maintain or increase the level of attendance and engagement with Yearly Meeting, ~~&~~ Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings by Friends and area meetings
- e. The participation of children, young people, young adults and families, and whether there are barriers to participation, diversity & inclusion of under-represented groups
- f. The respective roles of committees and staff in making practical arrangements?
- g. Any changes required to Yearly Meeting's relationship with Meeting for Sufferings as the other senior body of the church, and the body which acts on its behalf between Yearly Meetings
- h. How Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering fit in to the programme of other events organised by Britain Yearly Meeting
- i. How well the needs of Quaker Recognised Bodies and other groups which hold events at the time of Yearly Meeting & Yearly Meeting Gathering are met

4.0 Mode of working

4.1 The Group shall meet as frequently as necessary to complete its task, and not less than twice a year. The Group is encouraged to use virtual means for its meetings wherever possible.

4.2 The Recording Clerk will ensure sufficient budget is available to support the Group's activities. The Group may not incur costs outside this budget without permission of the Recording Clerk.

4.3 The Group may communicate by minute with

- Meeting for Sufferings
- YM Agenda Committee & YM Arrangements Committee
- BYM Trustees
- Other bodies which are accountable to Yearly Meeting

4.4 The Group shall consult widely among Friends and the bodies listed in 4.3 to inform its findings and recommendations.

4.5 The Group shall report to Meeting for Sufferings at the end of each stage and at least annually on progress.

4.6 The Group shall prepare a final report with recommendations to be submitted to Meeting for Sufferings for discernment.

4.7 The Group shall prepare supporting materials to enable Meeting for Sufferings to report and make recommendations to Yearly Meeting.

4.8 The Group shall raise with Meeting for Sufferings any matters which it feels need consideration which would take it beyond its remit.

4.9 The Group shall operate within these terms of reference which were agreed by minute MfS/19/12/18 of Meeting for Sufferings held 7 December 2019 and amended by minute XXX of Meeting for Sufferings held 4-6 March 2022. The terms of reference may only be amended by minute of Meeting for Sufferings.

Reporting arrangements for QCCIR and QWRC

Do you work gladly with other religious groups in the pursuit of common goals? While remaining faithful to Quaker insights, try to enter imaginatively into the life and witness of other communities of faith, creating together the bonds of friendship.

Do you welcome the diversity of culture, language and expressions of faith in our yearly meeting and in the world community of Friends? Seek to increase your understanding and to gain from this rich heritage and wide range of spiritual insights. Uphold your own and other yearly meetings in your prayers.

(Advices & queries nos. 6 & 16)

Background

Britain Yearly Meeting is represented externally by two standing committees. Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) works to maintain good relations with other churches and faith communities, with the ecumenical instruments in the three nations which make up our yearly meeting, and with national interfaith bodies.

Quaker World Relations Committee (QWRC) represents Quakers in Britain on Friends World Committee for Consultation, and holds the relationship with other yearly meetings and Quaker groupings around the world.

The functions of both committees are described more fully in [chapter 9 of *Quaker faith and practice*](#).

BYM Trustees review the terms of reference of the standing committees from time to time as set out in [Quaker faith & practice 8.18](#). They are currently working with the committees to put in place new terms of reference for their work.

What's changing?

At present both these committees report to Yearly Meeting via BYM Trustees, as do the Central Committees. This is primarily to ensure that BYM Trustees are able to allocate appropriate resources to each committee's work, and to hold them accountable for their activities on behalf of the national organisation.

In the case of QCCIR and QWRC, apart from a modest level of secretarial support – primarily to help with the administration of meetings and communicating the committees' work – the bulk of the activity is undertaken by the committee members themselves, and by other volunteers. Most of their work is taken up with building and sustaining relationships, attendance at events and networks, and representing the Quaker view externally. These two committees do not oversee programmes of work undertaken by staff in the way that Quaker Life and QPSW Central Committees do.

For this reason, Trustees and the committees consider that the work of QCCIR and QWRC should rightly be accountable to Friends not via Trustees but via Meeting for Sufferings, as the senior representative body of the national church. New terms of reference are being prepared to reflect this changed approach.

In addition, changes are being made to the terms of reference to enable these committees to draw upon the gifts, experience and willingness to serve of a wider group of Friends. This will mean that they are less reliant upon committee members and can work through a more diverse range of Friends.

At the moment, [Quaker faith & practice 8.05](#) does not permit Meeting for Sufferings to have committees of its own, so to make this change would require a decision of Yearly Meeting in session. In the meantime, it would be possible for the committees to work much more closely in practice with Meeting for Sufferings, whilst the reporting to BYM Trustees could become largely a formality.

At this stage it would be helpful to know if Meeting for Sufferings unites with this suggested change of approach. If so, the proposed review of the role of Meeting for Sufferings can take this into account in its work.

Questions for Meeting for Sufferings at this meeting:

- a. Do you agree that Meeting for Sufferings should take on greater responsibility for external relationships with other yearly meetings, churches and faith bodies, working through QCCIR and QWRC?
- b. Will you take on the responsibility of receiving their annual reports and including their work in your annual report to Yearly Meeting?
- c. If so, will you ask the group reviewing the purpose of Meeting for Sufferings to include this work in their considerations, with a view to asking Yearly Meeting to amend the constitution in due course?

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk
18 February 2022

Simplifying BYM structures: progress report and next steps

Introduction and background

Over the last three years, Trustees have been engaging with Meeting for Sufferings in a process which aims to simplify the central structures of Britain Yearly Meeting. This work is happening alongside a number of other reviews.

In November 2021, a 'joining the dots' meeting was held, with representation from all the national review processes and from Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee. This meeting identified a number of needs, notably for:

- Aligning the processes so they work to a single definition of simplification, and share a common approach to understanding the functions of the central structures;
- Streamlining the review processes so that the number of different reviews is kept to a minimum;
- Clarifying the role of Meeting for Sufferings itself, as it is the body which has a constitutional relationship with all the other bodies under review, and any changes to it would have significant implications elsewhere;
- Collaborating in bringing any proposed changes before the Yearly Meeting in session in a co-ordinated and timely way, most likely at Yearly Meeting 2023;
- Concluding the review processes in time for any structural changes and the common approach to be reflected in the new book of discipline; the Revision Committee is already working on text for church government sections of the book;
- At every stage, communicating and engaging widely with Friends.

Trustees have some overall responsibilities for the governance and functioning of the church structures, as well as the committees of the national charity (BYM) and a clear mandate in [Quaker faith & practice 8.18](#) to maintain and periodically revise the central & standing committee structure. Following conversations with Trustees and committees, however, it's clear it will be more appropriate for Meeting for Sufferings to be the primary body taking the overview of changes to church structures. Note that any changes to the basic functions of Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committees require the agreement of Yearly Meeting in session.

Summary of the process so far

'Simple structures and practices' was adopted as one of Trustees' three priorities in 2018. The drivers for change include:

- The limited number of Friends who can participate in central work because of the focus on a particular kind of service – three year committee positions

- The opportunity cost of staff time devoted to servicing committees and sub committees
- The opacity of the central governance structures – hard to explain and not always clear where accountability lies

Two Trustees (Ellie Harding and Carolyn Hayman) were asked to lead a process to come up with central governance arrangements that would be simpler, more inclusive and more sustainable. The Covid pandemic has led to different ways of working that demonstrate how much change may be possible.

The work began by forming a Simplification Working Group with the Clerks of the central and standing committees as well as the Engaging Young Adult Quakers Steering Group. All were very open to thinking radically, as MfS encouraged the group to do. (*“We have heard a call to take a more coordinated approach to our review process, considering the interrelationships between bodies and to take a radical approach to our structures not being constrained by the historical development of different bodies. We look forward to playing our part in achieving this change.”* MfS20/12/08). And all could see both strengths and weaknesses in the way we currently operate.

This Working Group endorsed:

- **a vision of the desired outcome:**
Our vision is of a Religious Society of Friends whose discernment, work and witness are all invigorated by the joyful participation of many Friends according to their leadings, gifts, time and interests.

- **And a definition of simplification:**
The necessary minimum allocation of time and resources to enable Friends to discern how their church should provide spiritual nurture and impact on the world, and make that a reality. Each part of the governance system is understandable to any Friend, and the responsibilities of different parts of the system connect but do not overlap

Working from first principles, the group discerned four functions that any system of central governance needs to fulfill. These are explained in the section on alignment below. The vision, definition and functions were endorsed by Trustees and then by Meeting for Sufferings in April 2021

“We all share the aspiration of a simple church supported by a simple charity to reinvigorate Quakerism. We receive paper MfS 2021 04 19 from trustees which summarises the call, made by Meeting for Sufferings and trustees, to simplify our central church and charity governance structures working from first principles. We support the approach to hold workshops for members of

Sufferings so that we can explore the points raised in the paper further.”
MfS/21/04/17.

The two Trustees then conducted five workshops with members of MfS, which highlighted some concerns about the way MfS operates, which have been shared with the Clerk of MfS, but also general support for the approach to simplification. After two special interest sessions at the 2021 Yearly Meeting Gathering, the two trustees held a series of 17 workshops with over 200 Friends from across Great Britain. A report of these is attached as an Appendix to this paper. They revealed a high level of interest in alternative ways of participating, and surprisingly little attachment to current structures.

The Trustees' remit takes an overview of the whole of central governance. There are also parallel reviews of Yearly Meeting and YM Gathering, and the proposed review of MfS, which are being conducted separately. Trustees are therefore proposing an approach to alignment between the reviews intended to ensure that the separate reviews are coherent, without gaps, overlaps or inconsistencies.

Aligning the work on simplification

Clearly, to align the different reviews we need to adopt a common approach. To this end we are proposing that Trustees affirm, and invite others also to affirm, the three goals of making our structures **simpler, inclusive** and **sustainable**.

Next, we need to consider the four functions that we have been discussing – **conscience, planning, stewardship** and **diplomacy** – and together discern what features they would need to have in order to be rooted in Quaker spirituality and ways of working, transparent/accountable and connected.

Having agreed the functions to be addressed, a range of alternative models can then be crafted (in discussion between the review groups) that would provide the features that we've agreed are required. All functions contribute to wider participation and engagement in different ways, and diplomacy is not confined to a single entity. It's important to recognise that all these functions require the exercise of Quaker discernment.

Below is a description of the four functions as we see them so far:

'Conscience': discerning what love requires of us

- Develops a vision for the Quaker church and its place in Britain and is a prophetic voice for all creation
- Organises the participation of Friends to enable deep discernment on spiritual positions and church governance
- Expresses the principal concerns of the church to guide Quaker witness
- Draws on a representative range of viewpoints and results from a gathered meeting, so that decisions are seen as legitimate and well tested

- Is able to reflect the views of all parts of the Society, particularly younger Friends, and is able to respond to emerging concerns in a timely way
- Has oversight of the health of the church, and of the **Diplomats** that represent it
- Has a mechanism for decisions on urgent matters between meetings

‘Stewardship’: sustaining our ability to express God’s purpose, now and in the future

- Satisfies itself that the plans produced by **Planning** are achievable within resource and other constraints, and if not, proposes and explains changes
- Secures the resources to carry out the plan and to support the church generally
- Oversees the delivery of the plan and reports on its achievements and challenges
- Ensures that the charity and all other bodies that carry out the work operate with regard to all legal requirements and safeguards the reputation of the Religious Society of Friends and Quakers
- Manages the charity’s physical assets to fit them to serve Friends in a generation to come

‘Planning’: expressing what love requires of us in action

- Operates within the parameters set by **Conscience** and **Stewardship** and is directly accountable to both
- Responds to the concerns of the church as expressed by Conscience in the plans for work by the charity
- Has a clear understanding of the resource and other constraints on the charity as expressed by Stewardship and reflects these in the plan
- Takes into account interest and activity in different areas of witness including at area and regional level, in QRBs and feedback through Local Development Workers and meetings of role holders
- Is clear about intended impact
- Learns from experience
- Allows for two way dialogue with Woodbrooke
- Is able to build on synergies between the work of the charity and work at area and regional level and in relevant Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRBs).

‘Diplomacy’: sharing the Light with others (within and beyond Quakers)

- Sustains and develops relationships with:
 - Christian and other faith groups in Britain, enabling the expression of a distinctive Quaker standpoint
 - Quakers worldwide, enabling constructive exchange of perspectives with other Yearly Meetings

- civil society groups in Britain, bringing to issues of common concern an approach rooted in Quaker spirituality
- Enables the involvement of Friends with specialist knowledge, experience, languages, etc.

The way ahead

After the March Meeting for Sufferings the next stage for Trustees will be to work on possible models for a committee structure that delivers the four functions in line with the aspiration for it to be simpler, inclusive and sustainable. These models can be examined and refined by Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings over the course of the year, and other bodies consulted as necessary. They will then form part of a package of recommendations to Yearly Meeting in 2023, covering a range of constitutional changes.

Both Meeting for Sufferings and BYM Trustees will need to report on progress in their annual reports to Yearly Meeting in May 2022. This will raise awareness of the work being done, in preparation for decisions which will be required at Yearly Meeting in 2023. Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings will also hold a Faith in Action meeting (the new name for Special Interest Meetings).

Considerations and decisions for Meeting for Sufferings at this meeting:

- a. Do you have questions about the process so far?
- b. Do the four functions – conscience, stewardship, planning and diplomacy – resonate with your experience of what our church needs of our structures? Do you have further improvements to suggest? Are you ready to affirm these as the agreed basis for further work on simplifying structures by Trustees and in the other ongoing review processes?
- c. Are you willing to receive and comment on possible models for simplifying our central structures at a meeting later this year?
- d. Do you have any further guidance to offer Trustees on the approaches they might take to this work?

APPENDIX: Report on simplification workshops

Background

Following a decision by BYM Trustees in 2018, to make simplification of structures and processes one of three priorities, two Trustees, Ellie Harding and Carolyn Hayman, were tasked with exploring how this could be done in relation to central governance.

A Simplification Working Group, made up of the clerks of Central Committees, discerned a vision, a definition of simplification, and of the key functions that a system of central governance needed to fulfil. These were endorsed by Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) and are given at the end of the paper.

Following this we have undertaken 5 workshops with members of MfS, two special interest sessions at Yearly Meeting, and 17 workshops with well over 200 attendees from across Britain Yearly Meeting. 45 Friends from Scotland attended, and 7 from Wales. Attendees from England were fairly well spread - London didn't dominate - but there were definite 'cold spots' with few attendees. There was very little participation from people under 40, and this is something that needs further work.

This paper reports a summary of the workshop findings.

Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of the workshops was to share the work that had been done so far, test the vision statement, the definition of simplification and the discernment of the core functions that central governance needs to fulfil, and explore the level of interest in new forms of participation.

Additionally, we asked to what extent participants saw the link between worship and witness as separate. This question was to inform decisions on whether QL and QPSW should be two entities or one.

Three overall findings stand out:

- Very few attendees spoke up for the current system or felt that a part of it of which they had experience needed to be retained. This was a surprise.

A few people felt the background paper was too dismissive of committees, pointing out that serving on a committee offers much personal development, and that 'getting rid of committees loses long term involvement to deal with long term and demanding issues' as well as 'losing some doers.' and 'Reducing the number of committee roles means you don't have enough people to do the work on subcommittees.'

Some Friends with reservations about the direction of simplification appreciated the chance to be involved; a Friend who had reservations before attending, reflected "[The session was] conducted... beautifully and handled some difficult and controversial issues with great sensitivity. I guess you gathered that I'm not happy

with some of the direction in which BYM and other parts of the Society are going, but you both made the thinking behind the new direction clearer, and I am grateful for that”

- There was widespread enthusiasm for more ways of participating that did not involve a three-year committee term

There was particular enthusiasm for less reading and more hearing directly from people involved in the work, and for ‘task and finish’ opportunities for service. There was positive feedback on the range of opportunities, but we need to be careful that this does not feel like consultation-type engagement, and ensure that discernment is still central to decision-making. Skills development was mentioned repeatedly, such as children & young people’s training too. Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRBs) and listed informal groups come up several times as the place where Friends found most joy in their service which run on ‘energy and expertise with just enough governance.’ There was hope that the new structure would allow for stronger connections between QRBs and central roles especially in terms of planning.

Additionally, there was a hope that fewer central roles would release more energy for witness or for supporting LMs and AMs.

- On the whole, attendees felt that ‘worship’ and ‘witness’ either overlapped completely or had substantial synergies. Relatively few people saw them as separate.

There were comments from both perspectives - ‘putting it all together isn’t practical, there’s too much work and too much understanding needed’ versus ‘They are two sides of the same thing. All life is sacred so it’s unhelpful to organise in a way that reinforces the decision.’

However, there was a consistent theme that ‘The interlacing of worship and witness is our key thing as Quakers.’. There a was concern that one “side” would overshadow the other and integrating the planning function could lead to a loss of support from specialist workers.

Risks

The risks most frequently mentioned were those relating to the loss of committee roles, and becoming increasingly secular. ‘Too much focus on minimising time might work against true simplicity, which is efficient, effective, transparent and engaging’. However, the risks of not simplifying were also recognised and throughout the workshops it was clear that we were echoing a conversation that was happening in Area and Local Meetings as well.

Opportunities

The main opportunities were for more different ways to give service and participate,

not all of which are strictly governance, but which could be the beginning of a journey towards a more formal governance role.

Vision, definition of simplification, key functions

The Simplification Working Group was encouraged by MfS to be radical. (“We have heard a call to take a more coordinated approach to our review process, considering the interrelationships between bodies and to take a radical approach to our structures not being constrained by the historical development of different bodies. We look forward to playing our part in achieving this change.” MfS20/12/08).

The vision emphasised greater participation not less.

Our vision is of a Religious Society of Friends whose discernment, work and witness are all invigorated by the joyful participation of many Friends according to their leadings, gifts, time and interests

The definition of simplification emphasised frugality with time and resources

The necessary minimum allocation of time and resources to enable Friends to discern how their church should provide spiritual nurture and impact on the world, and make that a reality. Each part of the governance system is understandable to any Friend, and the responsibilities of different parts of the system connect but do not overlap.

The four key governance functions

Working from first principles the Group discerned four key functions. These are not structures, but functions that could be fulfilled by various bodies: Conscience, Stewardship, Planning and Diplomacy.

The next phase of work will look at alternative models to fulfil these functions, and there will be a further round of consultation leading up to proposals being presented to Yearly Meeting in 2023.

Ellie Harding, Carolyn Hayman, Graham Torr supported by Paul Parker
18 February 2022

Date for Yearly Meeting 2023

Meeting for Sufferings is responsible for determining the date of Yearly Meeting (Quaker faith and practice, 7.02f). Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee has sent the following minute to Meeting for Sufferings regarding the date for 2023.

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, 10-12 December 2021 YMAC 2021 12 16 Date of Yearly Meeting 2023

We receive paper **YMAC 2021 12 12** Options for Yearly Meeting 2022 to 2024.

We recommend that Yearly Meeting 2023 takes place over the early May bank holiday weekend (29th April to 1st May 2023). This is in line with our current cycle.

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

Adwoa Bittle
Clerk

Quaker Peace & Social Witness changes

Introduction

Meeting for Sufferings last heard from Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee (QPSWCC) in July 2021 (minute MfS/21/07/14 refers). They explained about their new strategy for our faith in action work:

- More focused on the twin priority issues of peace and climate justice, in order to make a greater difference in the world
- More connected, both to other parts of QPSW work and to Quakers more widely
- More responsive to developing leadings of Friends and able to be agile in what is worked on
- How we work, the methods we use, is at least as distinctive as what we work on

Since then, QPSW has completed a staff restructure to try to deliver on that strategy. QPSW Central Committee has been discerning the future of its governance structures. Details of the new staff structure and work priorities are outlined below.

What QPSW will work on

One part of QPSW now comprises a single large Campaigns, Advocacy and Faith in Action Team, focused on the priority themes of peace & peacebuilding and sustainability & climate justice. The team includes staff specialising in the issues and staff with expertise in methods for delivering social change, including supporting Quakers putting their faith into action. The whole team will look at both issues, rather than having sub-teams looking separately at peace and at climate justice. Diagram 1 sets this out in a more visual manner.

Alongside this team, we have a number of projects – pieces of work with independent objectives, methodologies and approaches. The projects may have some faith in action, campaigning and/or advocacy elements, and we hope they will connect to and draw from the expertise and capacity of the Campaigns, Advocacy and Faith in Action Team, but we don't necessarily expect to merge them into this team. These projects are currently the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), Peace Education, Peacebuilding in Britain and East Africa, Conciliation, and the Quaker Housing Trust secretary function.

An ongoing process

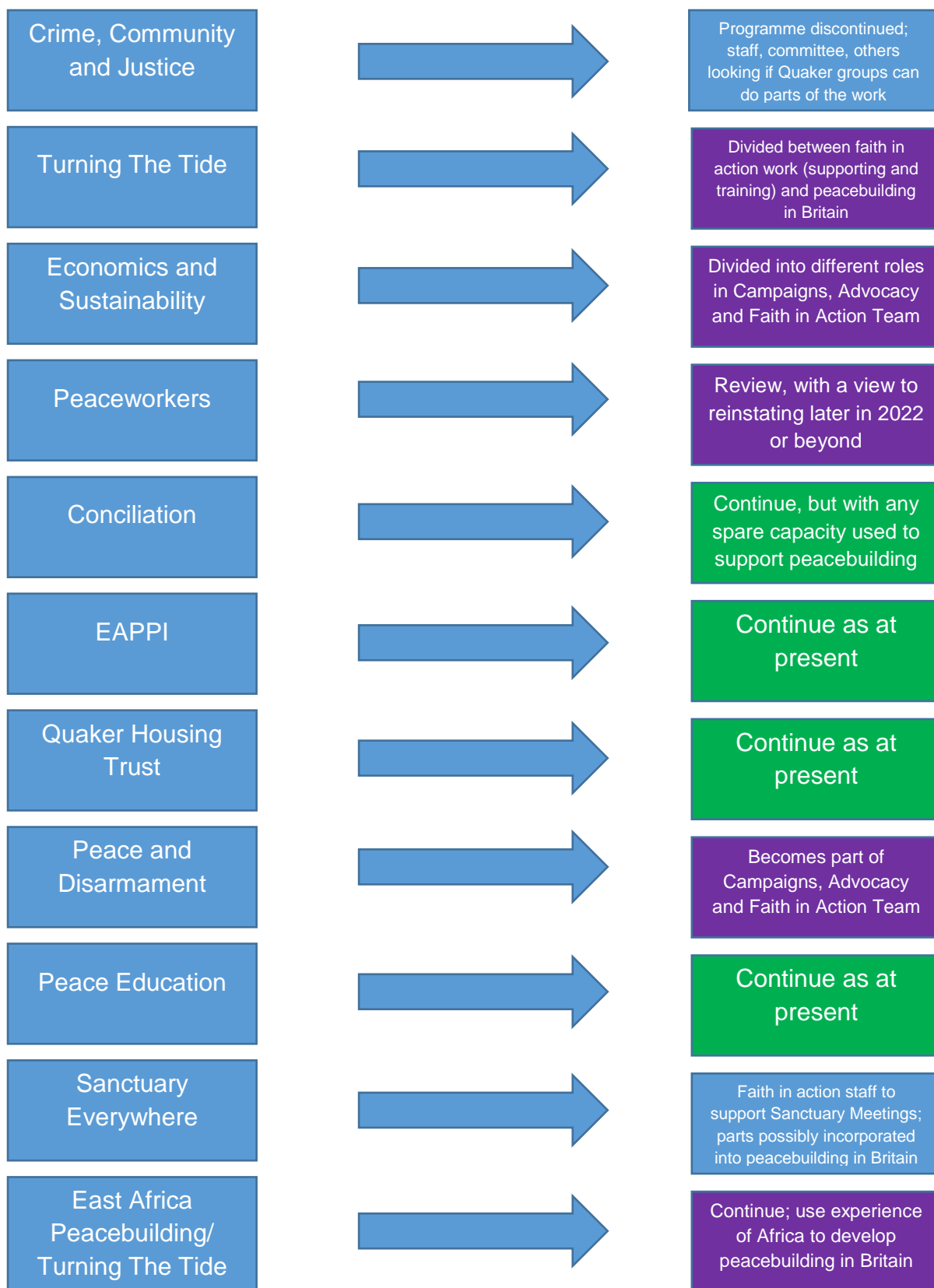
Staff moved into their new roles at the start of January, following a formal restructure at the end of 2021. No staff left BYM as part of the QPSW restructuring process.

Information about what has happened to each of the old areas of work is in Diagram 2. However, it takes time for people to get used to new roles and develop a new culture, and there are still parts of the work in transition, including the relevant parts of the BYM website. We hope that Friends will support the work, staff and committees as we continue to bed in the new structure and as our governance arrangements are considered by QPSW Central Committee

Diagram 1: How the new Campaigns, Advocacy and Faith in Action Team will work



Diagram 2: What's happened to each of the old areas of work?



Appointments

a) Central Nominations Committee

Brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

Book of Discipline Revision Committee

Renominate to serve from May (Yearly Meeting) 2022 to Yearly Meeting 2025

Anya Nanning Ramamurthy – Lancashire Central & North AM

Judith Thompson – Devon AM

Release from service with immediate effect

Christine Trevett – South Wales AM

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

Release from service with immediate effect

Jenny Brierley – York AM

Release from service at 9 April 2022

Nick Eyre – Lincolnshire AM

Church Government Advisory Group

Nominate to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2024

Martin Burnell – South East Scotland AM

Pendle Hill Friend in Residence

Nominate to serve as the Friend in Residence for 2022

Nim Njuguna – London West AM

Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations (QCCIR)

Release from service with immediate effect

Debbie Cates – Cambridgeshire AM

Quaker Housing Trust

Nominate to serve from Annual Retirement Meeting (ARM) 2022 until ARM 2025

Rici Marshall Cross – South East Scotland AM

Renominate to serve from ARM 2022 to ARM 2025

Mark Bitel – South East Scotland AM

For information the following appointments were made as between meeting decisions:

Church Government Advisory Group

Reappointed to serve from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2024

Peter Parr – Sussex East AM

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee

Appointed to serve from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2024

Ann Floyd – Chilterns AM

Mark Borthwick – South East Scotland AM

Sila Collins-Walden – North Scotland AM

Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until YM 2022

Gill Reid – West Scotland AM

b) Yearly Meeting Nominating Group

None at this time

c) Meeting for Sufferings Nominating Group

None at this time

Meeting for Sufferings Report on 2021

Meeting for Sufferings is tasked with several duties set out in *Quaker faith & practice* 7.02 and keeps these under review by listing in tabular form how our business fits with those responsibilities. This appears in the papers for each session of Meeting for Sufferings.

Unlike many other churches, it is not our customary practice to offer liturgically authorised prayers for the world, but the faithful attention of Friends to the details of social and ethical issues is surely an analogous practice. On that basis, Meeting for Sufferings engages in prayerful intercession for the world each time it meets. We have scheduled several items for discernment of how the Truth prospers in our meetings, reflecting on the insights afforded by the pandemic and the response to it.

One of the priorities for Meeting for Sufferings is to further the spiritual life of the yearly meeting and its prophetic role in society. One of our most interesting items in this regard was an analysis of trends in membership over the last several years as revealed in the annual tabular statements. Far from being a dry statistical exercise, this was a fascinating and inspiring glimpse into the life of our yearly meeting highlighting some of the difficulties we face but also revealing signs of creativity and growth.

Having previously set up a group to revise our book of discipline, we have continued to receive reports of its work giving us an opportunity to comment and clarify as necessary. This has been another inspiring item of business. We have also received our usual report from our Sustainability Monitoring Group on how, as a yearly meeting, we are meeting the commitment we made at our Canterbury Yearly Meeting Gathering in 2011 to build a low-carbon, sustainable community, measuring our practice in each of five areas of our corporate life identified by Meeting for Sufferings.

In 2019, we had received minutes from a few area meetings expressing a concern with the issue of assisted dying. In 2021, this issue having also come to parliament, we finally brought a long process of deliberation to an interim conclusion. We were unable to reach unity on a statement of principle, and the issue thus remains one of the many that are left to the consciences of individual Friends, but we were keen to emphasise that Friends should be supported however they were led and that we perhaps had a ministry to other faith groups in maintaining that it is not necessary to have a defined corporate position on every matter.

Another concern that had been referred to us was the use of the term “overseer”, which many Friends have found unhelpful. As Friends also grappled with the realisation of systemic racism within our own community, the echoes of slave-owning which some Friends hear in the word made the question particularly pointed. Meeting for Sufferings recognised that local Quaker practice has already begun to

experiment with alternatives. We have encouraged this and await a report on the terminology that has developed. This also relates to the ongoing work on “simpler meetings” and the question of whether our system of church officers has become overly burdensome.

As part of the governance process of the Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings is tasked with making a contribution to setting the priorities for the centrally managed work. In 2021, we received and commented on the strategies for the work of Quaker Life and Quaker Peace and Social Witness, Quaker World Relations Committee, and Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations.

We are also authorised to issue statements on behalf of the yearly meeting and in 2021, we supported the Recording Clerk’s Office in making a statement critical of the proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, drawing on our minutes. We also requested a statement addressing the issues of climate justice in response to the hosting of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) in Glasgow, which was signed off by the Clerks in accordance with our established process.

Meeting for Sufferings receives regular reports from the Yearly Meeting trustees, so that we are kept informed about developments in the centrally managed work. In 2021, we perhaps worked more closely than usual with the trustee body as we each addressed the demands of developing “a simple church supported by a simple charity”. We recognise that this may involve making hard choices and Meeting for Sufferings has struggled with some of this. Meeting for Sufferings is overseeing some of this work and will continue to receive reports as work continues. We hope that the fruit of this work might be ready to bring to Yearly Meeting in 2023.

Meeting for Sufferings must also review, evaluate, and adapt its own practices to ensure faithfulness in carrying out our work. In 2021, we have received a review of our own Arrangements Group, which, while emphasising the good work that it does, recommended some changes to appointments to improve continuity and encouraged a more pro-active handling of business.

The pandemic has had a major impact on the way in which we have conducted business as a yearly meeting, and Meeting for Sufferings has been explicitly charged with undertaking certain tasks on behalf of the Yearly Meeting.

In addition to these headline activities, Meeting for Sufferings has continued its faithful work of maintaining the court and prison register, appointing representatives to attend other yearly meetings, monitoring, and approving changes to the composition of our local Quaker communities, and other routine activities.

2021 has been a challenging year. Both procedurally as we continued to develop ways of working under the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, and theologically, as we faced up to the less edifying aspects of our community’s history and present practice. We have been reminded of our task to be faithful in heeding the

promptings of love and truth and not making idols of our established ways of doing things, however much we may cherish them.

Robert Card

Assistant Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

2022 Feb. 13



Minute received from Mid-Wales AM: responding to racism

Cyfarfod Rhanbarth Canolbarth Cymru – Mid-Wales Area Meeting, 21 November 2021

Minute 53/21 – Minute to meeting for Sufferings:

We agreed to forward to Meeting for Sufferings our thoughts following our Faith and Practice meeting in September on 'Responding to Racism', for their consideration and response.

Responding to Racism

We have returned to reflecting on racism on society and within ourselves as citizens, Quakers and as an Area Meeting. Racism is a sensitive challenging subject, multi-layered and complex. It is not just about colour of skin and other human attributes, but relates to culture, language, gender, such that the inter-relationships between all of these elements demands care in how we behave, speak, express ourselves and relate to others. We comprehend the challenge contained in Advices and Queries number 22, but we are aware that this may not be enough when we unwittingly, and carelessly behave in a racist manner. We are not after all, a representative group; we do not reflect the national demographic; thus we are not inclusive, but neither do we wish to exclude.

It is demanded of us that we should be aware of how others feel, especially minorities. Whether we can do so is a measure of our understanding and tolerance.

That is but one challenge that is before us, translating this into action is problematic – what then are we as Quakers called to do, perhaps what others are not doing? Whatever we do, we do stand as witnesses.

We understand that race is a social construct, which is used to divide, to demonise. It is about power. We then need to better understand this and appreciate how Quakers contributed to its manifestation as slave-owners and as colonisers, contributing to what was a system of "white" supremacy, whilst also portraying ourselves as innocents. We were never bystanders, and we should not be standing on the shoulder of others.

Each one of us will have had experiences of racism that highlight our failings, our misunderstanding, our misinterpretation, based on fears, insecurity, ignorance and on misguided ideals and our misapplied education.

Fear of the other is a powerful weapon – how do we interpret that in our own lives? How can we show respect, appreciation of the world of others be they gay, black, male, female or trans in a world where we are too easily polarised in our thinking, especially when so much around us is manipulated by the media and unfeeling, unthinking politicians?

We look at ourselves here in Britain, where Wales was the "first colony", but which then also contributed to the expansion of empire. We reflect on this as the oppressed who became the oppressor. Yet, the Welsh experience of racism

impacted on its language and culture, with attitudes that are still very much alive today. The racist demons are thus not too far away from us, within conflicts that are not easily grasped, because they are unconsciously deeply embedded and poorly understood.

Our YM has encouraged us to be more conspicuous on the issue of racism. Perhaps we could start by looking at our role within the slave trade, highlighting our failings whilst recognising that in the past we did much to abolish an evil trade, whose scars still run deep within the national psyche? Our YM could perhaps prepare a mobile exhibition on our failings and successes in that trade, and we would commend such an idea as one way forward.

Sue Shreeve and Veronica Grant
Co-Clerks

Note:

Quakers in Britain have declared our commitment to declare our commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist faith community – see minute 17 (and also minutes 23, 24, 35 and 46) of the [2021 Yearly Meeting minutes](#). Yearly Meeting 2022 will continue this work.

Meeting for Sufferings has also spent time considering racism, and Arrangements Group is also aware that there is work on this issue going on in several Area Meetings.

MfS has heard previously that BYM Trustees are considering ways of exploring and understanding Quakers' relationship to the slave trade. Staff have been asked to prepare proposals, but the work has been delayed by limited capacity. Mid-Wales' suggestions can be shared with and considered by staff and Trustees.

Arrangements Group is not expecting to spend time on this minute but hope it will encourage Friends around Britain in their consideration.

Church Government Advisory Group Suggested changes to *Quaker faith & practice*

Summary

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to approve changes to chapter 16 of *Quaker faith & practice*, as detailed in appendix 1 of this paper.

Alternatively, it may choose to offer guidance to Church Government Advisory Group about more work it considers is needed on the proposed changes

Introduction

You may wonder why we need to change the text of chapter 16 as it was extensively revised at Yearly Meeting 2015. The reason is that there have been procedural changes to the registration of marriage in England and Wales. Our current text is now out of date and may mislead those who refer to the text for guidance on our Quaker marriage procedures.

Details of the need to change

In England and Wales, the civil registration of a Quaker marriage is no longer a responsibility of the registering officer. It is now undertaken by local government staff, once the Quaker registering officer has indicated, by signing a newly introduced document, the marriage schedule, that the marriage may be registered as having taken place according to our Quaker procedures. The effect is that registering officers no longer receive a certificate permitting the marriage to take place, complete the civil marriage register or issue civil marriage certificates either at the time of the marriage, or later. Our registering officers still authorise the registration of the marriage so no change of nomenclature is needed.

These changes simplify the role of our registering officers considerably, but it means that the text of chapter 16 is now out of date and a source of confusion. It feels appropriate to suggest that changes to the text are made, so that our procedures are seen to be up-to-date. These changes can be considered minor changes, as the new procedures have already been introduced by the GRO (General Register Office).

The textual changes required are mainly replacing the term certificate with schedule. As a marriage schedule is already used in Scotland, there are places where the text can be simplified. In some sections there are also some consequent changes.

Following consultation with the Recording Clerk, Church Government Advisory Group also concluded that it would be appropriate as far as possible to remove pronouns and replace them with a gender neutral alternative.

No changes to section numbers are proposed. There are some references to weddings, marriages and marriage registration in other chapters. None of these appear to require text changes. Meeting for Sufferings may wish to note that area meetings still need to keep old marriage registers in their custody, which is mentioned in 4.40c, and to keep records of all marriages according to our usage. There are no changes to the role of registering officers in Scotland.

These proposed changes need to be seen in the context of the complete chapter. The text in any individual section might appear incomplete, but when the chapter is looked at as a whole the information will be complete.

Questions and comments

Details of the proposed changes

The proposed changes are detailed in the appendix to this paper. The left hand column shows the current text, with both additions and deletions marked. The right hand column gives a brief explanation of the changes suggested. If you have any questions or comments on the proposed changes, please contact the Church Government Adviser, Michael Booth michaelsb@quaker.org.uk

Two further documents have been prepared which may be of interest.

- Document 1: This contains the existing and proposed text side by side.
- Document 2: This contains side-by-side the existing text, changes highlighted, and proposed text.

These are obtainable on request from Michael Booth michaelsb@quaker.org.uk

Finn Pollard
Convener, Church Government Advisory Committee
February 2022

Appendix

Proposed changes with explanation in right hand column. New text is underlined text to be deleted is ~~crossed through~~.

Chapter 16 Quaker marriage procedure		
	Changes highlighted	change
16.19d	d. in England and Wales: give notice of intention as required by civil law to the appropriate registrar and obtain the certificates <u>schedule (16.33–16.36)</u> ;	Delete England and Wales, as this applies in Scotland too. Certificates changed to schedule.
16.20h	The registering officer must: h. immediately after the meeting for worship in England and Wales, arrange for the registration of the marriage, and in Scotland the appropriate signing of the schedule (16.61);	In h. simplify the wording as the Scottish procedure now also applies to England and Wales.
16.22	Each area meeting shall appoint a suitable Friend as registering officer for the purpose of these regulations, and, in England and Wales but not in Scotland, to register all marriages that may be solemnised according to the usage of the Society within the area meeting. <u>to ensure that any marriage held is in accordance with Quaker practice and civil procedures.</u> Area meetings are advised to review their appointments regularly, normally on a triennial basis. The registering officer shall register only such marriages as are solemnised within the limits of the area meeting by which he or she is appointed. On every fresh appointment of a registering officer the area meeting making the appointment shall report to the Recording Clerk without delay, by minute signed by the clerk, the name and address of the newly appointed registering officer. The Recording Clerk is required to certify all such appointments in England and Wales to the Registrar General and, for such appointments in Scotland, to the Registrar General for Scotland.	Remove references to registering the marriage. Confirm that registering officers have responsibilities for both Quaker and civil processes.

<p>16.23</p>	<p>The registering officer, acting on behalf of the area meeting, is responsible for the acceptance of an application for marriage according to Friends' usage. <u>The registering officer</u> He or she is also responsible for giving the couple the necessary advice and assistance in relation to the procedure under these regulations, for seeing that all the necessary steps preceding the marriage are completed, <u>and the civil paperwork is completed directly afterwards.</u> , in England and Wales but not in Scotland, for the registration of marriages. The registering officer should feel free to consult the area meeting clerk or some other knowledgeable Friend to check that the appropriate forms have been properly completed. Area meetings may also appoint from time to time two or three Friends whom the registering officer can consult in cases where he or she feels this necessary or desirable.</p> <p>All powers and duties given to the clerk of an area meeting or local meeting shall, in the case of her or his absence or incapacity, be exercised by the assistant or acting clerk of the same meeting.</p>	<p>Remove references to Scotland, England and Wales, but make clear the civil responsibilities of the registering officer.</p> <p>Change wording slightly to remove "he or she" in two places.</p>
<p>16.24</p>	<p><u>The registering officer is responsible for providing to</u> At the beginning of each year the forms for the purpose supplied by the Recording Clerk <u>details of</u> should be returned by the registering officer listing all marriages that <u>take place</u> have been solemnised during the previous year under their auspices according to the usage of the Society, or, if applicable, stating none.</p>	<p>The rewording reflects that reporting can take place during the year on electronic forms.</p>
<p>16.33a</p>	<p><i>a. Marriages in England and Wales</i></p> <p>Each of the couple intending to marry must give notice of the intended marriage, in person, to the superintendent registrar of the district in which he or she resides, and has resided for the period required by law, accompanied by the documentary evidence required. Marriages may take place in areas other than those in which the certificates were issued. A statutory fee is payable by</p>	<p>Change reference to certificate to marriage schedule and simplify the rest of the paragraph.</p> <p>Sections 16.33b and c are unchanged.</p>

	<p>each person at the time of giving notice. After the expiration of the period required by law the superintendent registrar will <u>issue a marriage schedule. The schedule is valid for a fixed period.</u> , on application, issue a certificate stating that the notice required by law has been duly complied with. The superintendent registrar's certificate is valid for twelve months after the entry in the marriage notice book, after which it expires. After expiry, the application must start afresh.</p> <p>If one of the couple resides outside England and Wales, the local superintendent registrar should be consulted for the procedures to be followed; these may take much longer.</p> <p>If either of the couple is not in membership, a certificate (form D) (see 16.29) in respect of each one must be produced at the time when such notice is given.</p>	
<p>16.34</p>	<p>The civil certificates or marriage schedules should be delivered to the registering officer as soon as possible after <u>it is</u> they are obtained. For marriages in Scotland, a marriage schedule is obtained from the registrar for the district in which the marriage is to take place, and this should be sent to the registering officer as soon as possible after it has been obtained.</p> <p>In no case can a marriage be solemnised without the production of the correct documents.</p> <p>In any case where one, or both, of the couple is resident outside Great Britain, or is a foreign citizen, there may be additional civil formalities which have to be completed.</p>	<p>Marriage schedules are now used in England and Wales as well as Scotland.</p> <p>The use of the term Great Britain in the final sentence is intentional and accurate.</p>
<p>16.35</p>	<p>Registering officers are strongly advised to have in their possession not less than twenty-four hours before the ceremony the necessary documentation. This includes the <u>marriage schedule.</u> certificates of the appropriate superintendent registrar(s) in</p>	<p>This has been simplified to just refer to marriage schedules.</p>

	England or Wales, or the appropriate schedule issued by the district registrar in Scotland.	
16.36a	<p><i>a. Marriages in England and Wales</i></p> <p>There are provisions for <u>a marriage schedule</u> certificates to be issued under the authority of the Registrar General in a period shorter than usual under certain exceptional circumstances. Couples should contact their superintendent registrar for further advice in this respect.</p>	Change certificate to marriage schedule in part a. There are no changes in part b.
16.41	<p>On receipt of a request for a marriage (form F) from the registering officer, the clerk of the area or local meeting for church affairs (as the case may be) should bring before it the request for the appointment of a meeting for worship (16.42–16.43). The meeting shall decide whether a meeting for worship (which must be open to the public) may be appointed at the time and place desired by the couple, or at any other time and place which may be mutually convenient, subject to compliance with the law (16.46). If the civil certificates or schedule (16.34–16.35) have <u>has</u> not been received, the meeting for worship may be appointed subject to the satisfactory completion of these formalities. The registering officer shall inform the couple of the decision of the meeting.</p>	Text simplified as references to civil certificates have been removed.
16.49	<p>Elders have responsibility for the conduct of the meeting for worship (12.12.f). It is now common practice to arrange for the registering officer or another Friend to give a short explanation of the proceedings at the outset of the meeting for worship for marriage.</p> <p>During the course of the meeting the couple will exchange declarations of marriage using the prescribed words. The declaration must be made in English (16.52) except that in places where the Welsh tongue is used a Welsh form of the declaration may be used (16.53). Wedding rings play no formal part in Quaker marriages, but many couples like to</p>	Simplification is possible as the signing of a marriage schedule now takes place in England and Wales as well as in Scotland.

	<p>give each other rings after they have made their declarations. Potentially disturbing photography or electronic recording is not suitable during the meeting for worship. At an appropriate stage during the meeting a Quaker certificate confirming the declarations is signed by the couple and two or more witnesses, and is then read aloud by the registering officer, or other suitable Friend. After the meeting it is customary for all present when the declarations were made to sign this certificate. For <u>all</u> couples in England and Wales, the official registration of marriage, or in Scotland the signing of the marriage schedule <u>must</u>, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the meeting.</p>	
<p>16.51</p>	<p>Should the registering officer be prevented through illness or absence from home or any other cause from issuing or signing the Quaker marriage forms (see 16.25), <u>the registering officer</u> he or she (or failing this the clerk of the area meeting) shall be at liberty to appoint any suitable Friend to act for him or her in these respects. It must be emphasised that this should not become a normal manner of proceeding.</p> <p>If, in England and Wales, the registering officer should be prevented from being present at the solemnisation of the marriage, care shall be taken that the <u>schedule be</u> entries be, notwithstanding, duly made and signed by the couple and witnesses. The registering officer, having been satisfied of the regularity of the proceedings, shall afterwards <u>complete the schedule.</u> add her or his signature. No person <u>one else</u>, not even a deputy or assistant registering officer, may sign the register in her or his place <u>complete the schedule.</u></p>	<p>Clarification of what to do in England and Wales if the registering officer is not present at the marriage, including how to complete the marriage schedule (previously the marriage register).</p> <p>Slight rewording to remove “he or she”</p>
<p>16.56</p>	<p>The marriage of a couple is a legal contract from the moment both have made their declarations, even though the official registration of the marriage takes place later</p>	<p>Simplification of the text is possible as registration is completed by registration</p>

	(in different ways in England and Wales and in Scotland).	service staff in England, Scotland and Wales.
16.61	<p>a) <u>Marriages in England and Wales</u></p> <p><u>The Registering Officer shall deliver the properly completed marriage schedule to the Superintendent Registrar to be registered.</u></p> <p>In England and Wales, immediately after the conclusion of the meeting, the marriage shall be registered by the registering officer, as described in the <i>Handbook for registering officers</i>. If, in England or Wales, the registering officer should be prevented from being present at the solemnisation of the marriage see 16.51 for the action to be followed.</p> <p>b) <u>Marriages in Scotland</u></p> <p>In Scotland, a <u>The</u> couple shall deliver the properly signed marriage schedule to the district registrar to be registered.</p>	<p>Change to sections a and b to reflect the formatting of 16.33 and 16.36.</p> <p>Simplification of wording also possible.</p> <p>The major difference is who is responsible for returning the marriage schedule.</p>
16.62	<p><u>A civil marriage certificate cannot be issued until the marriage schedule has been returned and the marriage duly registered. Civil marriage certificates can be obtained for a fee from the relevant Registrar, or online.</u></p> <p>For marriages in England and Wales, a registering officer shall, if required, issue a certificate, which is the certified copy of any entry in any of the marriage registers of the area meeting by which he or she is appointed. For this a fee may be payable. The procedures for doing so are given in the <i>Handbook for registering officers</i>. In Scotland, application should be made to the district registrar for extracts of the marriage register.</p> <p>The General Register Office holds a central copy of all registrations of marriage or civil partnership for England and Wales over six months old, and certificates may be ordered</p>	<p>Registering officers no longer issue the civil marriage certificates, so this section can be simplified.</p>

	<p>online. Advice on obtaining extracts of marriage or civil partnership registers in Scotland can be found on the website of the National Records of Scotland.</p> <p><i>All these are the official certificates of marriage or civil partnership, necessary for official purposes.</i></p> <p><i>It is important to distinguish between the traditional Quaker certificate of marriage, which has no legal standing, and the official certificate of marriage, which is a certified copy of an entry in the appropriate registers.</i></p>	
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Letter of Greeting to Yearly Meetings in Europe

Britain Yearly Meeting tries to keep in touch with Friends in other parts of Europe. One way we do this is to send a letter of greeting to each of the other yearly meetings when they gather. The letter of greeting is drafted by Quaker World Relations Committee, although it is signed by the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings.

Quaker World Relations Committee has agreed the draft letter of greeting which is included in this paper.

Meeting for Sufferings is invited to accept the draft letter of greeting, noting that the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings is able to make any desirable adjustments to the letter.

Tracey Martin, Clerk
Michael S Booth, Secretary

Quaker World Relations Committee

Draft Letter of Greeting to Ireland Yearly Meeting

Greetings Friends

On behalf of Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting I write to greet you for the New Year, as you gather for your own yearly meeting.

We do not know what the coming year will bring except that it will include great uncertainty here, as in all other Yearly Meetings. Our Epistle from the Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021 offered us challenges; questions we might ask ourselves as individuals and as Local and Area Meetings. We were reminded that “We can meet one another on kinder ground, in our personal relationships, our meetings and wider communities and on social media... A commitment to truth requires us to be open to new experiences with a readiness to learn.”

In the autumn of 2021 many Friends from many Yearly Meetings participated in Cop 26 activities in Glasgow and in their local communities. Amongst other activities, Quakers played a role in supporting the call for the countries which had caused most harm to the climate to offer greater financial support to those countries which had and continue to suffer greatest harm. How will we encourage all the work on faith based climate justice to continue?

It's not possible to know all that the coming year will require of us but we face it with hearts full of love for humanity and optimism and faith that ways to overcome our challenges together, will become clear to us.

We hope to see living in uncertain times as an opportunity to look both inward and outward, to learn more, to strengthen our communities within Britain and within Quaker communities around the world. As our Epistle advises “We have pledged ourselves to continue to be a gentle angry people who dare to live for truth and justice in such a time of crisis.”

We hope that your yearly meeting will be a time of spiritual refreshment and renewal and that you will face your challenges with faith that ways to overcome them together will become clear.

Margaret Bryan
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

Use of the term 'overseer'

Introduction

In December 2019 Meeting for Sufferings received a minute from Central Yorkshire Area Meeting regarding the use of the term 'overseer' to describe those in our meetings who hold responsibilities for oversight (paper MfS 2019 12 09).

At that time, Meeting for Sufferings referred the matter to Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC). QLCC carried out a wide-ranging consultation and reported back to Meeting for Sufferings by minute in April 2021:

QLCC 21.06 Use of the terms 'overseer' and 'elder'

Meeting for Sufferings received a minute asking for discussion on changing the term 'overseer'. Meeting for Sufferings asked QLCC to look at the issue (minute MfS 19-12-14) and we were asked by Book of Discipline Revision Group to also consider whether the term 'elder' should be changed. We asked for a wider consultation (QLCC 20.44) and staff used Quake! to elicit input on the matter from Friends. We receive papers QLCC 2021 01 06 i-iii, on the input we have received from meetings and individuals. We thank those Quakers and meetings who have written on this.

The terms 'overseer' and 'elder' were adopted by Quakers because they were used by the early church, but Quakers have moved away from these terms in many parts of the world. There is general support for a change to the term 'overseer', partly because of the historical connotations dealing with hierarchy and oppression. This is the time for a change and we believe that meetings should be encouraged to use different terms as soon as possible. Meetings should be free to experiment with roles to enable the community to be loving, supportive, inclusive and all-age. From the responses the words 'pastoral care group' or similar were common, but in North America the term 'committee on ministry and counsel' is widely used. Another suggested from the survey is 'Quaker community support'. The terminology is not the most important thing.

We have not yet discussed the use of the term 'elder'. However, a number of meetings have merged the functions of eldership and oversight, which may address the terminology issue.

In response Meeting for Sufferings minuted (MfS/21/04/12 (part)):

Their [QLCC's] minute indicates that there is general support for a change to the term, partly because of the historical connotations dealing with hierarchy and oppression.

We unite with their discernment that this is the time for a change and we encourage meetings to continue experimenting with the structure of the roles and the terminology used until the end of 2022, when we look forward to hearing the results.

Request to Area Meetings

Meetings have been encouraged to experiment with the structure and terminology of the role until the end of 2022 and report back to Meeting for Sufferings. Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group plans to include time on a future agenda to consider this further (towards the end of this year or early next year) and asks Area Meetings to report.

Several Area Meetings have already sent minutes (although these were all received before the decision taken in April 2021 to encourage meetings to experiment and so these Area Meetings may wish to send a further minute):

Minutes received from:

- Central Yorkshire AM (original minute) (September 2019)
- York AM (January 2020)
- Hardshaw and Mann AM (September 2020)
- Mid Thames AM (October 2020)