

# Calling letter



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

16 February 2024

## To members of Meeting for Sufferings

I look forward to seeing you again on 2nd March at our next session of Meeting for Sufferings.

In addition to our usual routine business, we expect to receive a recommendation from Church Government Advisory Group on use of the term 'overseer'. We will also receive a draft letter of greeting to other European Yearly Meetings and a draft annual report from Meeting for Sufferings to Yearly Meeting. (If you have suggestions on either of these drafts, please email them to clerks ahead of the meeting at [sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk).)

We then expect to receive a report from the Yearly Meeting trustees on work they have been doing on our behalf and a report from Central Nominations Committee outlining the challenges they are currently facing in making nominations.

We expect to devote the afternoon to the report from the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM). We appointed this group in December 2019 and they now bring us their recommendations following long consideration and significant consultation throughout the yearly meeting. They have done their work and it is now for us to bring the matter back to Yearly Meeting.

I think we heard from Yearly Meeting in session that change is necessary and at our October meeting last year we united with that impulse even if, in December, we were unsure that the recommendations as they then stood would be appropriate.

We will have an opportunity at our Preparation Meeting on 27th February to look at the proposals in some detail and to ask questions of the Group before our discernment in formal session.

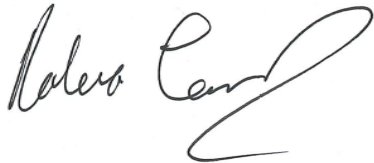
I am very aware that this past year has presented us with many reminders of the urgent, and deeply challenging, issues that the world faces and I know many Friends feel that time spent on reviewing our structures is a diversion. Some Friends are

concerned that we may lose our fundamental reliance on the leadings of the Spirit if we change tried practices.

We are not looking to create utopia, but to ensure that the Society can continue to practice discernment into the future.

May we live up to the Light that we have, and hope that more may be granted to us.

In Truth,



Robert Card  
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

### **Papers enclosed with this mailing**

Agenda

Minutes from MfS Arrangements Group

**MfS 2024 03 06** Quaker Recognised Bodies

**MfS 2024 03 07** Prison and Court Register

**MfS 2024 03 08** Church Government Advisory Group's report on changes to *Quaker faith & practice*

**MfS 2024 03 09** Letter of Greeting to other European Yearly Meetings

**MfS 2024 03 10** Meeting for Sufferings 2023 report to Yearly Meeting

**MfS 2024 03 11** Minutes and report from BYM Trustees

**MfS 2024 03 13** Introduction from the Group to review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)

**MfS 2024 03 14** GRYYM report on planning and delivery

**MfS 2024 03 15** GRYYM report on the review of Meeting for Sufferings

**MfS 2024 03 16** Area meeting minutes on the review of Meeting for Sufferings

### **A reminder of how you can prepare for the meeting**

- 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](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk)), before the meeting to be received by morning of **29 February**.



Yearly Meeting of the  
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## Agenda

### Meeting for Sufferings – 2 March 2024

In-person at Friends House and by video conference,  
open for arrivals from 9.30am for 10am start

	Item	Paper
<b>10am</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	
<b>1</b>	Opening worship	
<b>2</b>	Welcome and introductions	
<b>3</b>	<b>Agenda</b> Adoption and acceptance of the agenda	
<b>4–7</b>	<b>Items to be taken on draft minute:</b> Membership (To follow) <b>(04)</b> Appointments (To follow) <b>(05)</b> Quaker recognised bodies <b>(06)</b> Prison and Court Register <b>(07)</b>	<b>MfS 2024 03 04–07</b> For decision
<b>8</b>	<b>Quaker faith &amp; practice</b> To receive a recommendation from Church Government Advisory Group on the term 'overseer'	<b>MfS 2024 03 08</b> For decision
<b>9</b>	<b>Letter of Greeting to other European Yearly Meetings</b> To receive a draft letter	<b>MfS 2024 03 09</b> For decision
<b>10</b>	<b>Meeting for Sufferings report to Yearly Meeting</b> To receive a draft annual report	<b>MfS 2024 03 10</b> For decision
	<b>Shuffle break</b>	
<b>11</b>	<b>Report from BYM Trustees</b> To receive recent minutes and hear from the Clerk of Trustees and Yearly Meeting Treasurer	<b>MfS 2024 03 11</b> For information

<b>12</b>	<b>Central Nominations Committee</b> To hear from Central Nominations Committee on challenges with nominations	Oral report For information
<b>12.30am</b>	<b>End of Session 1</b>	

**12:30am Lunch break**

	Item	Paper
<b>1.45pm</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	
<b>13</b>	<b>The Group to review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)</b>	<b>MfS 2024 03 13</b> For information
<b>14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Report 1: Planning and delivery</b> To receive a report on planning and delivery of Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings</li> </ul>	<b>MfS 2024 03 14</b> For decision
<b>15</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Report 2: Review of Meeting for Sufferings</b> To receive a report on the review of Meeting for Sufferings</li> </ul>	<b>MfS 2024 03 15</b> For decision
<b>16</b>	<b>Area Meeting minutes on Review of Meeting for Sufferings</b> To receive minutes from Chilterns and Central England area meetings	<b>MfS 2024 03 16</b> For consideration
	<b>Shuffle break</b>	
	<b>Review of Meeting for Sufferings</b> (continued)	
<b>17</b>	<b>Closing worship</b>	
<b>4pm</b>	<b>End of Meeting</b>	



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At a meeting of

## **Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group**

Held online 13 December 2023

### **Minutes**

**Present:** Robert Card, Ivan Hutnik, Caroline Kibblewhite, Jean Scott Barr

**In attendance:** Elizabeth Allen (incoming Assistant Clerk of MfS and Clerk of MfS Arrangements Group from January), Siobhán Haire, Neil Jarvis

#### **1. Meetings attended by the Clerks and others**

Robert and Caroline attended a meeting of the Group to Review Central Structures on Monday evening this week. The review of structures and future plans are underway and ongoing.

#### **2. Review of Meeting for Sufferings in December**

We have reviewed the minutes from Meeting for Sufferings in December. We have assigned minute 9 as a gold minute. We note we need to return to the matters of the marriage declaration, later in 2024. The review of Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, and appointment of non-members to roles in local and area meetings and those governed by legislation will be discussed further. We ask staff to add these matters to our Forward Plan.

We have received the report from the Support Group.

#### **3. Dates in 2024**

##### **a) Arrangements Group meetings**

We agree to continue the meeting pattern for the Arrangements Group for the time being but note we may need to review these when new members join. The dates for 2024 are (all to be held online and starting at 7pm):

- 30 January
- 13 March
- 24 April
- 12 June

- 4 September
- 16 October
- 6 November
- 18 December

#### **b) Meeting for Sufferings Preparation sessions**

We agree to the dates of the optional online preparatory sessions ahead of Meeting for Sufferings on:

- Tuesday 27 February (ahead of MfS on 2 March)
- Wednesday 29 May (ahead of MfS on 1 June)
- Monday 1 October (ahead of MfS on 5 October)
- Tuesday 3 December (ahead of MfS on 7 December)

We ask staff to update the website.

#### **4. Residential meetings in 2025 and 2026**

We have heard an update on preparations for finding a venue for our residential meetings in the next triennium. Our view is that the opportunity to meet together and have space and time to discuss, assists the important discernment.

We hope that our meeting in 2025 will be held in either Scotland or Wales and ask staff to continue finding potential venues and make a provisional booking if possible. We will return to this at a meeting in early 2024 to confirm a choice.

#### **5. Any other matters**

There being no further business to conduct, we part planning to meet again on 30 January to plan Meeting for Sufferings on 2 March 2024.

Signed in and on behalf of the meeting,

Caroline Kibblewhite, Clerk



Yearly Meeting of the  
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At a meeting of

## **Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group**

Held online 30 January 2024

### **Minutes**

**Present:** Elizabeth Allen, Robert Card, Ivan Hutnik

**Prevented:** Jean Scott Barr

**In attendance:** Siobhán Haire, Neil Jarvis

We began our meeting with a period of worship.

#### **1. Meetings attended by clerks and others**

Robert and Elizabeth attended the joint meeting of the Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS) and the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM) held on 12 January, in Friends House.

#### **2. Forward plan**

We have considered our forward agenda, which informs our planning. It has been updated and we have flagged up items we may wish to return to.

We have added Safeguarding and Israel and Palestine to our list for June.

We will invite Quaker Housing Trust and Quaker Council for European Affairs to report in 2024.

With a general election likely in 2024, we hope our public affairs team will report to MfS on the work they are doing to help Friends engage with the election.

#### **3. Meeting for Sufferings in March**

We have considered potential business for Meeting for Sufferings in March.

We have noted the reports we expect to receive, and have heard that GRYYM will present its final report to MfS for discernment. It is important that sufficient time is allowed for Friends to consider and discuss GRYYM's recommendations.

We have noted receipt of the following minutes:

- A. Leeds AM on the Labour Party's abolition of the role of Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament. We ask staff to prepare a paper for Arrangements Group to help us discern how we might best action this minute.
- B. Kendal and Sedbergh AM on ecocide. We ask staff to respond to this minute, informing Kendal and Sedbergh AM that an ecocide network has been set up and is supported by a member of staff.
- C. & D. Central England AM on Meeting for Sufferings Report and Chilterns AM on Meeting for Sufferings. The matters raised in these minutes will be before MfS in March and we will circulate the AM minutes with the papers for this meeting.

The online preparation session is on 27th February. It will focus on the GRYYM report.

We ask the clerks to finalise the agenda in consultation with staff.

#### **4. Residential meeting in 2025**

We have discussed the venue for the next residential meeting of Meeting for Sufferings to be held 28 February to 2 March 2025 in Cardiff, Wales.

We ask staff to explore the two venue options, decide which is best, and make a booking.

#### **5. Any other matters**

##### Yearly Meeting Fringe Sessions

As in past years we welcome the opportunity to have a shared MfS and BYM Trustee session.

##### MfS Standing Nominations Group

This group is inactive, but we will wait until the new MfS triennium to seek new members.

There being no further business to conduct, we part planning to meet again on 13 March to review Meeting for Sufferings in March.

Signed in and on behalf of the meeting,

Elizabeth Allen, 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](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk).

*Minutes received since last Meeting for Sufferings*

Body sending minute	Minute	Initial steps and decisions	Subsequent steps (if any)	Status
Leeds AM	2023/107 [Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament]	<b>16/11/23 Minute received</b>  <b>30/1/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Agreed to ask advice from BYM public affairs and advocacy team		Seeking advice to make final decision
Kendal and Sedbergh AM	23.11.8 Ecocide	<b>23/11/23 Minute received</b>  <b>30/1/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Ecocide was considered at MfS in October 2023. MfS agreed to uphold AMs and Friends acting locally. Agreed to link this AM with Ecocide network of interested AMs		Complete
Central England AM	2023.095 Meeting for Sufferings report [review of YM and MfS]	<b>26/01/24 Minute received</b>  <b>30/1/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Agreed to take at next MfS		At Meeting for Sufferings in March 2024
Chilterns AM	24.01.10 Proposed changes to MfS	<b>29/01/24 Minute received</b>  <b>30/1/24 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Agreed to take at next MfS		At Meeting for Sufferings in March 2024

Updates to previously received minutes:

Body sending minute	Minute	Initial steps and decisions	Subsequent steps (if any)	Status
West Weald AM	21/23 Minute to MfS [Trustees and Membership]	<p><b>15/11/21 Minute received</b></p> <p><b>1/2/22 Tabled at MfSAG</b> MfSAG asked staff to correspond with Area Meeting on background and rational for current practice</p>	<p><b>31/5/22</b> This matter relates to the minute received from Mid-Somerset. Correspondence is ongoing.</p> <p><b>30/8/22</b> MfSAG reconsidered and asked staff to contact the AM to offer a visit and/or meeting to discuss this further</p> <p><b>12/10/22</b> – Siobhan emailed West Weald (generic email address) to offer a call or visit.</p> <p><b>7/2/23</b> Some correspondence with West Weald regarding approaches to trustees, Quaker Life aware.</p> <p><b>12/23</b> MfS agreed to ask CGAG to consider membership and trustee roles for future discernment</p>	With Church Government Advisory Group and returning to MfS in due course
Mid Somerset AM	02.05.22 Area Meeting Trustees	<p><b>15/5/22 Minute received</b></p> <p><b>31/5/22 Tabled at MfSAG</b> MfSAG noted there is ongoing correspondence with AM</p>	<p><b>30/8/22</b> MfSAG reconsidered and asked staff to contact the AM to offer a visit and/or meeting to discuss this further</p> <p><b>12/10/22</b> – Siobhan emailed Mid Somerset to offer a call or visit.</p> <p><b>7/2/23</b> Some correspondence with MSAM regarding</p>	With Church Government Advisory Group and returning to MfS in due course

Body sending minute	Minute	Initial steps and decisions	Subsequent steps (if any)	Status
			approaches to trustee appointments, Quaker Life aware. <b>12/23</b> MfS agreed to ask CGAG to consider membership and trustee roles for future discernment	
Book of Discipline Revision Committee	BCRC 23-7-9 Sharing text [Marriage declaration]	<b>17/7/23 Minute received</b>  <b>6/9/23 Tabled at MfSAG</b> Agreed to bring to MfS – probably in December as October agenda full	<b>12/23 MfS</b> Discernment on declaration and request to AMs to return minutes for final decision in 2024	Returning to MfS in October 2024

## **Membership of Meeting for Sufferings**

Since our last meeting we have received the following nominations and requests for release for Meeting for Sufferings until the rise of Yearly Meeting 2024:

### **Release requests received:**

Danny Chesterman – East Kent AM representative  
Simon Colbeck – Luton & Leighton AM alternate  
Beverley Eastwood – Hampshire & Islands AM alternate  
Mark Frankel – Kingston & Wandsworth AM alternate  
Caroline Howden – East Kent AM alternate  
Michael Hutchinson – West Scotland AM representative  
Steven Johnson – Manchester & Warrington AM alternate  
David Jones – Mid-Wales AM representative  
Elaine Millar – West Scotland AM alternate  
Lynne Richardson – Banbury & Evesham AM representative  
Carol Satterthwaite – Mid-Wales AM alternate  
Pip Swancott – Pendle Hill AM representative  
Susie Tombs – Banbury & Evesham AM alternate

### **Nominated:**

Kim Boyd – Kingston & Wandsworth AM alternate  
George Coyne – East Kent AM alternate  
Damian Entwistle – Pendle Hill AM representative  
David Heathfield – Hampshire & Islands AM alternate  
Caroline Howden – East Kent AM representative  
Michael Hutchinson – West Scotland AM alternate  
Elaine Millar – West Scotland AM representative  
Carol Satterthwaite – Mid-Wales AM representative  
Anne Seilly – Luton & Leighton AM alternate  
Chris Tombs – Banbury & Evesham AM representative  
Julie Tucker – Banbury & Evesham AM alternate

### **Visitors invited to represent area meetings/committees in the absence of the appointed representative or alternate:**

David Lewis – Leicester AM

### **Apologies:**

East Kent AM, West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

### **Other visitors:**

Michael Booth – BYM staff, Church Government Adviser  
Sarah Donaldson – BYM staff, Quaker Church Affairs consultant

Yvonne Estop – Yearly Meeting Agenda committee

Cato Pedder – BYM staff, Media Officer

Lesley Richards – Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)

Carolyn Sansom – GRYYM

Chris Skidmore – GRYYM

## **Appointments**

In advance of the meeting, Sufferings representatives and alternates are welcome to contact Neil Jarvis, with any comments about the nominated names: [sufferings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:sufferings@quaker.org.uk).

### **a) Central Nominations Committee**

Central Nominations Committee brings forward the following names for service or release as indicated:

#### **Book of Discipline Revision Committee**

To serve with immediate effect until the work is complete, nominate:  
Antonia Swinson, Kingston & Wandsworth AM

#### **Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees**

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2026, nominate:  
Elizabeth Redfern, Leicester AM

#### **Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group**

To serve with immediate effect for a triennium, nominate:  
Lex Ryder, North Scotland AM  
Mary Savage, Cumberland AM

#### **Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee**

To serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2026, nominate:  
Lesley Grahame, Norfolk & Waveney AM

#### **Representatives to other European Yearly Meetings**

To serve as the BYM representative to Finland Yearly Meeting 2024, renominate:  
Mary Woodward, South East Scotland AM

To serve as the BYM representative to Sweden Yearly Meeting 2024, renominate:  
John Phillips, South East Scotland AM

To serve as the BYM representative to Norway Yearly Meeting 2024, nominate:  
Sigurd Reimers, West Somerset AM

To serve as the BYM representative to Ireland Yearly Meeting 2024, nominate:  
Gordon Benson, Pendle Hill AM  
Kate Arnot, South East Scotland AM, General Meeting for Scotland nominee

**For information the following between-meeting appointments were discerned:**

#### **Book of Discipline Revision Committee**

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until the work is complete:

Michael Long, Northumbria AM  
Lucy Faulkner-Gawlinski, Norfolk & Waveney AM  
Marcie Winstanley, Northumbria AM (reappointment)  
Pearl Johns, Bristol AM (reappointment to 31 December 2026)

**Pendle Hill Friend in Residence**

Appointed to serve as the Friend in Residence for 2024:  
Jennifer Kavanagh, London West AM

**Quaker Life Central Committee**

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2025:  
Elizabeth Backhouse, Brighouse West Yorkshire AM

**Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee**

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2026:  
Hannah Larn, Hardshaw & Mann AM  
Mathew Guest, Northumbria AM

**Quaker United Nations Committee, Geneva**

Appointed to serve as co-clerk with immediate effect for one year:  
Helen Drewery, South London AM

**Quaker World Relations Committee**

Appointed to serve with immediate effect until 31 December 2024:  
James Eddington, Bristol AM

**b) Meeting for Sufferings**

For information the following between-meeting appointments were discerned:

**Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings**

Released from the group and role of convener:  
Sarah Donaldson, Manchester & Warrington AM

Appointed from the group's members to serve as co-conveners until the work is complete:

Ann Kerr, West Scotland AM  
Carolyn Sansom, South Wales AM

## Quaker recognised bodies

### Introduction

This paper covers:

- **Part A:** one application for registration as a new Quaker recognised body (QRB)
- **Part B:** one review of existing QRBs for continuing registration
- **Part C:** the laying down of one existing QRB
- **Part D:** the removal of a dormant QRB from the official list

### Background

The guidelines for groups that would like to be a Quaker recognised body are on the BYM website [www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/quaker-groups). That page also contains a list of current QRBs with their contact details and brief description.

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.

Each QRB is allocated a BYM link staff member.

### A: New application

One application for registration as a Quaker Recognised Body is ready to come to Meeting for Sufferings this time.

- **Peacemakers (West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project)**

**Action required:** Meeting for Sufferings is asked to approve this organisation as a Quaker recognised body for a period of five years, as it is a well-established group.

**Name of Quaker Recognised Body:** Peacemakers (West Midlands Quaker Peace Education Project)

**Constitution:** Memorandum of Understanding with Central England Area Meeting

**Governance:** Peacemakers is governed by a Management Committee of about 8 appointed by Central England Area Meeting with at least one member from Staffordshire Area Meeting with a finance and people sub-committee. The staff Director reports to this committee.

**Type of Group:** Linked to Central England Area Meeting



**Foundation:** Peacemakers started (as West Midlands Peace Education Project) in the late 1980s as a project of Central England Area Meeting. Peacemakers remains a branch of the CEAM charity and is supported financially, practically and spiritually by the Area Meeting.

**Aims:** ‘We want a world where people are equipped to deal peacefully and creatively with the inevitable conflicts that arise for all of us.

‘We work with schools, units, clubs, committees, teams, collectives and groups of people regardless of age or anything else.

‘We support people within communities to build, strengthen and repair relationships at all levels.’

**Publications and activities:** Peacemakers works with schools, units, clubs, committees, teams, collectives and groups of people regardless of age or anything else. Activities include training and support for staff and children in schools on areas including relationship and community peace, peer mediation and restorative practice as part of a whole school approach. Peacemakers is leading on significant work developing the nationwide offer on peace education at Key Stage 2. Peacemakers work closely with BYM’s peace education team and many other organisations.

Publications include *Learning for Peace – A guide to developing outstanding SMSC in your primary school*, a book used by many schools

And a range of online content via [www.peacemakers.org.uk](http://www.peacemakers.org.uk)

**Membership:** Approximate size of group: 14 staff (four salaried and 10 freelancers).

Over 1,500 people (children, young people and adults) have benefited from the activities of the organisation.

In 2022, Peacemakers worked with 39 schools and external organisations according to its annual report.

**Finance:** Peacemakers total income in 2022 was £177,834. Total expenditure was £163,502

Peacemakers accounts are audited or examined in accordance with their Memorandum of Understanding with Central England Area Meeting.

**Winding up:** Peacemakers maintains financial reserves to wind up the organisation if necessary.

**Archives:** These are kept in the Peacemakers library and in the Central England Area Meeting archives

**Current contact details:**

**Address:** Peacemakers, 41 Bull Street, Birmingham, B4 6AF

**Telephone:** 0121 236 4796

**Email:** [info@peacemakers.org.uk](mailto:info@peacemakers.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.peacemakers.org.uk](http://www.peacemakers.org.uk)

**Staff link:** Ellis Brooks, Peace Education Coordinator [ellisb@quaker.org.uk](mailto:ellisb@quaker.org.uk)

## **B. Reviews of existing QRBs**

When Meeting for Sufferings grants QRB status, it asks for each organisation to be reviewed in due course.

For each of review an update from the staff link about recent activities and key information from the original application to Meeting for Sufferings is included.

There is one review submitted this time:

- **Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP)**

**Action required:** Meeting for Sufferings is asked to renew the registration of this organisation as a Quaker recognised body to be reviewed during 2029 (that is in five years' time).

**Initial recognition 2019**, review due 2024, free standing group.

**Staff link:** Bea Robinson, Content and Publications Manager

**Staff report:** I attended an event in the past, but it had been quiet for some time. I have a good relationship with the new lead contact, and expect to be more closely connected as they look at revitalising their activities. My team have not had much additional contact with the group. Since Quakers in Britain has moved away from book production, I increasingly find myself directing Friends with ideas for books or queries about publishing to seek advice from QUIP/the QUIP Facebook group instead.

**Looking forwards, their current contact has written:** QUIP is currently prioritising our plans for possibly 2 online meetings during 2024, as we need to re-vitalise our activities again since less was on offer during the Covid pandemic and we also hope to some new younger members. We have reached out to speakers in relation to a panel discussion on the use of social media in promoting Quaker books, hopefully involving both Americas and Europe based authors. Separate to this, we are exploring having a talk from Friends who are doing literacy work by producing peace books for young people in coordination with Friends Peace Teams. In 2024 we will meet only online. In the past, in person conferences were successful, so our format for 2025 meeting(s) has yet to be discerned.

**Current contact:** Finola O'Sullivan, Cambridgeshire AM

**Website:** <https://www.quakerquip.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/87406854573/>

## **C. Laying down of a Quaker recognised body**

**Action required:** Meeting for Sufferings is asked to agree to remove the Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture from the list of Quaker recognised bodies, at the request of the group.

- **Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture (Q-CAT)**

**Initial recognition 2017,** Linked group and registered charity.

**Staff link:** Clare Wood, Head of Peacebuilding Projects

The Trustees of the group informed Meeting for Sufferings in March 2023 that they were going to wind up the charity as they had been unable to find new trustees (see minute MfS/23/03/11). They have progressed sufficiently in this process that they now wish to be removed from the list of Quaker recognised bodies.

## **D. Removal of a dormant QRB from the official list**

**Action required:** Meeting for Sufferings is asked to agree to remove Friends in Tune from the list of Quaker recognised bodies, as it has not responded to requests from staff who were asking for it to be involved in its periodic review. This does not prevent the group from reapplying to be a Quaker recognised body if it so wishes.

- **Friends in Tune**

**Initial recognition,** February 2019, Review due February 2021, Emergent.

**Staff link:** Alistair Fuller, Team Leader Quaker Community

**Report from staff:** Since some initial contact in 2018/19, there has been no further contact. It is unclear to what extent this is still a functioning group. In trying to conduct this review we have not been able to find any effective current contact.

In the December 2022 report on Quaker recognised bodies to Meeting for Sufferings, the following was included:

Meeting for Sufferings is invited to note that as the link staff member has not received any response to their enquiries, that the group named below will be listed as a dormant QRB in 2023 and if no contact has been made by early 2024, Meeting

for Sufferings will be invited to remove the group from the official list of Quaker recognised bodies.

An email was sent in mid-January 2024 letting the group know that unless they responded, staff would recommend that the group would be removed from the list of Quaker recognised bodies. No response has been received.

Michael S Booth  
Church Government Advisor  
Quaker Church Affairs  
February 2024

## **Prison and Court Register**

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 in publicly-available documents. 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.

### **Under consideration this time**

Meeting for Sufferings has been alerted to the following Friends who have appeared in court or have been imprisoned and is asked to consider adding a summary of these details to the Prison and Court Register.

#### **1) Sue Bennet, Northumbria Area Meeting**

Northumbria Area Meeting minute 2023/12:18 from 12 December 2023:

We have been asked by Newcastle Friends to forward the name of Sue Bennet to Meeting for Sufferings to be included in the record of Friends imprisoned or on trial because of their faith. Sue was on trial on 5th December for her part in a non-violent climate protest. At the trial, she pleaded not guilty, identified herself as a Quaker and explained how her actions were rooted in her faith. She was obliged to pay costs of £336 and given a discharge conditional on her not committing another offence for 9 months.

## **2) Helena Norval, North West London Area Meeting**

North West London Area Meeting minutes on 22 January 2024:

We ask the Clerk to write to Meeting for Sufferings to include the name of Helena Norval on the Court and Prison Register. Helena is an Attender at Friends House Local Meeting and was convicted of Wilfully Obstructing the Highway in support of the Just Stop Oil campaign. She was sentenced to a conditional discharge and costs of £800. The Area Meeting agreed to a grant of £250 to Helena Norval.

## **3) Jacob Arthur Solomon Bourne (known as Sol), Leeds Area Meeting**

Leeds Area Meeting forward the following minute from Carlton Hill Local Meeting with a request to Meeting for Sufferings for these details to be included in the Prison and Court Register:

Jacob Arthur Solomon Bourne (known to us as Sol) was part of a 'Just Stop Oil' protest on 28th June at Lords Cricket Ground and was arrested. He pleaded not guilty to aggravated trespass on 31st July and went to trial on 28th September 2023. He was found guilty and sentenced on 24th October to 60 hours of Community Service and ordered to pay a fine and costs totalling £444. He is one of three people who all had the same sentence.

Because Quakers nationally have committed to climate action, we feel this is in line with our testimonies. We uphold him in his action. Further action is planned by Sol and other Friends of the meeting. We offer Sol and other individuals the opportunity to hold a meeting for clearness in which they could work through their thinking on taking further action and the consequences of that for themselves and the meeting. We invite friends to donate towards Sol's fine, costs and other expenses.

## **4) Adrian Cook, London West Area Meeting**

**Phil Laurie, East Kent Area Meeting**

**Alison Meaton, Cornwall Area Meeting**

As noted in The Friend (26 January 2024), eight Friends appeared in court in January following witness at the Defence and Security Equipment International (DESI) arms fair in London in September 2023. These Friends were charged under Section 14(5) and (9) of the Public Order Act 1986 for failing to move when asked from sitting in the road.

Three area meetings have confirmed the following Friends were acting under concern and wish to be included in the Prison and Court Register:

- Adrian Cook, London West Area Meeting
- Alison Meaton, Cornwall Area Meeting
- Phil Laurie, East Kent Area Meeting

It is likely further names will be brought to a future meeting of Meeting for Sufferings.

## **Change to the text of *Quaker faith & practice***

### **Discontinuing the term “overseer”**

In December 2022, Meeting for Sufferings asked all area meetings to cease using the term overseer and to select another suitable term in its place. This paper suggests how that decision should be reflected in the text of *Quaker faith & practice*.

### **The approach to the task**

The words overseer and oversight occur numerous times in *Quaker faith & practice*, describing both current and historic Quaker practice.

Church Government Advisory Group (CGAG) consulted Meeting for Sufferings in March 2023, suggesting that rather than make many revisions to the current text, we just add an explanatory note. Meeting for Sufferings agreed to this approach.

### **Possible additional text**

The word “overseer” has traditionally been used by Quakers to describe Friends who are responsible for pastoral care. After consultation, in 2022 Meeting for Sufferings asked all area meetings to use another word or phrase because the traditional one has often been associated with the transatlantic slave trade, slavery and other forms of oppression.

In this edition of *Quaker faith & practice*, there are many references to “overseer” and “oversight”. *Quaker faith and practice* is currently being revised and, while we wait for it, we trust that readers will bear in mind our firm intention to remove the word as soon as we can. Older quotations may need some explanatory text where editing would be inappropriate.

### **Where will this text be placed?**

CGAG suggest that this text could appear just above section 12.05, under the heading “Eldership and oversight”. Our communications team should be asked to include the text on the front page of the online *Quaker faith & practice*.

### **Who can decide on this change?**

Yearly Meeting has given Meeting for Sufferings the authority to make minor changes to the text of *Quaker faith & practice*. Yearly Meeting continues to reserve to itself the ability to make more major changes.

The report of Meeting for Sufferings to Yearly Meeting referred to the December 2022 decision that “overseer” is no longer an appropriate term, although the decision was not included in the Yearly Meeting minutes.

The advantage of Meeting for Sufferings deciding that this is a minor change is that it could then take place without delay.

If Meeting for Sufferings decides that this is a major change for Yearly Meeting to consider, then no change will be made to the text of *Quaker faith & practice* at this time.

The Recording Clerk advises that this is a minor change.

### **Recommendation to Meeting for Sufferings**

Meeting for Sufferings is asked to accept the proposed minor change to *Quaker faith & practice* with additional text being included as suggested above.

Finn Pollard  
Convener, Church Government Advisory Group  
November 2023



## **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 every year 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.

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### **Draft 2024 Letter of greeting to other European Yearly Meetings**

Dear Friends

As you gather for your yearly meeting, I send you greetings for 2024 on behalf of Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting.

Our region in Europe and the Middle East continues to face many new challenges. Last year saw both the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and a new conflict in Gaza after 7 October 2023. We are all called to respond to these and other urgent issues. Britain Yearly Meeting's 2023 Epistle encourages us to '... show leadership and offer counsel that will help our nations in matters of the degradation of public truth, the climate and ecological crisis, and divisive public commentaries around people's identities and associated rights.' See <https://youtu.be/rO8xPQ7edwU>

One highlight in 2024 for Friends in Britain are the celebrations of the 400-year legacy of George Fox, co-founder of our Quaker faith. We give thanks for the community that he and Margaret Fell created which has endured.

We hope that Friends in your yearly meeting are inspired by the World Plenary Meeting (WPM) in South Africa from 5 to 12 August 2024, with the theme of 'Living the spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation – and one another'. This event offers Friends from all Quaker traditions worldwide a wonderful opportunity to interact and learn from each other.

We trust that your own yearly meeting gatherings this year will be joyful occasions that enable you to thrive and walk cheerfully together in the Spirit.

In Friendship

Robert Card  
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

## **Meeting for Sufferings report to Yearly Meeting**

Meeting for Sufferings makes a report to Yearly Meeting each year on its activity. This is a draft report on Meeting for Suffering's work in 2023 offered by your Clerk for presentation to Yearly Meeting in July.

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### **Meeting for Sufferings annual report, 2023**

Meeting for Sufferings is a Committee of up to 100 representatives from across the yearly meeting: 70 area meetings, General Meeting for Scotland, Crynwyr Cymru–Quakers in Wales, Central Committees, Standing Committees, Young Friends General Meeting and Yearly Meeting Trustees. It meets four times a year to carry out business on behalf of the yearly meeting such as appointments, updates to the prison and court register, and registration of Quaker Recognised Bodies.

We receive reports from Quaker World Relations Committee and Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations, as well as minutes on matters of concern from area meetings and other bodies, and we are empowered to set up further groups for specific tasks.

In 2015, Meeting for Sufferings approved a vision statement, *Our faith in the future* (available at: [www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/our-faith-in-the-future](http://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/meeting-for-sufferings/our-faith-in-the-future)) providing a point of reference for all Friends to discern their current position and how they might best act to realise that vision. The structure of that document has been adapted to arrange this report.

#### **A future where Meeting for worship is the bedrock of living as a Quaker**

Worship grounds all our meetings, and this year we had the opportunity of a primarily residential weekend, which offered additional opportunities for worship and fellowship.

We received reports from various review groups, which repeatedly emphasised that Spirit-led discernment is central to our lives as Quakers and giving time to this should always be our priority.

#### **A future where all Friends understand and live by Quaker discipline**

We have continued to receive updates from the Book of Discipline Revision Committee and have had opportunities to consider some of the proposed text. Young Friends General Meeting challenged us to consider how our testimony to living under Gospel Order effects our understanding of how we interact with the

worldly Powers when they questioned our delivery of a “loyal address” to the monarch.

We returned to the question of nominating Friends to serve on central committees, and agreed that nominating bodies need not be limited to Friends in formal membership when nominating to Britain Yearly Meeting committees. We are still looking at the implications for local and area meetings and for roles with specific legal responsibilities such as trustees and registering officers.

### **A future where Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age**

We have continued to hear of work done to make our Meetings truly inclusive, including the work of Quaker Life on new patterns of belonging to our Meetings. At our December meeting we were once again enriched by parallel sessions for children and young people, some of whom attended the session in which Quaker World Relations Committee reported on our relations with other Yearly Meetings and the forthcoming plenary meeting of Quaker World Relations Committee (August 2024).

### **A future where Quaker values are active in the world**

We heard from Friends from Lancashire Central and North Area Meeting on their work on “Spirit-led employment practices”; had an opportunity to hear from Quaker chaplains in different settings on their ministry; and received a report on the work of Crynwyr Cymru—Quakers in Wales in living out their faith in the context of Welsh government structures.

In a year where the desperate needs of the world have been so apparent, we have spent significant time on reviewing our internal structures. We can only hope that this work will free Friends up from maintaining our own organisation for more effective ministry beyond our Society.

We have also continued to maintain the Prison and Court Register, a record of Friends acting under Concern to witness to the Gospel Order that rebukes and ultimately redeems the Powers and Principalities of the world.

### **A future where Quakers work collaboratively**

Perhaps the most significant piece of work in this area was a consideration of whether to join the campaign to make ecocide a crime under international law. While Meeting for Sufferings concluded that we would not participate at the national level, the exercise of considering how we might be involved in such work was valuable. It also offered an opportunity for Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee to explore how it might work to support area meetings to pursue a concern that is not part of centrally managed work.

We received the report of Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations and were reminded of the difficult conversations about diversity and inclusion in the nation's ecumenical instruments.

### **A future where Quakers are well known and widely understood**

For all the questions about the propriety of delivering a "loyal address" to the monarch, this was an opportunity for Quakers to make their voice heard beyond our own community. It was, however, notable, that the structure of the event prevented it from being as effective a form of public ministry as it might have been.

It has been another rich, challenging, and fulfilling year for Meeting for Sufferings. While it can be tempting to hope for easy agreement, it is as we strive to reach unity on matters of dispute that we have the greatest opportunity to realise the peace that surpasses understanding and witness to an alternate ordering.

Robert Card  
Clerk, Meeting for Sufferings

## **Report from BYM Trustees**

This is my first report to you as clerk of BYM trustees, and I look forward to delivering it to you in person at Friends' House.

Four trustees completed their terms of service at the end of 2023 – clerk Caroline Nursey, assistant clerk Graham Torr, Alison Breadon and Frances Voelcker. We owe these Friends a great debt of gratitude, especially for their stewardship of our staff and resources during the challenges of the pandemic. We welcomed three new trustees, Ursula Fuller, Jo Hills and Kit King. Danielle Walker Palmour began her service as assistant clerk, bringing much needed experience and expertise to the new clerking team.

We met in a blended meeting clerked from York on 10th February, with a very long agenda and a daunting number of important documents in advance to digest, some arriving just before we met. We hope we did justice to the important issues we were considering. Whilst the minutes are available to you in their entirety, I would suggest you pick up in particular:

**BYMT/24/02/04**, which records the filing of the 2022 BYM accounts with the Charity Commission on 14th November 2023, 14 days after the due date.

**BYMT/24/02/06f**, which reassures us that, in spite of some of the problems from 2022 spilling into 2023, we should be able to receive and approve the accounts for 2023 at our June meeting, and thereafter take them to Yearly Meeting in session in July. Alongside this minute, we considered a very detailed report from our Audit Committee examining the issues arising from the preparation of the 2022 accounts, and the recommendations they make in minute **BYMT/24/02/08** from which Management Meeting will produce an action plan for further monitoring by the committee. This will ensure that the problems we experienced last year are much less likely to happen again. Your treasurer will speak to this in a moment.

I also want to draw to your attention to minutes **BYMT/24/02/07**, Employment Committee report, **BYMT/24/02/11** Update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and **BYMT/24/02/12** Reparations Working Group, which detail the painstaking work that is going on to implement Yearly Meeting's commitments to being an inclusive and anti-racist community.

Our treasurer, Paul Whitehouse, and I look forward to reporting to you on 2nd March and respond to any questions you may have.

Marisa Johnson  
Clerk BYM Trustees

# Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

Saturday 10 February 2024, by video conference

## Minutes

**Present:** Georgina Bailey, Catherine Brown, Kit Fotheringham, Ursula Fuller, Kate Gulliver, Ellie Harding, Carolyn Hayman, Jo Hills, Marisa Johnson (Clerk), Kit King, Silas Price, Danielle Walker Palmour (Assistant Clerk), Paul Whitehouse (Treasurer)

**In attendance:** Siobhán Haire, Deputy Recording Clerk; Vipin Narang, Finance Director (except minute BYMT/24/02/09); Paul Parker, Recording Clerk; Oliver Robertson, Head of Witness and Worship; Lisa San Martin, Chief Executive, Quiet Company (minutes BYMT/24/02/10 to 15)

**Visitors:** External members of BYM Trustees' Audit Committee: John Ashcroft and Janet Slade (minute BYMT/24/02/08); Sarah Donaldson, Quaker Church Affairs team (minute BYMT/24/02/13); David Loxton, Head of Communications & Fundraising (minute BYMT/24/02/14 to 15)

## **BYMT/24/02/01 Welcome and introductions, agenda check, conflicts of interest check**

We welcome three new trustees to this meeting: Ursula Fuller, Jo Hills and Kit King. Ursula joined us as an observer at our last meeting. For Jo and Kit this is their first meeting and we hope all three will find it interesting and rewarding.

There are no unrecorded conflicts of interest. For items where Friends have connections to one aspect of the issue or other, we will declare this as we go along.

We confirm our agenda.

During our opening worship, we heard 25.01 from *Quaker faith and practice* of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain:

*The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.*  
*John Woolman, 1772*

## **BYMT/24/02/02 Continuing business**

We receive a list of continuing minutes including the extracts from the following minutes of our last meeting:

BYMT/23/11/06 Preparation of 2022 annual accounts;  
BYMT/23/11/10 Risk register;  
BYMT/23/11/13 Audit committee's report on response to the pandemic;  
BYMT/23/11/17 Drayton House;  
and BYMT/23/11/20 Link Trustees.

## **BYMT/24/02/03 Minutes received**

We receive the following minutes:

- Quaker Life Central Committee 27–28 October 2023 – we note plans to deliver Quaker Life Representative Council differently in future and read with interest about their discernment contributed to the Trustees' Handbook under development.

- Quiet Company 14–15 November 2023 – we note the very good results for the company 9 months into the financial year and the improvement in the profitability of the Quaker Centre.
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee 17–18 November 2023 – we note in particular from QPSWCC 23/60 Grants Group: We encourage BYM Trustees to consider how this grants work can support progress towards becoming an actively anti racist church, specifically through reparations work. Any steps towards linking existing small funds and re invigorating the QPS fund would also assist.

### **BYMT/24/02/04 Trustees’ annual report and accounts for 2022**

At our last meeting on 10 November 2023 we approved the annual accounts and financial statements by minute BYMT/23/11/06. The documents were filed with the Charity Commission, 14 days after the relevant deadline, on 14 November after final checks by the external auditor.

### **BYMT/24/02/05 Insurance report**

We note paper BYMT 2024 02 04b setting out a summary of BYM’s main insurance policies. The renewal premiums for 2024 amount to £154,735.85, an increase of £16,892.78 from last year.

### **BYMT/24/02/06 Finance report**

#### **a) Minutes of Finance & Property Committee**

We receive minutes of the meeting of Finance and Property Committee held on 5 February.

We note the helpful 2023 IT annual report, the more rigorous analysis of the past failings in the implementation of the Finance system and the project management approach being applied. We are pleased that the meeting allowed time for a review of the diverse property portfolio and the consideration of some of the strategic issues relating to how we manage key assets in future.

We are pleased to hear of the progress toward the sale of the property at Lesser Slatters. We hear that we have a buyer and will convene a brief meeting of trustees to consider the sale and appoint the signatories on the final agreement when it is reached.

#### **b) Pollard & Dickson Trust**

We note minute FP 24/11, which recommends that we accept in principle the offer of restricted funds from the possible winding up of the Pollard & Dickson Trust.

We agree that these funds could be used to further hardship grant-making programmes and to support the travelling ministry through other work of Britain Yearly Meeting within the scope of the restrictions, and agree in principle to accept this transfer should the trustees of the Pollard & Dickson Trust so decide.

#### **c) Estate of Robert Matthews**

We note minute FP 24/10, which recommends providing tenants of the property concerned with a rent holiday as a good will gesture while they find alternative accommodation. This would mean foregoing 1.2% of the value of the legacy.

We authorise the Treasurer to apply to the Charity Commission for the required permissions.

#### **d) Marsh legacy**

We note the agreement by the Committee to the use of an additional £150,000 from the funds received from the Marsh Legacy towards a number of workstreams relating to exploring a reparative response to Quaker involvement in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and economic exploitation. We are pleased to see the steady development of the structures to support this work.

We ask for Finance and Property Committee to revisit the overall purposes of the Marsh Legacy in light of our emerging discernment.

#### **e) Rentals of Friends House**

Most of the rentals charged to tenants in Friends House are below market values. The organisations we let to are also beneficiaries of grants by BYM for Quaker work. Any rise in rents may result in requests for larger grants. For the sake of transparency, we agree that we should have valuations to show current market values, and, where we continue to charge below that, we will show that as a gift or contribution in kind.

#### **f) Audit preparation for 2023 accounts**

We have heard an update from the Director of Finance on the progress of preparing the 2023 accounts and the associated external audit. Although there is still a lot of work to do, and some of the issues experienced last year have continued in 2023, we are reassured that we are on track to produce timely set of accounts this year, and progress is being made with the recommendations of last year's audit report.

We expect to be able to sign off the 2023 accounts at our June meeting, and will want to receive early warnings if anything should cause delay.

We note that this was the last Finance and Property Committee meeting to be attended by Paul Henderson Grey as Head of Estates. We convey our thanks and good wishes for a fruitful retirement.

### **BYMT/24/02/07 BYM Trustees' Employment Committee**

We receive a report from our Employment Committee on its activity in 2023 (paper BYMT 2024 02 05).

We note the considerable work the committee has overseen on developing employment policy and other issues, such as negotiation of the cost of living increase for staff salaries. We are pleased the staff team is settling following the disruption from the pandemic. We are grateful to the committee, the People Team and the union for their contributions towards developing equity, diversity and inclusion within BYM and helping us become an anti-oppressive employer.

As the report concludes, "the employment committee continues to be a space to discuss, explore and shape a key element of how we live our Quaker values and testimonies in a real way, in a real time".

We ask our Nominations Committee to consider how best to maintain continuity on this committee given that both trustee members will reach the end of their terms at the end of 2024.

### **BYMT/24/02/08 Audit committee's report on the preparation of the 2022 annual accounts**

Further to our minutes BYMT/23/09/13 and BYMT/23/06/05, we welcome two of the external members of the Audit Committee – John Ashcroft, and Janet Slade – to our



meeting. The Committee's Clerk, John Ashcroft, has introduced their report (paper BYMT 2024 02 06) to us.

The report includes a timeline of events along with observations and suggestions from the Committee about systemic issues to be addressed to ensure we prevent as far as possible, or mitigate, a recurrence of the problems identified. Twenty-two recommendations are summarised in an appendix, grouped under nine headings. It is acknowledged that a number of issues are already being addressed.

We note key areas highlighted for consideration by trustees:

- Further learning from the Covid-19 pandemic regarding remote working;
- The way that projects, especially IT projects, are managed, governed and overseen;
- The appearance of over-stretch within (parts of) the organisation;
- Verifying the proper documentation and operation of financial procedures;
- Sustaining competence-driven recruitment and appraisal processes;
- How to ensure sufficiency and resilience of management capacity and capability;
- Risk management;
- The respective roles of Finance & Property, who have the responsibility of responding to and following the audit's recommendations, and Audit Committee – the latter looks at internal processes and only has one opportunity a year to sit with the auditors; we need to discern whether the scope and terms of reference of these committees are right or need to be reviewed and changed.
- Organisational culture. We may be too willing to accept assurances and be supportive, rather than probing and challenging. We need to work towards a better balance between these two necessary approaches. We must take more notice of the feedback and warnings from the auditors.

We thank John Ashcroft and Audit Committee for the very thorough report on the preparation of the accounts. We note the impacts of wider governance and management decisions on organisational risks and capacity. We ask that Management Meeting review the table included in Annex 2 and report to us on progress toward resolving the management issues identified. We reflect on the development of a culture of constructive challenge within the organisation and between governance structures and the staff. We ask Finance and Property Committee to consider the key signals of system problems – the “orange flags” – that it will monitor going forward. This will include issues arising from consultation with our external auditor or consultants. We will return to these matters at our June meeting when we expect to see an action plan and progress arising from the recommendations in Annex 2. We will consider the functions and relationship between the Finance and Property and Audit Committees with a view to ensuring the gifts of Friends, engagement of staff and organisational resources are used most effectively.

### **BYMT/24/02/09 Recording clerk's report and dashboard**

We receive a report from the Recording Clerk for the period November 2023 to January 2024 (paper BYMT 2024 02 07a).

The report gives updates and news under the headings of BYM's strategic priorities:

- Thriving Quaker communities: outreach, Head of Inclusive Quaker Communities, preparing for Summer Yearly Meeting. We look forward to taking part in an interest group jointly with Meeting for Sufferings.
- Sustainable and peaceful world: war in Israel and Gaza; ecumenical accompaniment programme in Palestine and Israel; slide into war.
- Simpler structures and practices: reviews of BYM structures; simpler governance at local level; nominations.

The report also informs us of the following:

- Regulatory matters: Permissions issue with Business Central; safeguarding serious incident.
- External relations: Woodbrooke; Glebe House (Friends Therapeutic Community Trust); Friends School Council; London Quakers Property Trust (Pollard and Dickson Trust).
- Estates and property.
- Quiet Company.

The Recording Clerk provides insight into key highlights in recent weeks including an All-Staff Conference, some additions to the senior staff team and Operational Managers, and the question of our presence at Yearly Meeting 2024. We were heartened to hear of the addition of new energy and capacity to take forward our work and the effort to manage the risks inherent in any staffing changes.

We reflected on the developing usefulness of the dashboard information and the data from Central Nominations. We were pleased to hear of the good progress toward the simplification of Quaker governance structures in Wales.

### **BYMT/24/02/10 The Salter Lecture 2024**

The clerk introduced this item with a call to ministry from Friends on the issues outlined in the Recording Clerk's paper relating to the possible repercussion of the Quaker Socialist Society's (QSS) proposed Salter Lecture on war and peace to be given jointly by Paul Ingram and Jeremy Corbyn, MP, as part of the Yearly Meeting event in July. She clarified our responsibilities as trustees as relating to the stewardship of the resources of the Yearly Meeting including the staff, programmes, facilities and reputation of the charity.

The Recording Clerk outlined the background to the current lecture and the meetings held to date. He set out the risk factors identified by staff in relation to participation by Jeremy Corbyn, MP in this event, and the clerk summarised the points raised in correspondence by QSS.

In worship we reflected on the need to make decisions on 'kinder ground' with QSS and other Friends. We recognise that QSS is an independent Quaker organisation. We may as trustees express that holding this lecture during Yearly Meeting might be a distraction from the wider Spirit-led work of the Society without expressing a view that the Lecture should not happen at another time or context as it has done before. Our duty of care to our staff that will need to manage the difficult communications that will arise from a speaker addressing an event within the annual gathering of our church community, leads us to recommend that the lecture as currently proposed is not held at Yearly Meeting in July 2024. We ask Friends and staff engaging with QSS and others within the Society do so with tenderness and respect for maintaining relationships and work with QSS towards enabling their lecture to go ahead.

We send this minute to Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee and QSS.

## **BYMT/24/02/11 Update on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

Further to our minute BYMT/23/02/07 we receive a report from the Deputy Recording Clerk on the progress made against our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion agenda.

We are pleased to note the progress made since the last report in February 2023, particularly in respect of Equity and Justice as an Employer, with the EDI Action Plan and the recruitment of two fixed term team members – a Workplace Equity Coordinator and a Reparations Coordinator, and the availability of two working hours per month or three days per year for staff to undertake this work.

We also note the development of an equity network to unify the equity agenda and develop the interconnections between groups of people (with protected characteristics or not) and between people and the earth.

We read with interest the examples of work on EDI being done in some parts of the country with the support of Local Development and Youth Development Workers.

We are concerned about the burden carried by staff tasked with moderating our social media presence on topics where there are differing views, for instance affirming trans identity due to the development of the debate in an adversarial public arena. We hope for some more positive outcome from reconciliation and listening work in Scotland, and similar work by London Quakers.

We note the work of Woodbrooke in putting together resources to help Meetings explore and fulfil the commitment to inclusion at local level.

We note the work of Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) in the field of anti-racism and reparations. We hope the committee may consider producing a document along the lines of *We are but witnesses* to show the theological underpinning of our commitment to inclusion and affirmation of trans people. We also hope to see a Quaker response, in line with minute 31 of Yearly Meeting 2021, to the government's consultation on non-statutory advice to schools on the management of "gender-questioning" children, due by 12 March 2024.

Work is progressing on all age participation and new ways of belonging.

We send this minute to QCCIR.

## **BYMT/24/02/12 Reparations Working Group**

Further to minutes BYMT/22/06/09 and BYMT/23/02/08 we receive a report from the Deputy Recording Clerk on the work of the Reparations Working Group including a copy of the Group's most recent minutes (BYMT 2024 02 09).

We hear that the group is dynamic, energetic and enthusiastic. The workstreams that the group is focussing on are:

- Historical Research into Quaker involvement in the Trans-Atlantic chattel slavery trade;
- Financial effect of Quaker involvement and how to quantify the cost of the damage;
- Outreach; and
- Theological justification for enslavement.

Trustees are supportive of including reparations in the "Room Sharing" Policy (currently being reviewed by staff in QPSW) and ask that records are kept of how this offer contributes to our reparations activities. We recognise that this is a preliminary phase of the work, a time for scoping what we will need to address in

future. When that becomes clear we will need to put in place robust governance and delivery mechanisms for any work that is discerned.

### **BYMT/24/02/13 Group to Review Central Structures**

See minute BYMT/23/06/06.

We are joined by Sarah Donaldson from Quaker Church Affairs team.

We receive a paper (BYMT 2024 02 10a) with an update on the work of the Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS) which includes minutes from their meetings held on 14 November 2023, 11 December 2023 and a joint meeting between GRCS and the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings on 12 January 2024.

The Group has also provided a paper (BYMT 2024 02 10b) on the governance of GRCS and options for the development of the work.

Ellie Harding sets out the importance of the right level of trustee oversight to enable the appropriate reporting to Yearly Meeting on this topic. We hear of the considerable time and energy required of all the Friends involved which may not be sustainable for the length of the project. We are pleased to hear that the consultancy support for the Group is already adding value to the programme.

We consider the key questions identified:

- Membership: We noted that two of the three trustees serving on the committee finish their terms at the end of this year. We would wish to see one or both of them to continue to serve until after Yearly Meeting 2025. We also ask Nominations Committee to look for a new convenor, if necessary by adding a further member to the group.
- We would like to express our gratitude to Ellie for the work she has put into steering this work thus far as convenor, and are pleased she is willing to continue to support the work of the group as a member of it.
- We ask the Recording Clerk to ensure sufficient resources are in place to support this work.

### **BYMT/24/02/14 Social Media Policy**

We welcome David Loxton, BYM's Head of Communications and Fundraising, to our meeting who has introduced his paper with a draft social media policy (BYMT 2024 02 11). This policy covers both our strategic use of social media and expectations on staff use.

We recognise the centrality of social media to our communications and to our mission. We have clarified that this policy also applies to those representing Quakers on external bodies.

We approve this policy as amended in this meeting, and ask Employment Committee to monitor its implementation on our behalf.

### **BYMT/24/02/15 Revision of Friends House Lettings Policy**

Through our minutes BYMT/23/02/07, BYMT/23/02/09 and BYMT/23/04/09 we have previously considered the need to revise the Friends House Lettings Policy as lettings might conflict with positions of Yearly Meeting. Two trustees, Carolyn Hayman and Kit Fotheringham, were appointed to work with staff on considering the policy and we now receive some recommendations from them (paper BYMT 2024 02 12). David Loxton introduced the policy.

We note the revisions have been seen and approved by both Management Meeting and the Quiet Company Board. We have also received legal opinion that the policy is workable but needs to be applied with great care and may still be challenged in the courts, as there is no case law to affirm the right to deny services to any person or organisation that enjoys protected status under the Equality Act 2010.

We approve the revisions to the policy as set out in the paper.

### **BYMT/24/02/16 Appointments**

Our Nominations Group brings us the following nominations and requests for release:

#### **a) Appointments**

##### **Property Development Steering Group**

Jo Hills to serve for the lifetime of the project

##### **Anti-oppression champion**

Kit King to serve for two years

##### **Group to review central structures (GRCS)**

Ellie Harding to be released as convener

We agree to these appointments and release.

#### **b) Record of appointment**

##### **BYM Trustee Finance & Property Committee Clerk**

Catherine Brown was appointed by between meetings process to serve as co-clerk with Danielle Walker Palmour for the next two meetings and then take on the full clerking role.

#### **c) Reviewing the number of trustee bodies and appointments**

Our Nominations Group has reviewed the bodies and roles we appoint Trustees and others to. We agree to lay down:

- Reference point for developing MoU with AMs
- Senior Staff Grievance & Disciplinary Group. If a grievance or disciplinary arises in connection with a senior staff member the Clerks of Trustees will convene an ad-hoc group made up from trustees and other Friends (eg a clerk of Meeting for Sufferings or Yearly Meeting)
- Communications Guide Task and Finish Group
- Lettings Policy Group

We note the minute from the Engaging Young Adult Quaker Grants Group (now known as Young Adult Quaker Grants Group (YAQGG)) asking for a change of reporting and nominating body. We ask staff to discuss options for the future governance of this grant-making programme with clerks of F&P, QLCC and BYMT Nominations Group – along with YAQGG – and bring a recommendation to us at a future meeting.

### **BYMT/24/02/17 Board effectiveness**

We agree to defer this item to our next meeting.

### **BYMT/24/02/18 Register of interest check**

At the start of each year we review our declarations of interest. We have done this and the register has been updated.

### **BYMT/24/02/19 Review of scheme of delegation**

Our scheme of delegation is routinely reviewed every two years. Some small updates are required and are set out in BYMT 2024 02 15a. We agree to these changes.

We also note Finance and Property Committee has been given responsibility for oversight of IT strategy and ask for this to be added to the description of that committee and for this to be reflected in point 3.22 of the scheme.

### **BYMT/24/02/20 Whistleblowing annual report**

We receive the Recording Clerk's annual report on BYM's whistleblowing policy and note there have been no whistleblowing cases in 2023.

### **BYMT/24/02/21 Delivery of the 2023 operational plan**

We receive a report from BYM's operational managers on the delivery of the 2023 operational plan.

We appreciate the hard work by the staff in delivering against this full plan.

### **BYMT/24/02/22 Trustees' news**

We receive a report of recent activities of trustees (BYMT 2024 02 17).

### **BYMT/24/02/23 Preparing for Meeting for Sufferings**

We have prepared for Meeting for Sufferings in March.

### **BYMT/24/02/24 Communicating trustees' work**

We have discussed how we might communicate our work.

### **BYMT/24/02/25 Reviewing the meeting**

We have reviewed the meeting.

### **BYMT/24/02/26 Time with Recording Clerk**

### **BYMT/24/02/27 Time without staff**

We have spent time without staff.

Marisa Johnson  
Clerk

## **A brief history of the work of GRYYM (The Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings)**

### **Initial phase of work: YM & YMG**

In May 2019 Yearly Meeting (YM) asked for a review of YM and YM Gatherings (YMG). In December 2019 Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) agreed to set up a review group to do this work. The group had two stages of work to complete:

1. A review of how well YM & YMG are meeting their purposes and whether the purposes need to be changed or updated;
2. A review of the planning & implementation of YM & YMG (to be seen in the light of findings of stage one).

In October 2020 MfS appointed Friends to serve on a review group “until the work is completed”. Although no definite timescale was set for completion, the expectation was that a report would go to YM 2023. At that time the group was generally referred to by the abbreviation YMRG, standing for Yearly Meeting Review Group. When the group’s terms of reference were later amended it came to be known as the **Group to Review YM, YMG & MfS (GRYYM)**.

The group began its work on stage one in 2021. It used a questionnaire, in depth interviews, and a special interest group around the time of YM 2021 to gather the views of Friends. It spent time together in worship and discernment. The group presented its report on the functions of YM and YMG to MfS in March 2022. The full report is available here: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2022-03-agenda-papers-package> (pp33-41).

### **Addition of MfS to the work**

While the group was still working on stage one, YM 2021 asked MfS to consider whether MfS should be reviewed. YM Minute 28 reads in part:

*The different parts of our governance are inextricably intertwined and we know the importance of their working well together. We have opportunities to examine this when they report to us at Yearly Meeting. We acknowledge that there are unresolved tensions that impact on the role of Meeting for Sufferings and that their role may now need review. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to consider this and return to us.*

MfS considered this minute in March 2022 and agreed to ask the existing review group to expand its work to include a review of MfS. From then on, the group had a total of three stages of work:

1. As above on the purposes of YM & YMG, which was completed with the March 2022 report;
2. NEW: A review of the current role of MfS within the structures of Britain Yearly Meeting;
3. As above but expanded to include MfS – a review of the planning & implementation of YM, YMG & MfS (to be seen in the light of findings of stage one & two).

The group addressed stage two via an open consultation, a special interest group around the time of YM 2022, online workshops, and many more conversations with Friends. The group thought widely about the questions it had been asked and again spent time in worship and discernment together. The group presented its first report on stage two to MfS in December 2022. It can be read here:

<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2022-12-agenda--papers-package> (pp22-29).

In this report the group identified that in the structure we have now, lines of accountability are unclear and there is considerable duplication and overlap. The report explored some possibilities for change, noting that changing the position of MfS in the structure to place it either below trustees (i.e. to become a consultative body) or above trustees (i.e. by merging it with YM) would bring greater clarity. However, the report did not make a specific recommendation. MfS sent this report to YM 2023. YM minute 30 reads in part:

*We recognise that a change in the relationship between Yearly Meeting, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, and Meeting for Sufferings is needed to address the overlap in current roles and responsibilities. We ask Meeting for Sufferings to bring to a future Yearly Meeting session proposals for what that change could look like. We are seeking changes that could release energy within our corporate structures, emphasise the importance of spirit-led discernment, allow wider and more diverse participation in decision making and improve communication between individual Friends, local meetings, area meetings and Meeting for Sufferings.*

### **Final phase of work**

Following YM 2023's request for proposals for change, the review group has continued its process of discernment, working on specific recommendations. It also worked on stage three.

GRYYM gave an update to MfS in October 2023. The relevant MfS minute reads:

***MfS/23/10/10 Review of Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings***

*We receive a report from the Group appointed to review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings.*



*It proposes that Meeting for Sufferings becomes a part of a continuing Yearly Meeting.*

*We agree that this is the right way forward and ask the group to work up this option, planning to bring a detailed proposal to us for Yearly Meeting in session in 2024.*

In response to this minute, GRYYM presented a short written report to MfS in December 2023 outlining how a continuing YM might work:  
<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2023-12-agenda--papers-package> (pp24-27).  
MfS in session provided valuable feedback, including concerns about the proposals.

A final report on stage two, together with a report on stage three, are now in the papers for this March 2024 meeting of MfS.

## **Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)**

### **Stage Three Report**

This is GRYYM's Stage Three report, covering a review of how Yearly Meeting (YM), Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) and Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) are planned and delivered. The specific questions we were asked to address are listed in the appendix to this paper.

GRYYM has written this report alongside its Stage Two report, and before any decisions have been made on those Stage Two recommendations. Some of the recommendations in this report are contingent on decisions being made in relation to Stage Two and some can be approved and actioned immediately if MfS feels it right.

MfS does not need to consider contingent recommendations in detail at this stage. At the end of this report is a list of recommendations that could be taken forward now if Friends wish.

### **Summary of findings and recommendations**

Our key findings and recommendations are as follows:

1. Friends need a meeting where we can discern the most important matters for our community; this needs to take place at least once a year but could be more frequent; we can call this Yearly Meeting (YM).
2. YM should be both open to all and have appointed representatives.
3. YM requires an agenda committee.
4. The YM clerks should attend but not clerk the agenda committee.
5. There should be a more open process for contributing to the agenda.
6. The practical arrangements for YM should be separate from the agenda committee and managed by staff with Quaker volunteer input.
7. Consideration should be given to dedicated staff/a team for major/large events.
8. There should be a rolling calendar for large events to allow Friends to plan.
9. The timing of YM and other important events should, as far as possible, take into account the ability of a broad range of Friends (of all ages) to attend.
10. There is a need for occasional longer gatherings; these should only be planned when needed and not more often than every 3 years.
11. Such longer gatherings (Yearly Meeting Gathering, YMG) should take place in venues across Britain known to be suitable.
12. Consideration should be given to using the name Residential YM, rather than YMG.
13. Further consideration should be given to how we build community within BYM, given that only a minority of Friends attend YM and YMG.

14. There should be greater openness about the financial costs of large meetings.
15. Further work is required on supporting the cost to individuals and Area Meetings of attendance at large events.
16. The processes and arrangements for the participation of Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRBs) at YM need to be simpler.
17. Once appropriate detailed planning has been done, YM and MfS should merge to form a continuing YM, thereby strengthening the role of MfS as acting for YM between YMs.
18. In the immediate future YM Agenda Committee and MfS Arrangements Group should work more closely together.
19. In the immediate future MfS representatives should be appointed on a rolling basis, rather than all being appointed on the same triennial basis.
20. In the immediate future MfS should continue experimentation with formats, preparation sessions and open sessions as appropriate.
21. Any changes put in place should be reviewed, with review dates set at the outset.

### **Attendance & representation at YM**

Friends need a meeting where we can come together to discern the most important matters for our community. At present this is an annual meeting – YM. As part of its stage two work GRYYM has recommended that we move to a system of a continuing YM, where YM would meet four times per year.

YM is open to all Friends and this feature must remain. If there is to be a continuing YM then Area Meetings must appoint representatives to attend YM sessions. Other meetings and bodies currently represented at MfS could do the same. In a continuing YM we expect that some items may be returned to at successive meetings. Area Meeting representatives to YM would therefore need to attend most sessions, with alternates attending only when unavoidable. If YM continues to meet only once per year then it could still be beneficial to ask Area Meetings to appoint representatives to YM.

Larger Area Meetings could appoint several representatives to YM to enable people in their Area Meeting to know and be able to discuss issues easily with a representative. As YM will be open to all, it should not matter if there are more Friends from some Area Meetings than from others.

Friends need an annual cycle for planning the agenda for Yearly Meeting sessions and an Agenda Committee for discerning that agenda.

GRYYM recommends that YM clerks should no longer be required to clerk YM Agenda Committee, although they should continue to attend. This should reduce the risks of a concentration of power and excessive workload and should free the clerks to take a fuller part in the discernment of YM Agenda Committee.

A more open process for contributing ideas for the agenda early in the planning cycle would allow wider access to the process. Individual Friends might participate, although suggestions which have gone through a discernment process should continue to be given extra weight. Some feedback to Friends on progress on the agenda towards the end of each year could encourage wider ownership.

YM Agenda Committee will need to consider how to balance routine and/or continuing ('carried-over') items of business that need to be considered alongside new agenda items at each YM.

YM Agenda Committee should be encouraged to think afresh about its way of working, including considering what the best size of committee might be.

The practical arrangements for YM should, so far as possible, be separated from the discernment of the agenda. It would be an advantage if staff took over most of the roles involved in the practical organisation and routine arrangements for YM, getting input from Quaker committees only when discernment is needed. This would free YMAC for their main role of discernment and might mean that a separate Arrangements Committee would not be necessary. A local committee might be needed for YMGs/residential YMs.

There is potential for staff with specific roles/a specific staff team for the practical arrangements for large events. This is a matter for BYM Trustees and Management Meeting to consider.

If MfS does not become a formal part of the Yearly Meeting, some coordination of agendas between MfS and YM could contribute to opening up the agenda process.

Issues of physical accessibility and the provision of on-line documents in an accessible format need more work. YM Agenda Committee and/or MfS Arrangements Group should take this forward.

### **Frequency, location and timing**

The right frequency, location and timings for YM and MfS will depend on whether GRYYM's recommendation for a continuing YM is taken forward.

YM, YMG/residential YM and MfS should all continue to offer options for in person and on-line attendance. What is being done currently should be further evaluated and further experimentation encouraged.

The timing of YM and MfS sessions needs to take account of the timings of Crynwyr Cymru–Quakers in Wales, General Meeting for Scotland and Young Friends General Meeting, all of which already meet several times per year and can involve a lot of travelling for the Friends who attend.

A calendar is needed which rolls on from year to year. This would help with planning for individual Friends, Area Meetings, and staff. It could also help to ensure regularity of reporting by ensuring bodies understand when other bodies are meeting.

The timing of YMs and YMGs/residential YMs should, as far as possible, take into account the ability of a broad range of Friends (of all ages) to attend. School holidays and some Bank Holidays are different in Scotland and England/Wales. Staff report that events for young people that are held in April tend to get the best attendance and so this should be considered.

A children and young people's programme should be offered at all YM events.

There is a need, and a desire, for occasional longer gatherings. YMGs/residential YMs should be planned for when they are needed, not at a regulated time-span. Examples could include consideration of the recommendations of the Book of Discipline Revision Committee or reparations. Given that these events take three years to plan, this may default back to a three-yearly interval, but a gathering should only be planned if Agenda Committee discerns one is needed.

GRYYM's stage one work indicated that YMGs are not seen as qualitatively different from YMs, although their practicalities are different. It may therefore be helpful to rename YMG as 'Residential Yearly Meeting' so that this continuity is clearer.

YMs should be held in different venues and not solely in London to aid physical attendance by those who live far from the capital. Where there is to be a YMG/residential YM, using known and assessed venues that have been proven to meet BYM's needs saves some planning time.

### **Welcome and community**

YM is a worshipping community and we want all Friends to feel welcome. Building a community is in many ways a spiritual endeavour. As we spend time together we can build connections. Greater understanding of the spiritual journeys of others can help to strengthen our discernment.

Only a minority of Friends attend YM or YMG and so we should not solely rely on these events to build our Quaker community. More work is needed around community building across BYM.

If we move to a continuing YM system then there is a risk that more frequent YMs might feel less 'special' and that the shorter YM sessions may be less well attended than longer ones. Meetings will need to continue to support Friends to attend YM – not just financially, but through preparation and appropriate support around the event.

YM is the only place where all Friends can get together, but it still may not reflect the diversity of all Quakers in Britain. YM can feel like a daunting and unfriendly place for

some. Anecdotally we have heard that this can be harder for Friends who visibly do not fit the picture of the 'average'. We need to consider how we may be excluding Friends and change for the better.

The presence of Friends who belong to Quaker communities other than AMs can be positive and information about YM should be shared widely. This could encourage age and background diversity. YM Agenda Committee might also consider inviting Friends from other bodies to attend YM in session if that seems appropriate to the agenda.

### **Financial and carbon costs**

The financial costs should be made as transparent as possible.

The cost to BYM is roughly as follows:

YM in Friends House over a long weekend: around £100,000<sup>1</sup>

MfS non-residential meeting: £10,000<sup>2</sup>

MfS residential meeting: in excess of £50,000<sup>3</sup>

YMG: around £150,000-£200,000<sup>4</sup>

The above costs do not include any of the costs incurred by Area Meetings and individuals, such as accommodation costs.

Staff costs should be considered as part of the overall costs of any event. However, they are not included in the above estimates because we have been unable to calculate them reliably. Staff preparation for and attendance at YM and MfS may not have a high direct financial cost but it means the staff cannot use that time for other work. Corporate discernment at a national level may lead to new or increased work for staff, and this needs to be made clear to Friends.

The Group to Review Central Structures and BYM Trustees should ensure that committees can support follow up from YM discernment and that the planning cycle is able to adjust appropriately in the light of YM decisions.

The costs of YM to individuals needs attention. The bursary system is unduly complex and needs reviewing. If there is to be a continuing YM then some Area Meetings may need financial support to ensure representation and wide attendance

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is a mix of budgeted costs of YM and the children & young people's programme, plus the estimated lost revenue from the use of Friends House. It does not include the costs of staff attendance or preparation. It does not include Friends' own accommodation or other costs.

<sup>2</sup> Pre-pandemic £10,000 was given as a rule of thumb. The cost of representatives' travel & accommodation is now much less than it was (despite rising prices) because of the number of representatives attending online. However, the cost of using the Large Meeting House and the catering is almost £8,000 so the £10,000 figure is still appropriate.

<sup>3</sup> Prices for residential meetings have risen hugely. The expected cost of the venue alone (no travel) in 2025 is around £55,000.

<sup>4</sup> This figure is based on the overall subsidy from BYM in 2017, with the expectation that it could be higher now, given rising venue costs.

by Friends at all four sessions. BYM may need to underwrite some degree of expense.

There are methods for estimating carbon costs and it may be valuable to use these on occasion.

### **Quaker Recognised Bodies (QRBs) and other groups who attend YM**

Clearer information and more support is needed so that QRBs and other groups know that they can ask to hold a special interest meeting or have a stall at the groups fair, and how to do that. The current process for doing these things is problematical and opaque.

Consideration should be given to whether in person special interest meetings during YM should now be reinstated (instead of or in addition to the online meetings held before YM).

### **Relationships between YM and MfS**

Once appropriate detailed planning has been done YM and MfS should merge to form a continuing YM, thereby strengthening the role of MfS as acting for YM between YMs. More details of this recommendation are in GRYYM's stage two report.

In the immediate future it would be beneficial if YM Agenda Committee and MfS Arrangements Group worked more closely together.

Representatives to MfS should be appointed on a rolling basis, ideally with around one third being replaced each time. It is not good to have a period when more than half of representatives are new. The principle of rolling appointments should also apply to representatives to a continuing YM, although for an open meeting the difficulties may be mitigated by the presence of seasoned Friends who are not representatives.

MfS should continue to experiment with how it takes its business and should make use of methods such as threshing and task groups in addition to spirit-led discernment. Preparation sessions should continue. Further consideration should be given to the possibility of open sessions.

### **Further review**

All changes will need to be reviewed, with a proposed timescale and method set out at the point that the change is adopted.

### **Conclusion**

GRYYM recommends that MfS considers the following recommendations, all of which could be implemented regardless of whether we move to have a continuing

YM. Where MfS agrees with the recommendations it should pass them to the body named in the table below for action.

Some of the recommendations would need acceptance by YM before being taken forward. GRYYM suggests these are sent to YM Agenda Committee so it can consider how best to progress these matters.

If MfS wishes to take forward any of the recommendations then it may also wish to forward its minute to Church Government Advisory Group, asking it to be ready to bring forward any necessary changes to the text of *Quaker faith & practice*.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Forward to whom?</b>
MfS continue experimenting with formats, preparation, open sessions etc.	MfS Arrangements Group
Work on community building	MfS Arrangements Group YM Agenda Committee
YMAC & MfS Arrangements Group work more closely together	MfS Arrangements Group YM Agenda Committee
Appoint MfS reps on a rolling basis	MfS Arrangements Group YM Agenda Committee
Change YMAC clerking arrangements	YM Agenda Committee
Open up process for contributing to YM	YM Agenda Committee
Make scheduling of residential events more flexible, dependent on agenda need	YM Agenda Committee
Use term 'residential YM' not YMG	YM Agenda Committee
Clarify processes for QRB participation at YM	YM Agenda Committee
More staff involvement in practical arrangements	YM Agenda Committee BYM Trustees
Possible dedicated staff team for large events	BYM Trustees
Create & maintain a rolling events calendar	BYM Trustees
Greater openness about cost	BYM Trustees
Ensure planning cycle works to support follow up from YM decisions	BYM Trustees

If there is to be a continuing YM then GRYYM recommends that MfS asks BYM Trustees to work on ways of supporting individual Friends with the cost of attending YM and on supporting Area Meetings with the cost of sending representatives to YM.

Ann Kerr & Carolyn Sansom

Co-Conveners of GRYYM

On behalf of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings



## Appendix 1

### Extract from GRYYM Terms of Reference

**Stage 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. 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 underrepresented 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

## **Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gathering and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM)**

### **Stage Two Final Report**

#### **A Continuing Yearly Meeting**

In receiving our report last October, Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) minuted “*We agree that this [i.e. a continuing Yearly Meeting] is the right way forward*” and that GRYYM should “*bring a detailed proposal to us for Yearly Meeting in session in 2024*”.

GRYYM’s proposal is that we move to a continuing Yearly Meeting (YM) i.e. that the whole yearly meeting, including representatives from each Area Meeting, meets four times each year. At the heart of this proposal is our belief that it will strengthen spirit-led discernment within our Religious Society.

Our current structures are far from perfect and in some ways they hold us back. There are too many interfaces and insufficient clarity about accountability, while at the same time communication is poor. Our corporate discernment both at MfS and YM is often deep and grounded but we may not be able to see tangible actions or changes following our decisions because they are separated from decisions about the allocation of resources. Discernment at MfS often needs to be repeated at YM and the annual nature of YM can make it difficult to follow through on decisions and minutes that are made. We need to make changes to improve these issues. By bringing both bodies together in a single continuing YM we can reduce duplication and increase accountability and participation.

#### **Centrality of discernment**

Through all stages of our work, GRYYM has been reminded of the centrality of spirit-led discernment to all our functions as a Religious Society. Friends have told us how much they value the experience of corporate discernment at YM. In a continuing YM we would have more opportunities for all Friends to come together and recognise where the spirit is leading us.

We know that the spirit may speak with the voice of anyone in the meeting and that is why we value openness, participation and diversity. Any one of us may be given words but we do not expect any single one of us to have them all. Practising discernment on the most important issues in open sessions means the spirit can communicate with us through different voices, perhaps making it easier for us to hear the meaning behind the words.

## **Learning and practising**

Friends have told GRYYM that YM is a place where they learn what Quaker discernment is and how to do it. More frequent YM sessions will help Friends to learn and practise.

## **Structure that empowers and enables**

The world is always changing, and so is our Religious Society. New Friends join us and bring their own insights into how power and responsibility should be shared. None of our structure is as it was in the early days and this is as it should be. Sections 6.01 and 7.01 of *Quaker faith and practice* show us how much has changed in 350 years. We need to be open to the spirit to create and recreate simple, understandable structures that empower and enable us to do the work that the spirit leads us to do.

## **Key issues GRYYM has considered**

### **(a) Accountability**

A recurring concern for some Friends is the extent to which BYM Trustees are accountable and to whom.

BYM Trustees are accountable to Yearly Meeting and this is unchanged in our proposal. Trustees have never been accountable to MfS (and legally they cannot be made accountable to MfS). Reports given by BYM Trustees to MfS are for information only. Lines of accountability in our current arrangements are not clear to all Friends and we need them to be simpler. Regular reporting by BYM Trustees to a continuing Yearly Meeting (in addition to the annual report session that already takes place) will allow for more frequent and meaningful dialogue with Trustees.

### **(b) Representation**

GRYYM recommends that representatives should be appointed to attend a continuing YM. The change proposed is not to do away with representatives, but to open up discernment and decision making to all Friends.

Some Friends are specifically concerned by the prospect of MfS no longer existing as BYM's standing representative body. If we are to judge the impact of this, we should ask what we mean by 'representation'. It seems so simple to have one Friend from each Area Meeting attending and making decisions together. Does that actually give us a representative body? Amongst other things, MfS has "*a part to play in developing a visionary and prophetic role for the whole Yearly Meeting and in fostering communication throughout the whole Yearly Meeting*" (*Quaker faith & practice* 7,02). Is MfS well equipped to do those things? Our questioning, listening and discernment has led GRYYM to the conclusion that the answer is no.

There was never a suggestion that MfS representatives were delegates from their Area Meeting. Quaker discernment doesn't work like that. The intention is that by bringing together Friends from all our Quaker communities, there is a breadth of experience that enables Sufferings to hear the uncomfortable truths sometimes needed to lead us to prophesy. Geographical diversity doesn't necessarily lead to a diversity of experience and we can have a group of fairly similar Friends: predominantly retired, professional, middle class and white. Our current system hampers our ability to hear the spirit speaking through the kinds of Friends not appointed as MfS representatives.

Some of the concern we have heard is about weakening the role of Area Meetings in our central decision making. As a standing representative body, MfS is not meant to represent Area Meetings but is meant to represent Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting. The use of Area Meetings as appointing bodies is a mechanism for that.

The proposal is that Area Meetings will continue to be able to send minutes to YM. YM Agenda Committee will develop ways to test those minutes to determine if they should be taken to a YM session for discernment or if they should be dealt with in some other way (e.g. whether they need to be sent somewhere for further threshing).

In any case, as above, GRYYM is clear that a continuing YM will need representatives from Area Meetings and representation should therefore continue.

One key role of appointed representatives is to bring continuity to the meeting. In the case of MfS, we have heard that this has not always worked as intended. Different Area Meetings manage the workload of the representative and alternate differently, and at any meeting of MfS there are a number of Friends present who are not fully aware of the history of particular items of business and who find it hard to contribute to the discernment.

Area Meetings need to use systems that work for them and their members, but if there is to be a continuing YM with Area Meeting representatives attending then we think these representatives should be appointed on the basis that they can attend the majority of meetings during their term of service.

### **(c) Communication across Britain Yearly Meeting**

A key role for MfS currently is to foster communication throughout the Yearly Meeting. In GRYYM's report to MfS in December 2022 we identified that this role is not done well, even though the Friends involved make a lot of effort (see <https://quaker.org.uk/documents/mfs-2022-12-agenda--papers-package> p22).

The communication that Friends want from MfS is not really about the passing on of information. There are many ways of communicating information that are more effective than sending a Friend from each Area Meeting to receive information at MfS, bring it back to and pass it on via those Friends who attend Area Meeting. The communication envisaged as coming through MfS is more than this. It is about trying

to bring us into a spiritual unity, a shared understanding of our community being led. The hope is of joining our disparate worshipping communities together into one, collectively offering our lives as vehicles of transformation.

MfS is not generally succeeding in this kind of communication either. We have heard that Friends feel that YM does this much better. GRYYM feels that a continuing YM would improve communication of this kind as it would give all Friends the chance to join shared worship and discernment more frequently, as well as offering informal opportunities to meet and share with Friends from other areas.

#### **(d) Agenda time**

There will be less agenda time overall if we move to four continuing YM sessions instead of four sessions of MfS plus one of YM. That need not translate into significantly less time for deep discernment. There will be less need for explaining what happened in one body and how it impacts on the other, and we can use more creative methods for preparation and for dealing with routine business in order to free up time. It will be for Agenda Committee to plan the sessions to allow time for consideration of important business. The starting point for the three shorter sessions is that they will last for a Saturday, but Agenda Committee could plan for slightly longer (e.g. by starting on Friday evening or extending into Sunday morning) if experience showed this was necessary.

#### **(e) Financial support**

We have also heard concerns about a lack of financial support, particularly for Area Meetings. We have not made any recommendations about how representatives to YM should be paid for. We agree that financial support must be considered carefully because it is essential that individual Friends and Area Meetings are not financially excluded from a continuing YM. BYM may need to contribute more than it does now to support attendance at YM. Likewise, not all individuals and Area Meetings are lacking in funds, and a pooling of resources could be possible. Our current arrangements for paying for MfS representatives are relatively recent (Area Meetings were once responsible for these expenses). We have also heard that the current financial support for attending YM is confusing to access. There are therefore positive opportunities for change and an appropriate group should be asked to look into this. GRYYM recommends that MfS asks BYM Trustees to take this forward.

#### **(f) Change**

GRYYM has heard from Friends who do not want changes to be made to the way things are. But change is all around us and it is affecting Quakers just as it affects everyone else. Societal changes mean that many Friends have less free time than was common in the recent past. The majority of Friends today are convinced, rather than having grown up within the Society, but our provision of learning about Quaker ways may not have caught up with that change.

Our tabular statement and reports from Meetings show us how our Religious Society is already in a state of change. Attendance at Quaker meetings for worship is falling. Attendance at meetings for worship for business is also falling. These trends, together with difficulties in appointing Friends to important service, are already weakening our ability to discern well at local level.

We can choose an option where we don't change our structures, but we cannot choose an option of no change. Throughout BYM Friends are looking prayerfully at how to simplify structures and make them work for their current needs. GRYYM has been asked to do this work on a yearly meeting scale. We have heard from Friends who want to see a structure that is simple, promotes diversity and participation, and responds more quickly to external events. We hope our proposal offers this and that it will 'release the energy in our corporate structures'.

We cannot know for sure if structural change will help. We can only trust our leadings. GRYYM has heard a call to live adventurously. We believe that a continuing YM would bring the following positive changes:

1. Spirit-led discernment: complex issues requiring discernment at national level can be well understood with Friends able to engage with them more than once. For example, an item could be threshed at one session, then considered again at another session a few months later.
2. Building community: all Friends will have the opportunity to come together four times a year. We expect that there will be a children, youth & families programme at all four YM sessions.
3. Diversity: all Friends will be able to be a part of the discernment for important issues affecting Quakers in Britain. There will be more chances for Friends with different perspectives to contribute to decision making.
4. Learning: there will be more opportunities for Friends to experience YM-wide discernment, which is an important part of our learning as Quakers.

## **How would a continuing Yearly Meeting work?**

The following is not a full list of everything that could happen but it is intended to give Friends a better idea of what GRYYM are suggesting.

1. Yearly Meeting in session would remain the final constitutional authority for Quakers in Britain. YM would retain all the powers that it currently has. As continuing YM it would hold sessions more than once per year.
2. YM would be responsible for setting the direction of the centrally managed work and ensuring that this work reflects the concerns of Quakers in Britain.
3. MfS would no longer meet as a separate body. Where MfS currently acts on behalf of YM between sessions, YM itself will take on this work. Examples include: hearing from BYM Trustees; receiving the annual report and accounts; giving guidance to BYM Trustees on important policy matters. Some of the work currently done by MfS would be done by other

committees including YM Agenda Committee and the central and standing committees (or any successor committees). Some work might be split, for example YM in session could make the entries in the Court & Prison Register while another suitable committee could uphold the Friends involved.

4. BYM Trustees would remain accountable and responsive to YM.
5. Continuing YM sessions would be open to all, just as Yearly Meeting is now.
6. Continuing YM would normally hold four sessions per year. In general, one session per year would be held over several days (as over the May Bank Holidays currently). The precise length of each session would be decided by YM Agenda Committee as part of its role in planning the agenda.
7. The option to hold a longer, residential-style session would still exist – this would generally happen no more than once every three years.
8. Continuing YM sessions would be blended.
9. Some continuing YM sessions would be held at different locations across the yearly meeting (not just Friends House).
10. There would be a single clerking team for all sessions of the continuing YM.
11. There would be a single YM Agenda Committee for all sessions of the continuing YM.
12. The new YM Agenda Committee would not be clerked by a member of the YM clerking team, although YM clerks would attend it.
13. The new YM Agenda Committee would focus on agenda planning. Another linked group, including staff, would focus on the practicalities for the events.
14. YM Agenda Committee would help Friends to prepare for YM sessions, by providing appropriate materials for individuals and meetings and/or by holding specific online preparation meetings before the sessions.
15. Area Meetings would be expected to send Friends as representatives to continuing YM, as would all those committees and meetings of Friends who currently send representatives to MfS. Other groups could be encouraged to send Friends. The 'sending' group would appoint these Friends, rather than YM having to do so. The length of representatives' terms should be sufficient to allow them to gain experience and confidence, although additional representative(s) could be appointed with shorter terms. Staggering terms of service to avoid a single large changeover would be helpful.
16. The appointment of AM and other meeting representatives would ensure adequate continuity from one session to the next; sending groups should aim to appoint Friends who expect to attend almost all continuing YM sessions.
17. Lack of financial resources should not stop Friends from attending continuing YM sessions. Likewise, they should not mean Area Meetings cannot send representatives. An appropriate mechanism of financial support for Friends and Area Meetings would therefore need to be created.

18. If YM 2024 agrees to these proposals then we recommend that new arrangements would begin with the rise of YM in May 2026. A full timetable for implementation would be brought to YM 2025.

## **Impact on other committees**

### **(a) YM Agenda Committee**

Much of the current business of MfS would transfer to the new continuing YM. The new YM Agenda Committee would discern which of that business would be done by YM in session. In this way the new YM Agenda Committee would also take over responsibility for the work currently done by the MfS Arrangements Group.

With a continuing YM, Area Meeting minutes that are currently addressed to MfS would be addressed to YM. YM Agenda Committee would develop ways to test those minutes to determine if they should be taken to a YM session for discernment or dealt with in some other way (e.g. by being sent to a committee that is already working on a similar issue for comment first). This way of working would be similar to how MfS Arrangements Group helps to prepare AM minutes to come to MfS in the current system.

### **(b) Group to Review Central Structures**

The Group to Review Central Structures (GRCS) was set up by BYM Trustees in response to YM 2023 minute 21. GRCS is looking primarily at central committees. Some of the business currently done by MfS might be suitable to be handed over to the central committees, but these committees may look very different in the future. GRCS is aware of GRYYM's proposals and if they are agreed then GRCS will incorporate them into its own proposals for change.

### **(c) BYM Trustees**

Some Friends are concerned that the move to a continuing YM will increase the power of BYM Trustees. BYM Trustees will still be accountable and responsive to YM, which would now meet four times a year, giving more opportunity for scrutiny and direction. None of the current functions of MfS will be given to BYM Trustees so the scope of their role would not increase.

## **Risks and mitigation**

All actions involve an element of risk. The proposed changes are aimed at the risks that are currently present. However, we must think carefully about the likely risks of change and put in place measures to mitigate those risks.

Since spirit-led discernment is of paramount importance, we want to maintain and strengthen our discernment. We need to pay particular attention to anything that risks having a negative impact on the quality of discernment. The following issues, some of which are already present in our current structure, need consideration:



<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likely underlying issues</b>	<b>Possible mitigations</b>
<p>Reduced attendance, particularly at shorter sessions (limited input from wider body of Friends; risk of reducing ‘buy in’ to decisions taken at YM)</p>	<p>Friends lack time. Friends have too many other commitments. Friends who are the single Quaker in their family feel they can’t commit the additional time. Friends don’t see the point. Cost is a barrier. More frequent YM sessions make YM feel less ‘special’ so Friends don’t prioritise attending.</p>	<p>Representatives appointed from AMs &amp; other meetings. Clear communication of the importance of YM. Agendas that Friends want to engage with &amp; that meet their needs. Annual timetable set out well in advance so Friends can plan. Appropriate financial support is planned. YM is accessible to all (e.g. Friends of all ages, Friends with disabilities, Friends with caring responsibilities).</p>
<p>Lack of continuity in attendance (things have to be repeated; decision making is inconsistent; Friends are frustrated)</p>	<p>Friends pick one or two sessions a year that are personally of interest or convenient</p>	<p>As above – representatives in particular will provide continuity. The impact of lack of continuity can be minimised by communications in advance and during a YM covering the background and previous discernment on a topic. YM will uphold Quaker discipline of trusting prior discernment. Discernment will not be re-opened just because different Friends are present.</p>
<p>Lobbying i.e. orchestrated attempts to sway the meeting, not based on discernment (reduced confidence in decisions; increased secularisation)</p>	<p>Friends with shared interests work together to achieve outcomes based on views formed in advance</p>	<p>Clear teaching of Quaker discipline so Friends understand the difference between preparing themselves and closing their hearts &amp; minds to change. Clear ways for Friends to raise concerns about the discipline in the meeting.</p>

		All Friends understand and are willing to play their part in securing good discipline at YM. Good eldering & clerking.
Friends are poorly prepared (decisions not based on best available information; reduced quality of discernment)	Friends lack time to read documents in advance. Friends don't see the need to prepare for YM.	Clear teaching on the importance of preparation. Easy to access documents in advance, including in a variety of formats. Meetings support Friends to prepare. Zoom preparation meetings in advance of sessions.

### Future reviews

Review should be built into any new arrangements. Friends should continue to be given regular opportunities to feedback on all aspects of YM. YM should ensure it has an appropriate mechanism in place for reviewing the new continuing YM system.

We have heard calls for BYM Trustees to be reviewed. They were last reviewed in 2021, having previously been reviewed in 2016 and 2011. YM may wish to look again at their remit and role once they have reported on their review of the central structures (expected to be in 2025).

### Next steps needed

GRYYM suggests that MfS endorses the proposal for a continuing YM, making any comments that it considers helpful, and sends the proposal to YM 2024 for further discernment. If YM 2024 agrees with the principles then it can set a process and timetable for implementation.

Ann Kerr & Carolyn Sansom  
Co-Conveners of GRYYM

On behalf of the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings

## **Area meeting minutes received**

### **Introduction**

Two area meetings have sent minutes following consideration of earlier reports from the Group to Review Yearly Meeting, Yearly Meeting Gatherings and Meeting for Sufferings (GRYYM) received at the October and December meetings of Meeting for Sufferings last year.

Meeting for Sufferings Arrangements Group has shared these minutes with GRYYM to aid their discernment in finalizing their recommendations. Representatives will want to read these minutes in conjunction with the GRYYM reports coming to this meeting (papers 13, 14, and 15).

In addition, it may help to note the following specific points:

- GRYYM recommends that Area Meetings should appoint representatives to a continuing Yearly Meeting. Reports from those representatives would help to connect Friends in their locality with what happens at Yearly Meeting. The presence of a committed core body of representatives would also help with continuity.
- GRYYM has not made any recommendations about how representatives to a continuing Yearly Meeting should be paid for. GRYYM accepts that this is an important issue, but it has not been able to do the detailed work required to propose a simple and equitable system. Meeting for Sufferings could note that this work needs to be done, and could ask BYM Trustees to take it forward.
- There is no proposal to transfer any of the current work of Meeting for Sufferings to BYM Trustees.

## **1) Central England Area Meeting**

### **2023.095 Meeting for Sufferings report**

Claire Bowman, our Meeting for Sufferings representative, spoke to a report about the Meeting for Sufferings held on 6-8 October 2023, the first in-person residential since the pandemic. Claire highlighted the changes being considered at Meeting for Sufferings that will affect membership of the Society of Friends. There is some feeling that new processes are needed to accommodate Friends who attend Meeting for Worship in different formats, such as online, rather than Local Meetings.

Claire also shared that Meeting for Sufferings is considering changes that will affect Meeting for Sufferings itself. There are concerns about diversity in representation at

Meeting for Sufferings and questions about whether combining Meeting for Sufferings with Yearly Meeting at several points throughout the year would work better.

Several Friends spoke strongly against these proposals and the detrimental effects they may have on the strength and vibrancy of the Society of Friends as well as the quality and spiritual nature of discernment. This reflected the feeling of the meeting overall. We ask the Area Meeting Clerks to write to Meeting for Sufferings to share these concerns, particularly around how they may affect spiritual discernment, and to ask for more detailed information about the thinking behind them.

## **2) Chilterns Area Meeting, 27 January 2024**

### **Minute 24.01.10 Meeting for Sufferings**

#### ii. Response to proposed changes to MfS

We thank Tony Philpott and Sheila Stevenson for their thoughtfully written draft minute, covering our concerns regarding the proposed changes to Meeting for Sufferings. We are aware that these concerns are shared with other Area Meetings, and with many Meeting for Sufferings representatives, as made clear in Sheila's report of the December meeting, and in the Area Meeting Clerks online discussion on 17th January.

With the changes noted in Meeting, we agree this minute and ask our clerk to forward it to the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings.

### **The future shape of Yearly Meeting – review of Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings.**

We have heard reports from our Meeting for Sufferings representatives about recent discussions of the future structure of the Society of Friends, in particular the proposal to replace Meeting for Sufferings with Continuing Yearly Meeting.

Chilterns Area Meeting has many serious concerns about these proposals, as follows.

1. There is great strength in the present system of having a representative and an alternate at Sufferings, between them providing a long-term perspective. They can consult Area Meeting and each other beforehand, then report back to area meeting after Sufferings. This is a well-tryed and effective system of communication. Area Meeting has greatly valued the excellent reports on Meeting for Sufferings from the current representative and alternate, and in the past from representatives. This reporting keeps Area Meeting in touch with Meeting for Sufferings and its work. Communication is vital, and we do not think

communication with a 'continuing yearly meeting' would be an adequate substitute for the Meeting for Sufferings report item on the Area Meeting's agenda.

2. There is a proposal that any representatives to the new body will be paid for by the area meeting, which will make them reluctant to send people. The present system of representatives being paid for centrally when they attend Sufferings works well.
3. Sufferings some years ago was reduced in size (from two representatives per area meeting to one) because it was found to be too big. The new proposals would make Continuing Yearly Meeting too big again.
4. At present there is control through the nominations process about who attends Sufferings. This is reinforced by the substantial body of advice to Area Meetings which is contained in Quaker Faith & Practice (7.07 in the 5th edition): this advice is specific to Meeting for Sufferings (not to Yearly Meeting) and illustrates the weight attached to Area Meeting representation. Area meetings choose suitable people (usually experienced members) who are then appointed by Yearly Meeting, or (if vacancies occur in between) by Sufferings. Paper MfS 2023 12 09 suggests, at 'working assumption' xi, that 'Area Meetings would be expected to send Friends to continuing YM as they currently are to YM (and as they currently do to MfS)'. But there are major differences: Area Meetings do not choose Friends to attend YM through a nominations process, informed by a body of advice comparable to what we find in Qf&P 7.07; and reporting back from YM to AMs, if it occurs at all, is not systematic as it is from MfS. Anyone can attend Yearly Meeting and in recent years this includes Attenders as well as Members, so there is an increased risk in the new proposals that an organised faction or even individuals could try to take over and change the nature of the Society. It also calls into question about who will be taking responsibility for decision making on behalf of the whole Society.
5. We highlighted the issue of the dominance of the South of England. Despite the suggestion that Continuing Yearly Meeting will not always be held at Friends House, this is our headquarters so to use it is cost-effective, and our national transport network centres on it. At present with Sufferings representatives being paid for centrally we get people from all over the country coming to London, so the South of England is not too dominant. Once area meetings have to pay, then they will be reluctant to fund people from a distance. We know that there is Zoom, but it is not the same, and in fact we were encouraged at the last residential Sufferings to attend in person.
6. There is the suggestion that the new system will lead to more and better 'spirit-led discernment'. This presumably is by increasing the time allocated to important and difficult items. We cannot understand how Continuing Yearly Meeting will improve 'spirit-led discernment' when there are no extra meetings and there are more people present. Sufferings already has ways of making extra time, e.g. by

holding Zoom sessions in advance of the main meeting and sending out papers for agreement in advance.

7. However hard they try to practise 'spirit-led discernment', Yearly Meeting can still get things wrong, as can MfS. Surely it is preferable, given human fallibility, to have more than one Meeting involved in the Society's deliberations and decision-making? Throughout Paper MfS 2023 12 09 we see no sign of the Review Group valuing the separate existence of MfS as our standing representative body, or recognising that for its continuing health the Society requires a certain balance between the Yearly Meeting and Area Meetings to be carefully maintained. Representation of Area Meetings (and some other Quaker entities) on MfS as our standing representative body is vital to maintaining a balance in our Quaker structures. We need both a Yearly Meeting open to all its members, and a Meeting for Sufferings with a defined and representative membership consisting largely of Friends who represent and report back to their Area Meetings.
8. There is also the suggestion that some matters presently allocated to Sufferings should be allocated to existing committees or a new body. These are presently being dealt with effectively by existing methods, and we feel it is not appropriate to pass important matters like the agreement of Quaker recognised bodies, or the discussion of area meetings minutes to other committees.
9. We are also concerned with the increased concentration – in the name of simplicity – of responsibility in the hands of a small number of people. We understand that as part of this process, some Meeting for sufferings work might be delegated to a small committee or to Trustees. There is a danger that much might be lost in this way.

Our conclusion is that it will be possible to keep all the strengths of the present system, but fulfil the criteria set out by Yearly Meeting in 2023, by some more minor changes to Sufferings, as follows.

- Keep with the proposal of a common clerking team and agenda-setting team for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting.
- Allow Area Meeting clerks to nominate extra people to attend Sufferings by writing to the Sufferings Clerk. This will increase diversity and allow interested people to attend but keep to the local nominations process.
- Hold a children and young person's Sufferings in parallel with the main Sufferings.