**Quakers in Yorkshire**

**Group to Reinvigorate and Simplify Structures and Processes (GRASP)**

**Minutes of meeting held on 24 August 2020 by Zoom**

**Present:** David Bunney (CY), Alison Clarke (York), Tim Herrick (S&B, Jim Ledwidge (BWY), Tracey Martin (Leeds), David Olver (C&K & Convenor), Rosie Roberts (co-opted to link with young people), Phyllis Wicks (P&H), Barbara Windle (QiY Trustees)

**We began our meeting with worship.**

**We agree the agenda for today.**

**1. Minutes**

The minutes of our meeting held on 21 July 2020 have been circulated.

**2. Responses to the pandemic lockdown**

We have received reports from area meeting representatives of how each AM has responded to the pandemic lockdown.

There has been a wide range of responses, driven by the strong desire to enable worshipping communities to continue to worship.

Most Local Meetings have used virtual meetings for worship, generally with the zoom platform. The rate of uptake has depended on the level of technical experience available. The near ubiquitous availability of smartphones, tablets and laptops has made it easier to arrange zoom meeting for worship and now, for some meetings, blended worship.

The advantage of virtual meetings for worship include: enabling geographically dispersed participation; multiple meetings in the week; and enabling participation by those who are unable to come to a physical meeting.

Virtual meetings have been used for many other purposes, such as poetry groups, all with the aim of cementing the community together. Children’s meetings have been run virtually in some meetings. Virtual meetings have been particularly successful with young people and attendance has gone up.

Meetings have started to grapple with how to continue Quaker witness which necessarily has taken a back-seat during the lock-down. Looking ahead there are issues as to how to do outreach and how to maintain Quaker networking. Zoom meetings are not being widely advertised and this may make it more difficult for new enquirers to find us.

Virtual business meetings have been successful, helped by the circulation of draft minutes. Some local meetings have held more, shorter, business meetings. Area Meetings have met using zoom.

Clerks have found virtual meetings to be challenging. Sensing the wishes of the meeting is more difficult. So discernment is different and there is a danger that the Quaker business method is diluted. Controversial issues seem to have been avoided by clerks.

Ways of using virtual meetings so as to maintain and enhance the Quaker business method could be a topic for GRASP to discuss more widely. York AM has used worship sharing as a way of dealing with the issue of the title “overseer”.

Re-opening of meeting houses is happening slowly. The local meeting needs to be confident that it can be done properly and sensitively to the needs of Friends who must self-isolate. Trustees need to be assured that all regulations and local health and safety measures are in place. The large number of old premises makes social distancing a real challenge.

A digital divide has emerged between Friends who are confident with new technology and Friends who do not have access to technology, or do not wish to use new technology. This has created a new diversity among Friends. Meetings are dealing with this diversity sensitively and are aware of the importance of maintaining and enhancing inclusive Quaker communities.

**3. Responses to the simplification consultation**

We have heard how Area Meetings are considering the simplification agenda. The rate of progress is very variable, partly due to the lock-down.

The difficulty of filling key roles has been a strong driver for considering simplification. Friends seem more willing to be part of a team, rather than take on the role alone. The importance of the nominations process has been emphasised. There could also be value in providing mentoring for role holders. We might be able to offer a range of models which nominations committees could consider so as to help meetings fill roles.

One of the remits of GRASP is to encourage cross-area meeting collaboration and simplification. We agree to develop ideas and models which would help area meetings consider how to cooperate. The management of change is very important, but first there needs to be the desire for change.

**4. QiY wide virtual meetings**

We have discussed the value of arranging QiY wide virtual meetings to encourage collaboration and cooperation on subjects which are within the remit of GRASP.

Topics might include: nominations; essential policies for AMs; methods of holding virtual meetings; and twinning, or partnerships, between meetings.

We are aiming to address Yorkshire wide issues for role holders. We have reminded ourselves that we will have the resources of a Local Development Worker in the future.

We have reassured ourselves that it does not matter if there is an overlap with courses provided by Woodbrooke.

We agree to try out a virtual meeting on nominations for those on Nominations Committees and anyone interested in the nominations process. This would be to share ideas and could include sharing solution to problems.

We ask Jim and Rosie to think about how to organise the virtual meeting.

**5. Roles in Area Meetings**

We have received an updated report on the Roles in Area Meetings. We are aware that the data is best regarded as a ‘snap-shot’ of the types of roles which AM Nominations Committees need to fill. It will change with time.

The data shows that there is a total of 399 unique roles plus 249 Elders and Overseers. The 399 roles mean an average of 57 roles per AM, varying between 44 and 74 roles. These totals are not proportional to the difference in size of the AM membership. The larger AMs have more Friends potentially available to fill roles.

**6. Date of next meeting**

We agree to meet next by Zoom on Monday 5 October 2020 from 6.30pm to 8.30pm.

David Olver

24 August 2020