**Quakers in Yorkshire**

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

**Minutes of meeting held on 24 May 2021 by Zoom**

**Present:** David Bunney (CY), Alison Clarke (York), Tim Herrick (S&B), Jim Ledwidge (BWY), David Olver (C&K & Convenor), Rosie Roberts (co-opted to link with young people), Barbara Windle (co-opted).

**We began our meeting with worship.**

**1. Minutes**

The minutes of our meeting held on 29 March 2021 have been circulated.

**2. Membership**

We record that Tracey Martin (Leeds) and Phyllis Wicks (Pickering & Hull) have been released from serving on this group. We thank them for their contributions to the work of GRASP and for effectively representing their area meetings.

**3. QiY quarterly meeting – Saturday 17 April 2021**

We receive minute QiY 21/04/11 “Final report from GRASP” from the QiY quarterly meeting on 17 April 2021. The session consisted of a presentation by David Olver and then discussion in break-out groups. There was limited time, but a worthwhile opportunity for Friends to confirm that our GRASP report has been well received.

**4. Local Development Worker / Youth Development Worker / Leeds hub**

We have had an update on:

(a) BYM Leeds Hub. This successfully opened on 5 May 2021 at Carlton Hill Meeting House and will be the BYM staff hub for the north of England.

(b) Yorkshire Youth Development Worker. BYM has re-appointed Lee Lester for a further year. This follows the decision of QiY Trustees and confirmed by QiY on 17 April to transfer £25,000 from the residue of the Adult School Union funds to BYM, who have allocated matched funding. This will enable the work to cover all of QiY. A Memorandum of Understanding between BYM and QiY has been agreed. The BYM fund-raising team is working with Yorkshire Friends in the hope of raising further funds in the next two years so that the work can continue.

(c) Yorkshire Local Development Worker. BYM has appointed Bridget Holtom to be the Yorkshire Local Development Worker. She started work at the beginning of the month, with the task of understanding Yorkshire Quakerism. She will initially be working largely remotely, but then based at Carlton Hill. She is part of a national team of seven local development workers.

**5. GRASP report – how being received and considered**

We have heard how the GRASP report is being taken forward in area meetings. AM minutes have been circulated and are attached to these minutes.

All AMs have welcomed the report and considered how to respond. They are taking our recommendations forward in ways that are appropriate to their circumstances.

**6. Review of achievements of GRASP**

We have received a paper prepared by David Olver reviewing the achievements of GRASP.

We were set up following the stimulating session at QiY at Doncaster in April 2019 where Friends were inspired to call for action on how to reinvigorate and simplify. The coronavirus pandemic delayed the work and caused a major upset to the way of conducting worship and business. However, there was a positive outcome as the lockdowns showed that change was possible to our cherished ways of doing things. The final report of GRASP was published in February 2021. It makes recommendations in five subjects: (1) nominations. (2) local meetings. (3) area meetings. (4) AM trustees. (5) sharing between meetings.

GRASP is not a decision-making body and it is now up to area meetings and local meetings to take our recommendations forward.

We hope we have achieved the following:

1. Developed a short summary of the core of Quakerism as the fundamental of all the work of GRASP.
2. Provided encouragement to consider change positively.
3. Collected data to justify the need for change.
4. Held a Nominations Workshop and produced a Nominations Video for use in QiY and beyond entitled “Willing and Able”.
5. Facilitated sharing of best practice in the pandemic.
6. Advised BYM on the Staff Hub in Leeds and Yorkshire Local Development worker.
7. Encouraged local meetings to consider their own approach to reinvigoration and simplification.
8. Encouraged area meetings and AM Trustees to simplify.
9. Promoted sharing, cooperation and collaboration between meetings as way to reduce number of roles and burden on meetings and individuals.
10. Published our final report on Reinvigoration and Simplification with structured recommendations and backed up by data.
11. Interacted with the national Simpler Meetings project.
12. Shown that QiY can be a useful means of collaboration between the seven AMs.
13. Stimulated initiatives to reinvigorate and simplify Yorkshire Quakerism in local and area meetings. This has been done through publishing, advising, assisting and promoting good practice.

There is much that remains for local and area meetings to do. Current structures can be made to work but are not-really fit-for-purpose in the twenty-first century. There is general acceptance that change is an essential sign that we are alive. Some suggestions on what local and area meetings might do are:

1. Need to move from consideration of GRASP recommendations to action.
2. Local Meetings need confidence to look outward through witness in the community so as to help increase numbers worshipping with us.
3. Meetings, of all sizes, need ways of being supported to reduce the administrative burden.
4. The management and upkeep of meeting houses (and other properties) need simplifying.
5. Inter-AM dialogue needs promoting.
6. Simplification of the area meeting structure in Yorkshire needs taking forward, with even consideration of one group of trustees for all Yorkshire area meetings.
7. Consideration of using professionals for subjects such as finance and properties where some meetings already have positive experiences.
8. More Yorkshire-wide collaboration for activities such as registering officers, prison visitors/chaplains, safeguarding, racial justice.

We encourage Friends to embrace the GRASP report postscript: “Quakers have a way that is quite distinctive in the world. We need to be more widely known and to reverse the current decline in numbers by reinvigorating and diversifying our community. Simpler structures are part of the process of freeing the spirit in our meetings and ourselves”.

**7. Thanks**

The group is indebted to David Olver for the quietly effective way he has co-ordinated and led us and for the huge amount of background work provided between meetings. This has enabled us to accomplish far more than could otherwise have been the case and we are deeply appreciative of his contribution to our work.

**8. Final minute**

GRASP has completed the task it was set up to do and now recommends to Quakers in Yorkshire that it be formally laid-down and any on-going recommendations for action transferred to QiY Trustees and appropriate QiY officers and committees.

In particular we recommend that area meetings are helped to simplify by:

* creating a database of role-holders across QiY.
* encouraging coordination of safeguarding issues, prison chaplains, registering officers and other roles which are not confined to any one area meeting.
* holding regular virtual meetings to share best practice for nominations committees.
* finding ways of encouraging Friends to share change across Quakers in Yorkshire.

We ask QiY Trustees to consider setting up a method of enabling regular coordination between AMs.

We have found the interaction with local Friends and the compilation of the final report to be immensely rewarding. We have felt upheld by Yorkshire Friends. We hope that our efforts will lead to simplification of our structures and processes and hence reinvigoration of Quakerism in Yorkshire.

David Olver

24 May 2021