**Consultation with Wales, Scotland and London**

1. **Notes from phone conversation with Lesley Richards, 14.6.23**

Wales

Their process began in 2019 and is known as *Symud Ymlaen – Moving Forward*

From the first meeting it was clear they needed a charity that wasn’t either AM or GM – there are 4 AMs (one straddles the border), and Crynwyr Cymru - Quakers in Wales (CCQW), which though it covers the whole nation is effectively equivalent to an AM, i.e. not ‘above’ them in a vertical or hierarchical structure. So they are dealing with 5 co-equal bodies, all of which remain in their new model: 4xAMs + CCQW = new CIO.

They reached agreement on this in Autumn 2022. They have drawn up a new constitution which has been reviewed by Quakers with appropriate knowledge and has now been sent for external legal advice. BYM has agreed to pay these additional legal fees in the hope/expectation that the resulting document might become a template for other meetings going a similar route in future.

They are also currently working on policy documents which should be ready by the end of the year. They hope these may also be made available for others to use as a model. 10 of a potential 15-19 policies are complete, and they are aiming for the rest to be done by the end of the year, and for the new CIO to come into existence on 1/1/24.

[SY2 (symudymlaen2.org)](https://www.symudymlaen2.org/) has graphic illustration of their process and documentation including draft constitution and MoUs for both general relationships and property management.

[Symud Ymlaen – Cardiff Quakers](https://cardiffquakers.com/symud-ymlaen/) also has visual depiction of the new arrangements, plus videos of how transitional trusteeship might work and ‘An everyday tale of the acronyms’.

Scotland

4 AMs + General Meeting for Scotland

Their process dates back to abut 2014. In 2018 they discussed becoming a single charity; the idea was rejected, but didn’t go away. They returned to it in 2021.

There have been various incarnations of committee. Options for Scotland 1 had 2 reps from each AM but didn’t include GM for Scotland, had a lot of difficulty working together and produced a report that made a number of recommendations but didn’t really address structural change. Options for Scotland 2 has representation from GM but one AM has had difficulty.

Scottish Friends have now reached unity on the model of a single body for Scotland, not just a single charity, i.e. laying down current AMs. The working group is drawing up a timeline for what needs doing, and are mapping out ways of building community without having AMs, e.g. building on things that are already happening such as intervisitation between 3 meetings in the borders area or the way Inverness meeting holds together scattered small groups in Caithness.

[Options for Scotland 2023 | Quakers in Scotland (quakerscotland.org)](https://www.quakerscotland.org/general-meeting/options-scotland) contains the working group’s report which includes table of pros and cons of different models. Also background minutes and information about process and draft MoUs, timeline, etc.

1. **Notes from phone conversation with Helen Drewery, 16.6.23**

London

7 AMs, London Quakers, and London Quaker Property Trust (LQPT).

Process of looking at *Pan-London Governance* has been underway since 2018. Initially an informal group looked at options. They brought a paper to London Quakers in 2019 giving options with pros and cons. Initially the idea of a single AM for London felt too radical, but widespread use of Zoom since the pandemic has changed the impact of cross-London travel.

Their first consultation envisaged a single charitable body, with continuing AM bodies and LQPT remaining separate due to the complexity of properties and related financial issues. Feedback asked questions like ‘How will we hold the trustees to account with 7 AMs to report to and consult, and no single body to stop them “running away with power”?’ or ‘Who’s going to help and support the trustees – how can they go to 7 bodies every time they need support in discernment?’ or ‘This doesn’t actually seem to simplify things very much – we’d still have to appoint trustees to LQPT, and LQPT’s resources wouldn’t be available to the charity.’

Eventually Friends were led to the single charity model, one Friends saying “I am persuaded by its grand simplicity.” There would be one AM, and Friends could also work in smaller Clusters (which might or might not be based on the existing AM groupings) for more local community-building, witness, mutual support, etc. They have now issued all meetings with an Invitation to Commit, see link below for documentation. There may be one or two AMs which do not agree, and this has been allowed for.

The proposal is to merge all 9 charities. Initially HD thought they would need to do this in one fell-swoop which would be extremely complex, but they have come to see that they could create a new charity by initially merging a few meetings and then folding other bodies in as and when they are ready.

There is a sense of the need to move quickly now – some AMs will ‘fall over’ if something doesn’t change soon.

An external Change Manager (a consultancy firm called Practical Governance) was appointed to help with part of the process. A mixed blessing, as they didn’t quite ‘get’ Quakers, even though they were using a model of ‘sociocracy’ which originated in Quaker understanding. However, they did provide some very helpful ideas, eg. The phase implementation mentioned above.

Throughout the process, Zoom has made a big difference. They recognise the need to invest in technology and encourage creative ways of including the less technically-minded.

It’s important to help people understand that talking about uniting/merging is not just about business and finance. It’s about how we do lots of other things – weddings, eldership/pastoral care, enabling age cohorts to meet, , chaplaincy, training and support, safeguarding, etc. etc.

[PLG | London Quakers](https://londonquakers.org.uk/pan-london-governance/) for Invitation to Commit and all supporting papers, plus previous consultation papers.

1. **Some practical insights from the above**

* Don’t try to skimp on consultation and engagement for the sake of getting things through. Remember the importance of everyone being actively included at each stage, even though you suspect many may not be interested in ‘boring’ governance matters. Allow the process to take the time it genuinely needs, but on the other hand you need to keep a sense of impetus and not let people drag their heels!
* When you send consultation documents, reports, minutes, documents to meetings, be **REALLY** clear about what you want back from them. E.g. Do you want a formal minute agreeing something, or would notes from a discussion be acceptable?
* Be mindful of potential dynamics between larger/urban/more self-sufficient meetings and smaller/rural/struggling meetings
* Likewise, be mindful of hearing from the quieter spoken, not only the louder/more vocal people
* It was helpful to set up an online discussion forum for all the clerks involved, to share insights and experiences
* Likewise (at a slightly later stage) for treasurers
* Consider the role of your Local Development Worker in any process, and any other staff whose work might be impacted
* Pay attention to how you communicate, in person and online.
* Plan for electronic communication, both for the working group itself (what document platform to use? How to track versions of documents? How to track electronic conversation? Etc) and for comms with meetings (a dedicated webpage?) Is there someone who can do this well and might make it their contribution? E.g. Note Welsh group’s use of story, cartoons, videos, etc. Symud Ymlain has simple, clear, easily navigated website.
* Consider finance and budget for the process as well as for any resulting plan
* Consider personnel, capacity and resources
* Wales and Scotland appointed an external working group clerk (Lesley in both cases) – there was value in having somebody as clerk who had nothing vested in any particular outcome. Lesley felt it right to invest a lot of time in visiting Friends and meetings and her role included an element of consultancy/leadership.
* London chose an internal clerk (Helen D), who felt she had to tread a bit more carefully in order to be/be seen as impartial, but there were advantages to being an insider
* Start work early on to create a register of ownership of properties, especially any (disused) burial grounds. In Wales one person has undertaken this. It has been a very long-drawn out process and you don’t want it to hold things up at the point you’re drawing up legal documents.

HR 19.06.23