**Quakers in Yorkshire**

**Simplifying Functions – Background and Information**

**May 2023**

This is a summary of the background to the consideration of simplification in Yorkshire and elsewhere in the yearly meeting.

**Yorkshire**

QiY established GRASP (Group to Reinvigorate and Simplify Structures and Processes) in autumn 2019. This was in response to a talk by Paul Parker at QiY in Doncaster in April 2019. GRASP published an interim report and consultation in early 2020 and the final report in February 2021. All the papers are on the website at <https://quakersinyorkshire.org.uk/grasp/>. The GRASP report emphasises that simplification should be considered as a means of re-invigorating Quakerism in Yorkshire.

Since 2020, local meetings, area meetings and AM Trustees have been considering the GRASP recommendations. The speed of consideration has varied according to local drivers. Also, the COVID pandemic and associated lock-downs slowed down things down. But the lock-downs showed that fundamental changes in the way we work (e.g. zoom) can be implemented quickly if needed.

A meeting of the clerks of the seven AM Trustees in QiY was held on 18 October 2022 and produced the recommendations leading up to this meeting. There was a range of views expressed including that merging charitable functions might not lead to much simplification and greater collaboration might be better.

**Britain Yearly Meeting**

BYM Trustees started the consideration of simplification about eight years ago. This was due to the feeling that the centrally managed work was too complex and many Friends found it challenging to connect with the work. Part of the response was the development of what are now called Local Development Workers. At yearly meting level the responses included:

* introducing the short statement that we should be “A Simple Church, supported by a Simple Charity”;
* simplifying its own committee structure by reducing the number of committees and the size of membership;
* sponsoring a time-limited project on Simplification (which employed a person for a year). This proved very successful and stimulated a lot of interest throughout the yearly meeting.

BYM Trustees joined QiY at our meeting in Leeds in January 2023. They led an interactive session on simplification. There are notes on the QiY website (<https://quakersinyorkshire.org.uk/qms-2023/>).

Yearly Meeting held from 28 April to 1 May 2023 had sessions on simplification. Minute 17 is reproduced in the appendix to this paper.

**Wales**

Welsh Friends have been considering simplification for longer than anyone else. They were collectively known as Meeting of Friends in Wales. After considerable discussions they decided to merge the charitable functions of the 4 AMs into one charity (CIO) but retain the area meetings. Meeting for Sufferings approved the proposal on 4 March 2023 and also a change in name to Quakers in Wales. There is a complication in that one of the four area meetings (Southern Marches) straddles the border of Wales and England. But charity law is common across England and Wales so legally this is no problem.

**London**

London Friends have also been considering simplification for some time. They had a Pan-London Planning Group which had four representatives from each of the 7 AMs in the London region. This group produced proposals in Spring 2022 which recommended merging the 7 area meetings into one charity and one area meeting. The proposals went for consultation with each AM and I gather some were in favour and some had hesitations. The discussions continue.

**Scotland**

Scottish Friends started later than others, probably because the General Meeting for Scotland already acts as a unifying and coordinating body. For instance, they are responsible for the Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer which is part funded by BYM. The 4 AMs in Scotland are now considering proposals to form one charity - similar to Welsh Friends .

**Other parts of England**

Groups of AMs elsewhere in England are at various stages in considering whether merging, or other forms of simplification might be right for them. This includes the group of AMs in South Lancashire and Cheshire (Manchester & Warrington, Hardshaw & Isle of Mann, East Cheshire, Wirral & Chester). Also those in Cumbria and the north east.

**Appendix 1 Minute 17 of Yearly Meeting, held 29 April 2023:**

**Releasing Energy and Revitalising Quaker Communities**

We have heard ministry about changes in our ways of working that have been planned over years, including Symud Ymlaen, the changes in organisation in Wales and the Southern Marches to release Friends’ energy to follow our leadings. We have heard too about changes made quickly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We recognise a need, now, to discern what change was just for that time, and what we will carry forward with us.

Change is inevitable. How we respond to change will determine whether our meetings are as full of vitality and welcome as we want them to be, and how we move forward gyda’n gilydd - together, as a community. We need now to be intentional about change, supported by our Quaker disciplines. We are led to work in new ways that are more inclusive and sustainable into the future. We recognise that inclusion means looking at a web of different needs and different gifts, continually listening and improving.

When we serve our meetings in a committee, or by serving coffee in a meeting house, we are doing the work before us; but we are also building community by working together. Working together is a form of Quaker worship and a way in which we can come to know each other in the things that are eternal.

We do need to discern which jobs and committees are still needed. Simpler structures could release energy for following the leadings of the spirit. It can help to think about the actions that are needed, to see what structures best support them. Let us bring creativity to our consideration of governance. Let us turn to a power greater than ourselves that will enable us to ground our work in deep spirituality, work joyfully, and reduce the risk of dutiful Friends becoming burnt out. Working more collaboratively and sharing our learning can enable us to reduce the overall burden of work. Simplifying our structures will enable us to share the gift of our worship and witness more expansively.

We are grateful for all the work that is done on our behalf. Each of us will have times and places where we are actively working, and others where our role is to uphold the Friends doing the work, trusting that they are listening to the leadings of the spirit. All of us must remember to breathe, to give space for the spirit to move.

**Appendix 2 Data on the AMs in QiY**

**The seven AMs in QiY**

The seven AMs comprising QiY are listed below with data on membership (from the Tabular Statement) and meetings.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Area Meeting | Members  (end 2021) | Members  (end 2022) | No of Meetings | No of Meeting Houses | of which listed. |
| Brighouse West Yorkshire | 143 | 137 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| Central Yorkshire | 116 | 115 | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| Craven & Keighley | 117 | 114 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Leeds | 176 | 173 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| Pickering and Hull | 157 | 153 | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| Sheffield and Balby | 214 | 214 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| York | 418 | 418 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Totals** | **1341** | **1259** | **38** | **32** | **12** |

The QiY membership is about 11% of that of the whole of BYM.

Central Yorkshire is the only AM not registered with the Charity Commission (due to its annual turn-over being below £100K so is still an ‘excepted charity’).

The income and expenditure from the published accounts on the charity commission website are below. 2019 has been chosen so as not to have distortions created by the Covid pandemic.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Registered name** | **Income (2019)** | **Expenditure (2019)** | **Total funds (2019)** |
| Brighouse West Yorkshire Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain | £82k | £117k | £3.188m |
| Central Yorkshire |  |  | *Excepted charity* |
| Craven & Keighley Area Quaker Meeting | £105k | £100k | £488k (excludes buildings) |
| Leeds Area Quaker Meeting | £245k | £286k | £4.761m |
| Pickering and Hull Area Quaker Meeting | £364k | £335k | £1.55m (estimate as uses Receipts and Payments method of reporting) |
| Sheffield and Balby Area Quaker Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends | £216k | £232k | £1.300m |
| York Area Quaker Meeting | £431k | £328k | £6.516m |
|  |  |  |  |
| Quakers in Yorkshire | £68k | £73k | £917k |

**Quakers in Yorkshire**

Quakers in Yorkshire is defined as a regional gathering in BYM (Qf&p chapter 5). Regional gatherings are not part of the administrative structure of BYM and exist because the constituent area meetings wish to make use of regional resources. QiY is a registered and is answerable collectively to the seven AMs. QiY provides various pan-Yorkshire services (particularly for young people), administers various regional funds, makes appointments to various bodies and is the responsible body for Bootham and The Mount Schools.

*The area Meetings is the primary unit for church affairs in Britain Yearly Meeting* (Qf&p 4.02). Thus the seven AMs can decide how they wish to govern themselves – within the constraints imposed by yearly meeting (as specified in Qf&p).