**Quakers in Yorkshire**

**Simplifying Charitable Functions Group**

**Notes on meeting held on 26 June 2023 by zoom**

**Present:** David Bower (Central Yorkshire AM), Erica Cadbury (Craven & Keighley AM), Deryck Hillas (Brighouse West Yorkshire AM), Ann Hindley (Sheffield & Balby AM), David Olver (QiY Trustees - Convenor), Helen Rowlands (Pickering & Hull AM), Martina Weitsch (York AM).

**Prevented:** .Rosie Darwood (Leeds AM).

We opened with a period of worship.

**1. Membership**

We are glad to hear that Leeds AM has appointed Rosie Darwood to this group.

**2. Papers received**

Noted that members have circulated the following papers – as agreed at our last meeting:

* Mapping Trustee Responsibilities and Other Tasks done by AMs in terms of which can be done from anywhere and which need local input (Martina).
* Option of 3 AMs or 2 AMs (Erica)
* Options analysis of a single charity (Anne and David B)
* Simplifying Functions – Property (David O)
* Notes on progress in Wales, Scotland and London (Helen)

**3. Issues discussed**

We had a general discussion of the papers and the issues raised for Yorkshire. Below is a short summary of the main themes.

**Wales, Scotland, London**

* Wales is the furthest along the path, having got approval from Meeting for Sufferings and active support of BYM. They are now in the implementation phase, including taking legal advice.
* Wales has separated AMs and charitable functions, whereas the London proposals consider them together.
* Not all AMs in London and Scotland have so far completely embraced proposals for one body, but there is probably sufficient agreement to proceed.
* The Scottish option papers are impressively thorough and proposals are approached from a spiritual perspective.
* London has adopted a model which can be evolutionary – “if not right now, might be in the future”.
* London already has the centuries old experience of centralised management of property (which has advantages but also leads to local tensions).
* The importance of good consultation and involving everyone is important.

**Yorkshire wide body**

* Yorkshire might seem to be a geographically large area, but there are relatively good transport links. Noted that North Yorkshire County Council stretches from Bentham in the west to Scarborough in the east.
* There is an inherited feeling of belonging across Yorkshire which is probably why we have retained one of the few regional gatherings in the yearly meeting.
* Merging charities with the same objectives is encouraged by the Charity Commission.

**Potential for 3 or 2 area meetings**

* The study shows that there could be naturally be 3 AMs composed of (1) Brighouse West Yorkshire + Craven & Keighley + Leeds; (2) Central Yorkshire + Sheffield & Balby; (3) Pickering & Hull + York. These give realistic and manageable numbers of members and meeting houses.
* This would solve our problem of too many relatively small AMs.
* But is it the lesser option? Is there logic in going for one charity?

**Functions**

Finance: There have been moves in a number of AMs to simplify financial book-keeping and accounting. Pickering & Hull AM is in the 2nd year of a unified accounting system and this has made life much easier. Brighouse West Yorkshire AM employ a book-keeper. Craven & Keighley AM have found it easy to move over to online accounting (using Quick Books which a number of other AMs also use). Sheffield & Balby AM have also adopted online accounting. York AM is considering the Zero accounting package.

Property: AM Trustees spend a lot of time dealing with property issues. Particularly challenging are un-attached burial grounds. There is clear scope for sharing experiences but local knowledge and immediate access is invaluable. More professional support would be useful – but at a cost. Local premises committees are always needed.

Safeguarding: Trustees in each AM have a legal obligation over safeguarding, but it ought to be possible to set up access to a Yorkshire wide professional service.

**Issues with current structure**

* Current boundaries of our AMs are historic and now too small.
* There is an increasing difficulty in filling key roles – even in the larger AMs.
* Doing nothing is not an option.
* We should grasp the nettle and put forward options which include a full merger.
* We have about 70 trustees across QiY which is a high number for 1259 members.
* The current size of AMs make it difficult to envisage using professionals for some tasks (or employing staff).
* There often seems to be a tension between levels in our structures, e.g. between London and us. or between area meetings and local Friends.

**Where next?**

* Trust is crucial moving forward.
* This group is only putting forward options. It is area meetings who need to discern what happens, but this also implies having the full support of the constituent local meetings.
* Trusteeship can be rewarding and satisfying and there ought to be enough Friends across Yorkshire happy to be trustees of a reduced number of chartable bodies.
* We need to be positive and talk about challenges not problems.
* We need to go back to basics and affirm that all the charitable functions are there to support Quaker worship and witness.
* We agree to invite Lesley Richards to join with us. She may be able to help us see the way forward.

**4. Date of next meeting**

Monday 31 July, 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm by Zoom

David Olver

26 June 2023