

Keeping the wheels turning: Quaker governance in Yorkshire

December 2023

Contents:

Who are we talking about?

What are the problems we are trying to solve?

Core questions

Working group's process and conclusions

Recommendation

1. Who are we talking about?



Current Area Meetings (AMs):

- ❖ Brighouse West Yorkshire (dark red)
- ❖ Central Yorkshire (dark green)
- ❖ Craven & Keighley (olive green)
- ❖ Leeds (purple)
- ❖ Pickering & Hull (blue)
- ❖ Sheffield & Balby (mustard)
- ❖ York (orangey red)

Quakers in Yorkshire (QiY) encompasses these 7 AMs.

Grey markers: Meetings geographically in Yorkshire but are not part of Quakers in Yorkshire; their connections are northwards towards Teesside.

2. What are the problems we are trying to solve?

- Changes in the world around us impact what we need to do, how we do it, and the overall volume of administration, e.g. changes in charity law and regulation, other regulatory changes, increased awareness of issues such as safeguarding, impact of the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Numerical decline means fewer potential members and attenders available to fill roles;
- All our AMs have difficulty nominating and appointing Friends to serve, particularly as trustees;
- The responsibilities and workload of trustees and clerks are particularly high and increasingly require specialist knowledge;
- There is a lot of duplication of effort between AMs;
- At least one AM is at serious risk of collapse;
- Across Yorkshire, we 'guesstimate' there are currently some 330 'Quaker charity' roles to be appointed by area meetings, including trustees, clerks, treasurers, nominations, property, safeguarding, data and websites. These are in addition to 'Quaker body' roles such as eldership, pastoral care, work with children and young people, witness work and projects;
- Declining numbers also result in declining income;
- Many meetings feel they have to put a lot of resources into maintaining property which may divert us from other Quaker witness.

3. Core questions:

What does love require of us in this situation?

Can/should we simplify and streamline our organisation and structures so as to release more Friends' time and energy for upholding our meetings' worship, community life and witness in the wider world?

If so, how?

4. Working group's process and conclusions

A group of one representative from each of the 7 AMs was gathered under the convenorship of Quakers in Yorkshire. Some of us are Trustees, some are not but have other roles in our respective AMs. We refer to ourselves in this context as the 'Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group'.

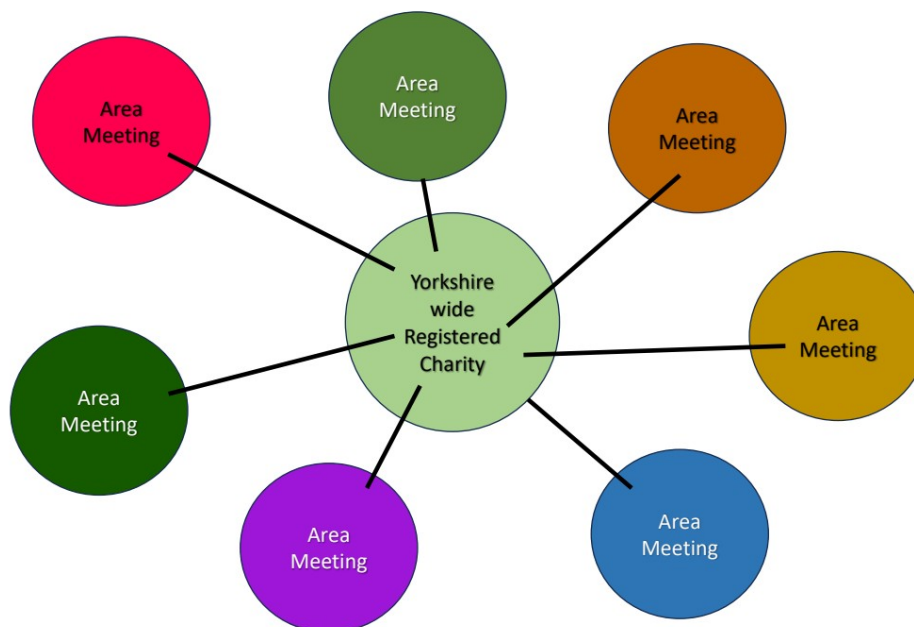
The Yorkshire Governance Group does not think our current situation is sustainable. We have heard a sense of urgency about the need for change from most of our AMs.

Building on the previous GRASP report, we explored a number of possible ways forward (see Supplementary paper).

We have found it helpful to distinguish between times when we function as *Quaker charities*, (operating under charity law, with trustees holding public responsibility on behalf of the meeting) and times when we operate as *Quaker bodies* (discerning what is needed to support our life as Friends). In both cases we would expect Friends to use Quaker business method as a basis for discernment, and to be guided by *Quaker faith & practice* or its successor book of discipline.

5. Recommendation

The working group recommends that Friends in Yorkshire work towards the formation of a **single registered charity covering all Quaker life and work in Yorkshire** and that we **retain Area Meetings as purely Quaker bodies not having separate legal status.**



Key features:

- One Yorkshire-wide registered charity;
- Around 14 trustees, responsible for trustee functions of finance, property, safeguarding, employment, compliance (risk management, data protection, health & safety, etc.) and public accountability;
- Trustees would be appointed, supported and held to account by a gathering open to all Yorkshire Friends;
- Due to the scale and nature of the operation, paid professional support and advice would be needed for each area of responsibility as appropriate;
- Area Meetings, Local Meetings and all events and projects would use policies and procedures approved by trustees. A Memorandum of Understanding would be drawn up with each meeting, committee or project, setting out who does what in each situation. Trustees could assign one of their number to link to each meeting, committee or project to ensure communication and mutual understanding;
- There would be a unified budgeting and accounting process. We assume it would be possible to retain existing Restricted Funds and there would be a process to negotiate budgets and allocation of funds for each meeting or project. Major projects would need to be proposed to and agreed by trustees;
- There could be unified management of property with the method to be worked out so as to give the right balance between the needs of local meetings and effective management of property assets;

- **Area Meetings**, operating as Quaker bodies **without separate legal status**, would be responsible for:
 - Appointment of Elders/Pastoral Carers, Chaplains, and other key roles which relate to their particular area.
 - membership processes and records.
 - gathering for worship and discernment, e.g., testing leadings for particular witness, and support for particular witness.
 - gathering for spiritual nurture, learning, outreach etc.
- Retaining the current AMs does not preclude future mergers.

In technical terms, it would be possible either to form a completely new registered charity, or to amend the existing Quakers in Yorkshire governing document.

We recognise that there is an enormous amount of work to be done to make this vision a reality. There will be many details to work out if Area Meetings agree in principle to the change. Whilst we have thought about some of them, we know we will not have anticipated all of them, and we did not feel it was our remit to go too far. If Area Meetings agree to further exploration of this possible way forward, then one or more working groups will need to be appointed.

Area meetings are asked to consider this recommendation and determine whether they feel, in principle, it is the right way forward. Minutes of Area Meeting should be sent to David Olver by 30 April 2024.

If there is general support for the recommendation, we think the next step would be for AMs to appoint one or more working groups to do detailed work on implementation plans.

Members of Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group: *David Bower (Central Yorkshire AM), Erica Cadbury (Craven & Keighley AM), Rosie Darwood (Leeds AM), Deryck Hillas (Brighouse West Yorkshire AM), Ann Hindley (Sheffield & Balby AM), David Olver (Quakers in Yorkshire - Convenor), Helen Rowlands (Pickering & Hull AM), Martina Weitsch (York AM)*

Supplementary Papers

1. *Alternative models explored*
 - A. *Status quo*
 - B. *Merger*
 - C. *Single registered charity with merged AMs as Quaker bodies*
 - D. *Single Area Meeting, both registered charity and Quaker body*
2. *Analysis of which trustee responsibilities require local input and which could benefit from being done Yorkshire-wide*
3. *Thoughts and information on management of property*
4. *Quakers in Yorkshire*