

## **Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group**

### **Responses from AMs to proposal to commit to a single merged charity**

(November 2024 to January 2025)

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#### **Sheffield & Balby (19 January 2025)**

##### Minute 6 - Yorkshire Quaker Governance

Since January 2024 we have been considering the proposal from the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group to replace the current seven Area Meeting charities and the existing Quakers in Yorkshire charity with one Yorkshire wide charity. (Minutes 7 from 14th January, 4 from 15th September and 3 from 9th November refer.) The proposal has been circulated in advance and is attached to these minutes along with notes of small group work at our November meeting.

This matter has also been considered by each of our Local Meetings. Balby Doncaster, Hope Valley and Nether Edge have expressed general support for the proposal though there has been a request for additional financial information. Sheffield Central felt that further discernment was needed.

On 7th January Friends from across the Area Meeting met online with Peter Rivers. Peter has been involved with the “merger” of Area Meetings in Wales and Southern Marches into a Charitable Incorporated Organisation with the working name of Cymar. The content of Peter’s presentation has been circulated and is attached to these minutes. Peter told us of the many complications and the high cost of the process of merger and of his optimism that now this is largely complete the Area Meetings will reap the benefits of simplification.

We note that Ann Hindley, our representative on the Group, is writing a brief for legal work to use to obtain a quote for legal fees. A Yorkshire charity should be able to use much of the set up work done by Cymar. This would reduce set up costs.

There was concern that the proposal has not been properly costed and that the working group does not have evidence that Friends will be able to donate sufficient funds. It’s important for the Group to answer questions about detail before moving further ahead with a merger.

Can we afford to be part of a merged charity? Sheffield Central, for example, has limited reserves which it needs for its own purposes.

There is a question hanging over the future of Doncaster Meeting House and the future for Sheffield Central Meeting House is still not completely certain. Is it sensible to transfer properties which could end up being sold? On the other hand it’s rarely the perfect time for change.

There is a fear that the further away something seems to be the smaller the number of Friends who may take an interest in it.

Could a merged charity help with our financial deficit and the “people” deficits of other Area Meetings?

We currently have a group of trustees, unlike some Area Meetings. But it hasn’t always been easy to appoint to this group and it may get harder. The people in the room are mainly beyond 50. Many of them carry heavy burdens in their meetings which they will want to lay down. For example we are currently having trouble finding an Assistant Area Meeting Treasurer.

We need to think about the legacy we leave to younger members. We also need to think

about how this potential merger serves British Quakers, not just our Area Meeting. We should live boldly and with a vision for the future.

We agree to ask that the Governance Group provide us by the end of September with full costings for the set up and future running of the merged charity. We will also need enough information to be able to calculate the cost savings to our Local Meetings. If it is able to do this and we are also satisfied that our Area Meeting's cost can be met by Friends we will enter with hope into the proposed merger.

We ask our Clerks to send this minute to the Clerk to the Governance Group and to Local Meetings.

We are grateful for the work that has been done so far to aid our discernment.

We thank Ann Hindley for all her work in representing us on the Governance Group and for supporting us in our discernment.

## **Quakers in Yorkshire (18 January 2025)**

### 9. Report on Simplification and Reinvigoration

David Olver, Clerk of QiY Trustees, has spoken to us about the steady progress being made towards the simplification and reinvigoration of Quaker bodies in Yorkshire, a process that is being coordinated by the working group formed of AM representatives. One aspect in particular will be at the forefront of concern for all Friends, namely the appointment of trustees to serve the new body, Yorkshire Quakers. This is an important stage of the process and all Area Meetings are asked to support the QiY Nominations Committee with suitable names when requested by the Nominations Committee.

This meeting agrees that QiY as a charity supports the work that has taken place so far and hopes that the working group will be able to finalise details in due course. On this basis QiY agrees to join the new charity as previously notified to all AMs with the benefits that those changes have for QiY as a whole.

Friends will also be interested to know that Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, will be joining us at Doncaster for our meeting on 26th April to prompt a discussion on the spiritual benefits that we might seek from the reorganisation and simplification of our necessary business. Paul will be using examples from the other schemes that are underway in the UK and showing how our meetings might change in the future.

## **York AM (11 January 2025)**

### 2025/6 Simplifying Meetings: Minding the Future

Do you wish to commit to merging into a single Yorkshire Quaker Charity?

Further to minutes 2024/19 and 2024/52 the proposals from the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group have been discussed in local meetings and five LBM minutes were circulated with the agenda for this meeting together with minute 59 from the York Area Meeting Trustees meeting held on 8.12.2024. In general these minutes favour the move to a single charity but reservations are expressed about some of the practical difficulties of managing all the properties and the potential costs of making the change. Friends are also anxious that they don't feel out of touch with the work of Trustees.

Martina Weitsch(NE), Clerk of YAM Trustees, held on line sessions on 16 and 18 October to explain the proposals. These were helpful.

Today the Assistant Clerk read the YAM Trustees minute 59 and the Clerk repeated the above question which is our focus today.

In general Friends in York Area Meeting support the aim of simplifying our structures at a time of a declining and ageing membership. At the same time they have concerns about some of the practicalities such as the cost of employing additional staff to administer the Yorkshire Charity and the substantial task of maintaining all our Quaker properties. Concerns have also been expressed about the need to move forward with plans to unify the Area Meeting finances and to improve the monitoring of these finances and also to improve the booking systems. We wish our Trustees and all Local Meeting Treasurers to progress these changes.

However, we commit in principle to merging in a single Yorkshire Charity which will be established over the next year . We will then have to decide whether we wish to join this charity. We ask Martina Weitsch, our representative on the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group, to keep us posted on how discussions are progressing. Overall the change seems an imaginative and practical way of addressing significant concerns we have about the future not just in York Area Meeting but in Area Meetings across Yorkshire. Put another way, of Simplifying Meetings and Minding the Future.

We thank all concerned with these discussions.

### **Craven & Keighley AM (11 January 2025)**

#### 2025/10 Substantive item: The Yorkshire Quaker 'simplification' proposals

Local meetings and Trustees have considered the proposals for a merged charity, to be called Yorkshire Quakers. All our Local meetings and Trustees support the proposals, with some caveats, including the opportunity of continuing involvement with the developing process.

We have been reassured that the proposed General Meetings would be a primary focus of making decisions as a meeting for worship for business.

We agree to commit Craven and Keighley Area Meeting to merge our charity into a single Yorkshire Quakers charity.

### **Brighouse West Yorkshire AM (24 November 2024)**

#### 24.11.09: Proposals for a Yorkshire Quakers Charity

The document, 'Proposals for a Yorkshire Quakers Charity' produced by the Yorkshire Quakers Governance Group had been circulated in advance of this Meeting. This paper sets out proposals for a single charity, to be called Yorkshire Quakers, which would be the merger of the existing seven Area Meeting charities plus the Quakers in Yorkshire (QiY) charity. The new charity would be responsible for the finances, employment of staff, properties, and regulatory requirements over the QiY region. This would enable Area Meetings to concentrate on supporting worship and witness as they would no longer be separately registered charities.

Following discussion, we decided that we wish to commit to merging into a single Yorkshire Quaker charity.

### **Leeds AM (20 November 2024)**

#### 2024/11/06 Simplifying our structures and processes

Discussions about ways to simplify structures and processes across Yorkshire have been underway for some years. Earlier this year our Area Meeting considered an outline proposal for creating one trust body, and minuted our agreement that this should be

explored further (see minute 2024/03/05). Further work has been done on this and proposals for a single charity have been circulated. (see minute 2024/06/09).

Detailed proposals for the merger of the existing Area Meeting Charities to a single trust body have been displayed in a paper on the Quakers in Yorkshire Website from the 4th September, 2024. The paper concludes:

Area Meetings are asked to consult their Local Meetings and their Trustees before discerning whether the proposals in the paper are the right way of helping to simplify our organisation and help reinvigorate Yorkshire Quakerism. It is likely that there will be a range of views so Area Meetings will need to discern whether a merged charity will enable the future of our Society to be simpler. The basic question for Area Meetings is Do you wish to commit to merging into a single Yorkshire Quaker charity?

Our Leeds Area Quaker Meeting Trustees have considered and support the recommendations.

We are now asked to confirm if Leeds Area Quaker Meeting would like to proceed with the proposal.

We understand that if the merger did proceed, Leeds Area Quaker Meeting would continue, but we would be being freed of our Charity responsibilities. This should mean that we will be in a better position to concentrate on promoting worship and witness.

We have heard some hesitations, including:

- some Friends may feel less committed to a much larger Charity than LAQM;
- money deposited by one large charity would no longer be protected under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme;
- local meetings may become less financially independent, not able to set their own budgets;
- the actual number of roles needed in the future plans will be more than originally anticipated.

We have also heard there are many benefits offered by the proposed new system, in areas such as Safeguarding and Registering Officers. Simplification means that we may well lose some things, and change can be painful.

We are glad to know that our Treasurers are working with members of the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group to resolve areas of uncertainty.

Overall, we feel that the direction of travel is the right one and will benefit us in the future.

Leeds Area Quaker Meeting agrees to the proposal that we merge with other Yorkshire Area Meetings to form a single Yorkshire Quaker charity.

We forward this minute to the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group (Simplifying Charitable Functions Group), so that they are aware of our hesitations.

### **Pickering & Hull AM (9 November 2024)**

#### PHAQM/2024/75 Yorkshire Quaker Governance

Further to Minute PHAQM/2024/64, five of our Local Meetings have sent Minutes as requested. They all support the proposals, some wholeheartedly, although there is a worry that the larger group may find it difficult to understand the needs of smaller local meetings. We urge the development of good communication systems.

We agree to commit to the proposed merger and ask our AM Clerk to forward this minute

to the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group.

### **Central Yorkshire AM (9 November 2024)**

#### Single Charity in Yorkshire

Minute 5.ii) refers to the proposal for a single charity in Yorkshire and includes minutes from 3 of our local meetings. David Bower, who is part of the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group, was present at our meeting and was able to take questions on the proposal.

Our meetings recognise the complexity of what is being proposed but feel that this will be of great benefit to the future of Quakerism in Yorkshire.

From the minutes submitted and the comments made in this meeting CYAM supports the establishment of a single charity in Yorkshire and will report this to the Yorkshire Quaker Governance Group.

In addition, thanks were expressed for the excellent paper from the group setting out the proposals.