

MfS 2016 12 09 – updated appendix

Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

Thaxted AM minute 15.11.3 from the AM held on 8 December 2013 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Bournemouth Coastal AM minute 15.11.3 from the AM held on 21 November 2015 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Staffordshire AM minute 5a from the AM held on 14 February 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

North London AM minute 16/17 from the AM held on 19 March 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also included are relevant minutes from the constituent LM's.

West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM minute 16/26b from the AM held on 19 March 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

East Cheshire AM minute 16.05.09 from the AM held on 8 May 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Pendle Hill AM minute 5 from the AM held on 11 June 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also included are relevant minutes from the constituent LM's.

Chilterns AM minute 17/6/16 from the AM held on 17 June 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

East Kent AM minute 17/6/16 from the AM held on 9 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Sussex West AM minute 16/71 from the AM held on 9 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also included are relevant minutes from the constituent LM's.

Cambridgeshire AM minute 16.07.29 from the AM held on 10 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Leicester AM minute 16/54 from the AM held on 10 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Wirral & Chester AM minute 16/87 from the AM held on 13 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also included are the minute from Heswall LM.

Kingston & Wandsworth AM minute 16/61 from the AM held on 17 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

South East Scotland AM minute 2016/07/10 from the AM held on 23 July 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

North Somerset AM minute 25/16 from the AM held on 14 August 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

East Scotland AM minute 16.37 from the AM held on 20 August 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Bristol AM minute regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

South Wales AM minute from the AM held on 5 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Southern East Anglia AM minute 2016/52 from the AM held on 11 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Hampshire & Islands AM minute 10 from the AM held on 11 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Mid-Somerset AM minute 39/16 from the AM held on 11 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Northamptonshire AM minute 16/66 from the AM held on 11 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also attached is a report from the constituent LM's.

Northumbria AM minute 5 from the AM held on 11 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Sheffield & Balby AM minute 5 from the AM held on 11 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

North West London AM minute 16.05.09 from the AM held on 16 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Lincolnshire AM minute 16.09.71 from the AM held on 17 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Norfolk & Waveney AM minute 9/09/2016 from the AM held on 17 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also included are relevant minutes from the constituent LM's.

Notts & Derbys AM minute 49/16a from the AM held on 17 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also included are relevant minutes from the constituent LM's.

West Somerset AM minute 16/68 from the AM held on 17 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also attached is a summary of responses from LM.s.

Hertford & Hitchin AM minute 43/16 from the AM held on 17 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs. Also attached is a summary of responses from LM.s.

Mid-Essex AM minute 16/97 from the AM held on 18 September 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

South East London AM minute 16/104 from the AM held on 23 October 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

York AM minute 2016.11.59 from the AM held on 12 November 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Kendal & Sedbergh AM minute 16.11.12 from the AM held on 12 November 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Worcestershire and Shropshire AM minute 72/16 from the AM held on 19 November 2016 regarding decriminalisation of drugs.

Thaxted AM held on 8 December 2013

Minute 13/12/09 Quaker Concern Regarding Drug Policy.

Cornwall AM has been working on their concern that the current policy on drugs increases the harm caused by drugs rather than decreasing it. They are not asking for the decriminalisation of the sale/marketing of illegal drugs but are questioning whether it is right to criminalise a person with a health related need and are asking Friends to examine the need to take action on this issue in order to abide by the principles of truth, equality and compassion. We unite with this concern and hope it can be taken forward as a concern of the Society as a whole.

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings for information.

John Capper
Clerk

Bournemouth Coastal AM held on 21 November 2015

Minute 15.11.3 - Decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use

We have heard from Nick McGeorge of Cornwall Area Meeting's appeal for further support for this Concern.

We have examined this before (Minute 14.1.6, which concluded, "We endorse this Concern, and ask our Clerk to notify the Recording Clerk accordingly.").

They write:

"Marion Coleman, then Clerk for Cornwall Area Meeting, shared concern with you in July 2013. We had sent a Minute regarding our concern to Meeting for Sufferings. We received a number of emails supporting our concern and attempted to take the concern to Britain Yearly Meeting but were not successful on that occasion. We are moved again to raise this concern and to send again a Minute to Meeting for Sufferings and to test this concern among Friends and advocate change. We have established the Quaker Decriminalisation Network in order to bring together those who support our concern."

We are asked whether drug addiction - and a whole host of associated issues - should be seen as a health, rather than a justice matter. Support from Quakers has been requested from the Head of the UN Drugs Office.

Difficulty has been encountered in the wide polarization of opinions once the topic of drug use is mentioned.

We commend this to Local Meetings and encourage concerned Friends to write to their MPs. We ask our Clerk write to Meeting for Sufferings expressing our support for this Concern and to notify Cornwall AM accordingly.

The supporting papers will be sent to Local Meeting Clerks, and can be made available to individual Friends on request.

Nick McGeorge is willing to visit Local Meetings or neighbouring Area Meetings if they feel it would be helpful to draw on his expertise.

Tom Sanders
Clerk

Staffordshire AM held on 14 February 2016

Minute 5a: Cornwall AM concern on the decriminalisation of drugs

We have received reports from 4 Local Meetings expressing support for Cornwall AM's concern on the decriminalisation of drugs: in addition several Friends have sent individual responses directly to the Clerk of Cornwall AM. We ask our Clerk to convey our support to the Clerk of Cornwall AM.

Bryan Cleary, Clerk

Anne Orme, Correspondence Clerk

North London AM held on 19 March 2016.

Minute 16/17 Decriminalisation of drugs

Further to our minute 16/03 and consideration by our Local Meetings, we have returned to our consideration of the concern raised by Cornwall AM for the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use. We have been reminded that delegatisation is not the same as decriminalisation which could help more drug users. We have received the following minutes from our constituent Local Meetings:

Bunhill Fields

16/16 Matters arising from previous minutes

We are aware that several matters remain outstanding in following up previous minutes that we have not been able to consider today. We will return to these items at a future meeting.

New Barnet

16/17 The decriminalisation of drugs

We have been asked, by Cornwall AM, to discuss the issue of decriminalisation of drugs for personal use. We thank Cornwall AM for raising our awareness of this issue. We have discussed the matter at some length. We have a wide range of opinion as to the effect of decriminalisation.

Stoke Newington

16/15 Request from Area Meeting for views on decriminalisation of drugs

Area Meeting minute 16/03

On 12th February 2016 Stoke Newington Quakers held a meeting for learning on the subject of decriminalisation of drugs. Following this and our discussion today we minute:

Ways out of addiction need a practical roadmap: the Quaker tradition can contribute a spiritual approach through deepening of the spirit, with a preventative as well as healing capability. Addiction is a spiritual malady, as George Fox recognised in the text at *Qf&p 20.42*:

Friends, whatever ye are addicted to, the tempter will come in that thing; and when he can trouble you, then he gets advantage over you, and then you are gone. Stand still in that which is pure, after ye see yourselves; and then mercy comes in.

Everyone in society bears a responsibility, and society bears losses from the problems of drug addiction. There are many complex factors creating vulnerability in which addiction is an element, so that it needs a whole-systems approach.

Many people experience this loss of spiritual power as they 'fix' on substances or behaviours (shopping, gambling, food, conspicuous consumption, self-harm), some of which are more stigmatised than others. We are encouraged that one of the outcomes of the Portuguese legalisation model was that the stigmatisation of drug addicts was reduced.

If we look to the Criminal Justice System for the solution (for addiction and related problems) then we will have the consequences of a criminal justice approach; it is more useful to address the complexity of the problem through a healthcare and personal therapy approach.

However, in current healthcare provision, especially in this climate of austerity and looking to save money, the focus is on short term provision, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy rather than longer term psychological interventions and support, the use of 'motivation testing' and gatekeeping before people can access residential rehabilitation and longer term support.

We suggest that money could be sourced from the industries which are invested in, and benefit from, addiction (e.g. alcohol, tobacco). If money is saved from the criminal justice system, it would be important to 'ring fence' resources for addiction support and health care.

We recognise the importance of a strong political will to take this approach, and any new approach should be given the time it requires to see results. We are happy to support the concern for decriminalising drug use.

Tottenham

2016/18: Decriminalisation of drugs

We have received minute 16/03 from Area Meeting:

We had a breakfast discussion group on the 28th of February on Quaker Attitudes to Alcohol, Drugs, and other Stimulants. Our sense upon reflection of the breakfast meeting and the following Meeting for Worship is that Cornwall's approach of decriminalization of personal possession and focus on information and support was aligned with the Quaker method of providing alternatives, as highlighted in Quaker Faith and Practice Chapter 20, section 39.

Winchmore Hill

16/23 Minute from Cornwall AM to consider decriminalisation of possession, for personal use, of all drugs

We have not had time to consider this Minute from Cornwall AM. Any personal responses should be sent to North London AM clerk not less than one week prior to AM on March 19th 2016.

The following letter was received by the Clerk of AM from Sue Newsom of Winchmore Hill Meeting.:

- I am pleased to hear that Cornwall's concern is to come before Meeting for Sufferings again.
 - I am content to be guided by Meeting for Sufferings on our future course.
 - Concerns coming to Meeting for Sufferings seems to be in right ordering and has worked for the Society in the past.
 - I hope Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs will guide us.
- Sue

AM notes that Meeting for Sufferings will consider this issue at its April 2016 meeting and we forward this minute to Meeting for Sufferings for information.

Oliver Robertson
Clerk

West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM held on 19 March 2016.

Minute 16/26b. Cornwall AM's Concern on De-Criminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use.

Minutes were received from all 6 LMs, which recognised the complexity of the issue, but in varying ways supported the Cornwall Friends' Concern. A subgroup from Bradford on Avon subsequently met to consider the briefing paper for QAAD Trustees on the Decriminalisation of Drugs and the original document from Cornwall and we have heard their minute. We do not feel we can adopt this as a concern at this stage, but wish to support the work of Friends in Cornwall and thank them for all their work on this issue.

Maggie Williams
Clerk

East Cheshire AM held on 8 May 2016

Minute 16.05.09: Report from the April 2016 Meeting for Sufferings

Andrew Backhouse

Andrew Backhouse has reported on some of the items of importance from Meeting for Sufferings. Although we feel that as a matter that is important in our interrelationships as human beings, Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use is a religious matter, we recognise that we don't know enough of the background to the concern of Cornwall AM raised at this time.

We have heard from Friends working with offenders that it is rare for people to be criminalised for possession of drugs for personal use alone. It seems that this is therefore already decriminalised, but we have been challenged as to whether full legalisation would be the right way forward.

However, we have heard of the support found by many drug users which is sometimes only met by the criminal justice system, and the need for such support to be widely available.

This is not an issue we feel we can usefully take any further as an AM at this point.

A copy of Andrew's report, Cornwall AM's paper on the Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use and the QPSW Central Committee's paper "Vision for a criminal justice system, have been sent out in advance of Area Meeting.

Sally Mendham
Assistant Clerk

Pendle Hill AM held on 11 June 2016.

Minute 5 of June 11 on the Cornwall concern.

1. Cornwall Area Meeting Concern: Decriminalising the Drug User

This concern has been forwarded to use by Meeting for Sufferings to discern whether it is a concern for Friends more widely.

We have received minute 6 from Bolton Preparative Meeting held on June 5:

“Cornwall AM Briefing on the decriminalisation of all drugs for personal use: This was the subject of our 4th Sunday Reflection. We feel the criminalisation of drugs for personal use is a self-defeating strategy on all fronts and that drug use is a totally health-related issue. We would like to see a much improved system for rehabilitation. Prison sentences in this, and other, contexts are mostly ineffective and may increase the likelihood of re-offending. We would support Cornwall AM with this concern and hope that Quakers in Britain would wish BYM to issue a statement on behalf of us all to this effect.”

We have received minute 2 from Sawley preparative Meeting held June 5:

“We are clear that the issue at the centre of this concern is the vulnerability for those people for whom there is problematic drug use, overwhelmingly those who have suffered deprivation, childhood abuse or trauma and the about 10% of the population who have a genetic predisposition to addiction. For all of these people ongoing, possibly life-long, support is far more effective than a custodial sentence (or criminal record) and the life-long stigma associated with that.

Education, training, enabling and supporting young people who have experimented with drugs for recreation and for those having problems with drug use would be more effective in changing lives than a criminal record. The implications of criminalisation are not helpful to the individual or to society.

Decriminalisation would release money spent in the criminal justice system for more positive use in treating drug use as a health and welfare issue to educate, support and encourage people in recovery and help with finding employment.

We have considered the question ‘What does love require of us?’ (*Advices and Queries 28*) in this matter.”

Blackburn Friends also discerned that it was a good idea but felt it useful to hear more from those who might hold a differing view.

We have reflected on the reasons given for criminalisation and also of the growing support, globally, for decriminalisation and a more humane approach that supports people in need rather than punishing them. We see a similarity between alcohol and other drug use and are clear that decriminalisation needs to be accompanied by greater education and help for those affected. Love needs to be the first motion. Some of us are still discerning where we are on this issue but we are clear that as a Meeting, we feel called to speak truth to power on this issue and feel united with the Cornwall Area Meeting concern.

Ben Pink Dandelion
Clerk

Chilterns AM held on 17 June 2016.

Minute 17/6/16

We have received the briefing paper from Cornwall Area Meeting on the decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use, and the minute from Sufferings about this.

We have considered this and have come to the view that it is a valid spiritual concern for the Religious Society of Friends.

We accept this minute compiled by members of our Area Meeting and forward it to Meeting for Sufferings.

In Friendship
Jane Edmonds, clerk

East Kent AM held on 9 July 2016

Minute 10a

Decriminalisation of Drugs has been the concern of Cornwall Area Meeting and others within the Society for some years. Meeting for Sufferings wishes to test this concern further to see whether there is clarity across the country. We believe that there are other concerns more pressing for Quakers.

Eleanor Brooks, Clerk

Sussex West AM held on Saturday 9th July

16/71 Decriminalisation of drugs for personal use.

Minute 16/51 asked Local meetings to test the concern brought forward from Cornwall Area Meeting.

The clerk has received the following minutes from the LQMs:

Bognor: After considering the concern from Cornwall Area Meeting about the decriminalisation of all drugs for personal use, friends from Bognor LQM find that we cannot support this concern.

Brighton: We have considered the executive summary but are not in unity about all of its content. We therefore do not feel that we can accept this as a religiously valid concern as currently presented. We do not feel able to take this matter forward actively ourselves as a concern as it feels as if we are being asked whether it is a valid concern for others which is a question we feel it is not for us to answer.

Chichester: We have received a request from Area Meeting to consider the concern relating to the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use raised by Cornwall Area Meeting. We are requested, if possible, to send a minute of discernment to AM Clerks before the Area Meeting on 9th July. Documents in advance have been circulated by emails and placed on the table.

We are asked to consider a] if we feel this concern is valid and b] whether we can support it.

The guidance in section 13.12 of Faith and Practice regarding testing concerns has been read.

It is felt this is a valid concern.

To assist consideration of the desirability of decriminalisation the following extract from the summary of this issue produced By QAAD (Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs) has been read.

"Some who believe that the law should be reformed take the libertarian view - that the state should not sanction an individual's drug use unless it becomes problematic. Others come from a reformist perspective, and simply believe that the drugs laws create more problems than they solve. On the other side of the debate, some would not like to see a softening in the law because they believe that drug use itself (not just problem use) is frankly undesirable; others come from a concern that problem drug use might increase".

An extract from the QAAD report regarding the distinction between decriminalisation and legalisation has also been read.

It is felt that the Cornwall Area Meeting is not looking at the bigger picture – it seems illogical to keep the supplying of drugs illegal if drug use is decriminalised.

We feel legalisation should at least be considered even if this requires pressing for a change in International Law.

We do not feel we know enough about this topic to make firm recommendations about an appropriate response.

We suggest a representative of QAAD be invited to speak to Sussex West Area Meeting about this matter in the near future.

Ditchling: Meeting for Sufferings has asked Friends to discuss this. We have been asked to discern if this is a concern. We have read QF&P 13.12.

There is sympathy and respect for this issue among members of Ditchling LQM and we recognise it as a valid issue. However, we feel unable to adopt it as a concern for our Meeting at this time.

Littlehampton: Area Meeting has asked us to consider a request from Meeting for Sufferings to test a concern from Cornwall Area Meeting to decriminalise the possession of all drugs for personal use. Area Meeting also asks us to send a minute to assist discernment about this matter at its July meeting. Following our last meeting the key questions for consideration were included in the June newsletter and a summary of the work that Cornwall has carried out has been made available through notices. We have also encouraged Friends prevented from attending this meeting to let the co-clerks know their views.

We wish to support Cornwall Friends through prayerful discernment on this important issue. However, we do not feel that we have the necessary expertise and knowledge to be able to take this concern forward as a Local Quaker Meeting. We do, however, hope that this matter can be included in our wider discussions on the criminal justice system in the future.

Worthing: We are asked by AM for our views on the concern raised by Cornwall AM. The overall feeling of the meeting is to support Cornwall AM's concern about the negative consequences of criminalising personal drug use. However, there were a number of reservations, including: (a) the harm caused to young people and families, (b) the need to: (i) specify the drugs concerned, (ii) define the nature of 'personal use', & (iii) identify legitimate sources of drugs.

Local Meetings have discussed this concern in detail and we have been read all the above minutes from them. We recognise this is a valid concern and support Cornwall AM, thanking them for all their work and detailed analysis of the subject, but do not feel able to adopt this as an AM concern.

We ask the clerk to send all our LM minutes to Meeting for Sufferings as well as this AM minute.

Signed by the clerks at the table:

Heather Brayshaw Judy Moody-Stuart

Cambridgeshire AM held on 10 July 2016

16.07.29 The Decriminalisation of Drugs for Personal Use

Meeting for Sufferings has asked all area meetings to test a concern sent to it by Cornwall area meeting concerning the decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use. The briefing paper was distributed to all local meetings in advance of this area meeting and was posted on the website. A copy is filed with the area meeting records.

We have gathered in small groups to discuss the content of the paper and then to consider whether a) we recognise this concern as being religiously valid, b) support it as individuals, c) share the concern and wish to see it become an integral part of our Quaker work either locally or nationally.

We then gathered as a whole meeting to discern our response.

Friends have been much exercised by this paper and have become increasingly aware of the complexities of the issues. We feel that there is still much work to do. We think this paper is a good start, but the concern needs to be widened. We would like to see QUAAD involved, with the parliamentary officer kept informed, so that she can link in where appropriate.

At the same time we are clear that this is a religiously valid concern – it is part of our testimony to equality, it is about the quality of people's lives. Truth and integrity is also involved – we need to bring into the light the dark areas of illegal drug use and open them up for public debate.

We consider that this is a subject upon which there should be a clear Quaker voice, but we do not feel that that point has yet been reached. We hope that work will continue and that the concern will come back to Meeting for Sufferings in due course. We would particularly like to see more emphasis on treatment and a closer look at the unintended consequences of the present situation.

We send this minute to the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings and the clerk will brief our Meeting for Sufferings representative.

We also send this minute and the paper from Cornwall area meeting to our representatives at the QAAD conference, to be held at Woodbrooke from the 29th – 31st July and to our representatives attending the Quaker Prison Chaplains' Conference, to be held at Woodbrooke from 7th – 9th October and ask them to raise the issue at their respective conferences if it seems appropriate.

Hazel Shellens
Clerk

Leicester AM held on 10 July 2016

Minute 16.54

We have considered a concern raised by Cornwall Area meeting through Meeting for Sufferings about the decriminalization of personal drug use. At Area Meeting in May we were unable to reach a decision about this item and agreed to allow further time for discernment.

We have asked Local Meetings to consider this issue and have taken time today to give the matter further consideration as an Area meeting. We thank Friends from Cornwall Area Meeting for their work.

We recognize this issue as a religiously valid concern but do not feel able to adopt it as a concern of Leicester Area Meeting. We will uphold those from other local and area meetings and organizations like QAAD (Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs) who feel able to take this matter forward.

Fran Hewett
Co-clerk
Leicester AM

Wirral & Chester AM held on 13 July 2016

Minute 16.87

Further to Minute 16.59 we have heard from our Local meetings about the concern of Cornwall Area Meeting for the “Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use of all drugs”. We welcome the Minute from Heswall Local Meeting who have discussed this.

“We sympathise with Cornwall’s concern that vulnerable people should not be criminalised for drug use, but we do not think that Cornwall’s proposal is the right solution at this time. We feel that the response of QAAD is the more balanced approach”

We ask the Clerk to send this Minute and the Minute from Heswall Local Meeting to Meeting for Sufferings.

Sheila Houldin
Clerk – Wirral and Chester Area Meeting

Heswall LM 26th June 2016 MfWf discernment : Cornwall AM : Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use.

Eleven Friends and attenders held a wide ranging discussion on many of the different aspects of problems surrounding drug use, after hearing the Executive Summary of Cornwall AM’s Briefing Paper read aloud. We also read out, from the Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs (QAAD) current newsletter, a reprinted minute from 2013. This was part of their considered response to Cornwall AM’s minute.

QAAD trustees do not feel led to a fixed position on decriminalisation. They recognise the importance of timeliness in offering prompt, health based interventions. Their intention is to continue to focus on influencing drug policy towards more health based provision. Our own discussion echoed these sentiments.

We agree with QAAD that ‘a health education approach would be vastly more helpful than a punitive approach’. We feel that PHSE in schools is very important in teaching young people about drugs, with talks from ex-users being most helpful.

We talked about the effect of drugs, including alcohol, on driving.

We are aware that new drugs are continually being introduced, so that the law is always playing catch-up.

We agree with QAAD that offenders are not necessarily criminalised for first or minor offences.

We are concerned that decriminalisation could lead to a perception that drugs are benign, leading users to ever more harmful practices that could blight their lives.

We sympathise with Cornwall's concern that vulnerable people should not be criminalised for drug use, but we do not think that Cornwall's proposal is the right solution at this time.

We feel that the response of QAAD is the more balanced approach.

Dori Miller, co clerk, with Penny Vernon

Kingston & Wandsworth AM held on 17 July 2016

Minute 16/61 Meeting for Sufferings: decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use

Meeting for Sufferings has asked all Area Meetings to consider the attached paper from Cornwall AM which seeks to test their concern for the decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use. A 2012 paper by Helena Chambers for the trustees of Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs (QAAD) has also been circulated.

Three of our local meetings have considered these. Their minutes are attached. Our clerk has reminded us of the guidance on testing a concern in Quaker faith and practice 13.8-13.18.

Susie Paskins has set out the key issues for us from both papers. The paper from Cornwall made the following main points:

1. The poorest and most excluded in our society suffer most from criminalisation of drug use
2. There is little relationship between the legal status and actual drug use
3. Dependent drug use should be seen as a public health issue, as in Portugal

The paper from QAAD emphasised:

1. That the Portuguese experience would not necessarily apply in the UK in particular because in the UK resources for treatment are not likely to be increased.
2. Evidence suggests that it is possible that decriminalisation can increase use by young teenagers with possible consequent mental health problems.
3. Criminalisation can be a major conduit into treatment.

We feel love requires us to be concerned to minimise both the damaging use of drugs and the effects of criminalisation. We have heard differing views. We have heard from a young friend and from practitioners dealing with drug dependency of the damaging effects of criminalisation and we have heard from others who plead caution. We are especially concerned about the use of custody for possession even if it is not often used.

We welcome QAAD's research, note its influence in the field and hope that Britain Yearly Meeting will consider financial support for QAAD. We support present UK policies for gradual depenalisation but are not in unity with Cornwall AM's call for decriminalisation at this point. We feel strongly that any move to decriminalisation would need to be preceded by increased resource for treatment as in Portugal.

We would support a thorough Government review of the issue but we hope Meeting for Sufferings will avoid any general statement.

Gillian Ashmore, Clerk

South East Scotland AM held on 23 July 2016

2016/07/10 Cornwall Area Meeting's minute on decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use

We have been asked by Meeting for Sufferings to consider a minute from Cornwall Area Meeting held on 12th September, 2015, as part of the discernment process. An extract from this minute was circulated with the draft agenda for this meeting.

Our Assistant Clerk, Alastair Cameron has summarised the issue, as put forward by Cornwall Area Meeting. They are urging a more humane policy for drug users and their problems, whereby drug dependency would be treated through health care, not punishment. They are asking Britain Yearly Meeting to support decriminalisation of drugs for personal use and to issue a statement to that effect.

In pairs, then together as a full meeting, we have considered Cornwall Area Meetings' concern. Our discernment has been helped by hearing from members of our meeting with knowledge and expertise on aspects of the issue.

We support the approach put forward by Cornwall AM, believing that an emphasis on harm and demand reduction, is the right approach, without further penalising people who are already vulnerable. The matter should be viewed as a public health, rather than a criminal justice, issue.

We believe that a programme of awareness-raising and education is needed, in part to counteract the characterisation of drug use in our press and media.

Much work needs to be done, including arriving at a clear definition of 'personal use': we believe this is possible, and necessary.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to work towards preparing a public statement reflecting the need for change.

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings and, for information, to Cornwall AM.

Elizabeth Allen
Clerk, South East Scotland Area Meeting

North Somerset AM held on 14 August 2016

Minute 25/16 Consideration / Discernment on Decriminalisation of Drugs

We have discussed in our Local Meetings the question of the decriminalisation of drug users who have drugs only for their own use. We have discussed it further here, and we support the decriminalisation for users.

We believe that these users are the victims of addiction, and not criminals. As such, they need treatment, counselling and social services support, all of which services have been cut by our government.

The drug dealers are the criminals.

We ask Meeting for Sufferings to approach our government to:

1. Reconsider its response to the Parliamentary Home Affairs Select Committee of 2012/13 which recommended the setting up of a Royal Commission to review the drugs policy, and
2. Release more funds for support agencies and rehabilitation services to support the drugs users to come to terms with their problems and help them to become useful members of society.

Enid Smith
Clerk, North Somerset Area Meeting

East Scotland AM held on 20 August 2016

Minute 16.37 Drugs Policy

Cornwall Area Meeting have a concern regarding decriminalisation of the possession for personal use of all drugs. They would like to have the corporate support of British Quakers behind this concern. Meeting for Sufferings have referred the matter to Area Meetings for comment.

We have considered a summary by Robin Baker of the main issues involved in this complex matter. We acknowledge both the complexity and the importance of this issue. We recognise that decriminalisation would still leave users with unavoidable contact with criminal dealers.

There is an overwhelming need for greater public awareness of the mental and physical harm that drug use can cause, for better resourced rehabilitation services, and for a change in public attitudes towards treatment and away from criminalisation. We support the statement in the QPSW vision statement under "Treatment of Drug Users".

We have heard contributions from members with direct experience of this issue. We see the principal issue as concern for the human needs and welfare of those who for whatever reason get caught up in drug use.

While recognising the impossibility of doing justice to all the dimensions of this matter, we support Cornwall Area Meeting's concern.

Robin Waterston
Clerk, East Scotland AM

Bristol Area Meeting: Minute regarding Changes in Drugs Policy Response to Concern from Cornwall Area Meeting

We have considered Cornwall Area Meeting's concern regarding the decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use.

We have heard from "Transform" – a charitable think-tank arguing for legal control and regulation of drugs, and from Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs, who are in favour of an extensive review of drugs policy before supporting this concern.

We are in sympathy with Cornwall Area Meeting's concern and are convinced that decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use could be a good step forward. We urge, however, that this should be seen as only ONE step in tackling a network of social issues which can lead to problematic drug use and human suffering.

We would like to see legal regulation involving control and licensing of supply, together with a policy which views the problems of drug use as a health concern rather than as a criminal matter.

Heather Lister
Clerk, Bristol Quakers
17 September 2016

South Wales AM held on 5 September 2016

Meeting for Sufferings minute mfs 16/04/14 re: Cornwall AM Concern

Further to our minute 16:05:07, we have given consideration to MfS's minute 16/04/14 which outlines Cornwall AM's concern regarding the decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs. We are asked to discern whether we unite with Cornwall AM's concern. We note that our Clerks circulated all the relevant documentation to Local Meetings following our AM in May as requested, and we have heard the two responses received which are appended to these minutes.

We do not feel led to unite with Cornwall's concern at present but recognise that we have much to learn regarding the complexities of this topic.

We are clear that more resources need to be given for the health and social care of individuals with drug problems whilst it is appropriate for the criminal justice system to address the activities of those that profit from dealing in drugs.

We urge Meeting for Sufferings to consider pressing for a Royal Commission type body to address the complexities of this issue. We recognise, for instance, that whilst the legalisation of cannabis could help some people with Multiple Sclerosis, it can also induce mental health problems in others.

We ask our Clerks to send this minute, along with Caerleon LM's minute and minute 16:06:04 to MFS as requested.

We encourage Friends in Local Meetings to continue to engage with this issue.

Carolyn Sansom and Frances Rutter
Co-Clerks

Southern East Anglia AM held on 11 September 2016

Minute 2016/52 Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

Further to Minute 2016/31, we considered a concern brought to Meeting for Sufferings by Cornwall AM. MfS has asked for help with testing the concern. A briefing paper was made available online and in print, and two Friends from Cornwall AM (Voirrey and Tony Faragher) came to Colchester to speak to us in July. John Hall presented a summary of the briefing paper and the questions before us. John's summary is attached to these minutes.

Before decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use can be seriously considered, we would need to be satisfied on several issues. We cannot form a view on the basis of what Cornwall Friends have said, as much as we might appreciate the diligence of their research. We cannot form a view unless we know what an informed and experienced response would be to the case that has been made, such as from departments in the police and the Home Office, and from Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs.

We seek clarification about what is meant by "all drugs", as there are some drugs that are extremely strong and dangerous. The line between possessing drugs and offering drugs to others is very fine. People might not be dealers, but could be sharers. Will it be legal to buy drugs, but not to sell them? Might we be putting others in danger by supporting this issue? We are mindful of Advices and Queries 40:

"In view of the harm done by the use of alcohol, tobacco and other habit-forming drugs, consider whether you should limit your use of them or refrain from using them altogether. Remember that any use of alcohol or drugs may impair judgment and put both the user and others in danger."

The nub of this matter is that people who take drugs need support, and without that support, decriminalisation would be extremely difficult for our society to effectively support. It therefore raises issues to do with funding of support services for rehabilitation.

There are serious consequences to the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use which must be thoroughly considered. We need to enter into the possibilities with our eyes wide open. We need to know, whatever the decision of BYM might be, what happens next? While we agree that it is not ethical to punish people for their vulnerability, we have serious questions about the consequences of a political decision that supports the decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs.

We ask MfS to consider whether the process of asking AMs to consider issues requiring discernment that reaches so deep and so wide, as this matter does, is appropriate.

Alison Parkes
Clerk, Southern East Anglia Quaker Meeting

Hampshire & Islands AM held on 11 September 2016

Minute 10

We have considered the Cornwall Area Meeting Concern regarding the Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs, both at a meeting held on the 9th July prior to Area Meeting and again today.

As the readings from QF&P (20.40 & 20.41) read during our worship remind us the causes go deep and may not be fully understood, but the resulting pain, fear, desperation and denial, damaging the abuser and all around that person, need to be supportively recognised.

Many of us have been affected by the issues raised by the use of illicit drugs and the affect that they have on those who are close to them.

Punishment is currently seen as the solution.

We should avoid the use of Prison as a response to the possession of drugs as prison is not an appropriate response, our prison system is creating more victims. Drugs are an evil trade controlled by criminal gangs

It is clear to us that dealing with drug abuse should be based on treatment and not on punishment. A regime based punishment for the possession is not supporting dependent drug users and those who are trying to help them.

Legalising the use of drugs for personal use but leaving the supply in the hands of criminals does not protect many of the vulnerable who are being exploited by the drugs trade.

We pass this minute to meeting for sufferings in response to their request for consideration of this.

I hope that the minute is self-explanatory but please get back to me if you would like further clarification.

In Friendship

Eddie Slade

Clerk Hampshire and Islands Area Quaker Meeting.

Mid-Somerset AM held on 11 September 2016

Minute 39/16 Drugs de-criminalisation

We have considered questions posed by Meeting for Sufferings which refer to Sufferings' minute 14/16: Cornwall Area Meeting's concern over personal drug use and Sufferings' request to Area Meetings to explore and test this concern. We understand the subject is very complex. We are not in unity as to the course of decriminalisation proposed by Cornwall Area Meeting and so are unable to offer Meeting for Sufferings any guidance other than to consider what they are likely to be aware of already, that:

- There is a high degree of harm to mental health by drug abuse
- We hope Meeting for Sufferings will encourage the UK Government to review current practice and policy
- UK Government could usefully consider possession leading to civil, not criminal offence, this may improve access to treatment and be constructive
- We would encourage the UK Government to analyse and take into account the economic cost and benefits of criminalisation that already occurs
- That abuse of substances is often or mostly driven by underlying issues and that these problems experienced by individuals should be tackled as well as drug abuse itself
- We believe Meeting for Sufferings referring to research might be helpful

This list is not exhaustive but covers the main points raised in our Meeting.

Andy Hall, clerk
David Winter, Assistant Clerk

Northamptonshire AM held on 11 September 2016

Minute:16/66 Cornwall concern on drug decriminalisation

Further to minute 16/44, we have received a report from the small group appointed by local meetings to report on this matter. The group appointed had personal experience, professional expertise, and the ability to review the literature. The group produced a summary and analysis of the Cornwall paper, and a response to the Cornwall minute. We accept their summary and response, which are attached to these minutes.

We thank the four Friends for their work.

The clerk will send the summary, analysis and this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

I attach the summary and analysis.

Abigail Maxwell
Northants AM clerk.

Northamptonshire AM Response to Cornwall minute

After much discussion and thought the AM working group conclude that;
We are unable to support the Cornwall minute because it does not present a coherent argument for the decriminalisation of the possession of substances for personal use. Firstly, although the Cornwall document references a health based approach as a positive step towards helping people with problematic drug use, and cites it as an important element, the Cornwall document does not press for any such development in the UK, rather it calls solely for decriminalisation of use. Thus there is a gap between the evidence submitted and what is actually being called for.

We agree that drug users would benefit from health education, treatment, rehabilitation and social support. This applies to both legal and illegal substances. Destigmatisation of these services and transitioning into health based services would be an advantage, although this paper does not call for these.

Secondly the statistics used are in places erroneous, misapplied and misleading. This can be seen in the summary which accompanies this document.

Additionally, within the Cornwall AM briefing paper there is misinformation about the access for drug users to current health treatment services.

Regardless of any feeling in relation to the potential decriminalisation we do not feel that it would be possible to support the document, on those grounds.

One of the many difficulties with decriminalisation is that some of these substances are extremely damaging to the individual's mental and physical wellbeing, e.g. crack cocaine and some of new substances coming onto the market.

We also considered the possibility that legalizing personal use of drugs incentivizes the supply chain, which would remain illegal. In fact the Portuguese example which is cited heavily does suggest that an increase in drug use does result.

In general the Portugal experiment, that is heavily drawn upon in this paper, is not comparable to the UK drug scene, for historical and cultural reasons.

Motivation for a change in behaviour happens when people are encouraged to recognise a problem, often this is an external event. Contact with the criminal justice system is one such possibility.

It is notable that QAAD was not led to take a position when it looked at this issue in 2012. The Cornwall paper criticizes the QAAD report, claiming to accept "clear evidence" which QAAD supposedly does not. The QAAD report represents a very thorough investigation into the issue.

The statement at the beginning and the conclusion of the Briefing Paper do not support the questions sent from MfS.

Our conclusion is that we as Quakers, support improvements to health education, rehabilitation and social support along with healthcare services for people with addictions and their families. Sadly this is not the concern brought by the paper. We do not support the use of damaging drugs by decriminalisation.

We were also asked to consider whether this was a valid religious concern (Q&A 13:12)

Issues around prison reform and imprisonment are already a Quaker concern. A valid religious concern could be the need for action to reduce drug use and the harms caused by it and accompanying it, but this is not the concern raised in the Briefing Paper. We therefore suggest that the paper does not address a religious concern.

Northamptonshire AM Summary

Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use, submitted by Cornwall AM

Cornwall's Executive Summary:

The Cornwall paper opens with the expression of their concern for the negative consequences of the criminalising of personal drug use and the consequent need to decriminalise all drugs for personal use.

They give figures for the substantial number of people criminalised for possession of an illegal drug (42,000 in 2011/12), and although they introduce the figures by mentioning people being criminalised for "their drug use" there is no available breakdown to show how many of those sentenced were merely in possession for personal use.

We are told that a substantial minority of the public use drugs recreationally (no figure given), with a smaller number becoming problem users, and that the major determinants of problem use are childhood abuse or trauma.

Another paragraph tells us that studies show that there is little or no relationship between the legal status of drug use in a country and the rate of drug use within it. Specific mention is made of Portugal which moved to a healthcare based system in 2001. The summary tells us "A decriminalisation approach coupled with investment in harm reduction and treatment services can have a positive impact on both individual drug users and society as a whole. Decriminalisation does appear to direct more drug users into treatment, reduce criminal justice costs and shield many drug users from the devastating impact of a criminal conviction."

Organisations calling for drug reform are cited, including the UN, WHO and others. The justification is given that it is not ethical to punish people for their vulnerability and that compassion is felt for those harmed by criminalisation. This is an expression of love in action.

Notably, the emphasis is on removing the harm done by people receiving criminal conviction but at this stage there is no call for helping people away from drug use or of positive support (but the idea is used in support of their position).

The main text:

The main text draws together various strands of information with the intent of "help[ing] Friends understand why Cornwall Area Meeting has raised this concern"

Cornwall AM explain that their argument is only for those found in possession for personal drug use and does not concern itself with the supply chain and other attendant activity. Figures are given for the numbers of people imprisoned for possession but the distinction is not clear between those who were in possession

purely for personal use and others. 80,000 were found guilty of possession in 2011, of which 3% were imprisoned. Cornwall AM state that 1,000 are imprisoned “solely for the possession of drugs for personal use” but the source of this figure is not clear. We are informed of the negative impact of criminalisation, such as social exclusion, educational attainment and employment, and that the policing is focussed on black and minority communities.

The paper then begins to draw a distinction between those who use for recreational purposes and those who are considered to be problem users. Some space is given to discussing the nature and prevalence of recreational drug use. “Sometimes, very importantly, drugs have been used for pleasure and enjoyment.”

The problem of dependent use is discussed, suggesting that for some what was once recreational use will become problematic in that dependency will develop. That psychiatric symptoms in later life are often associated with childhood trauma is given to suggest that there is a link to early experiences and substance abuse. In their own survey of people with dependency problems, 46% of males and 73% of females reported childhood abuse. Another study is cited which suggests that 84% of people in treatment for drug/alcohol abuse reported a history of child abuse / neglect.

One paragraph states that “A study of sexual abuse, shows significant correlations between variables such as family drug use, first age of sexual abuse, age of first depression and age of first illicit drug use”

Figures are given for the number of drug offences reported: in 2011/12 there were 229,000 offences (from the exec summary, relating to 42,000 people) of which 86% relate to possession; 1,247 people were imprisoned for possession and 21,862 were fined. A value judgment is made that fines make little sense if the person is dependent upon drugs. However, there is no distinction in the figures between those in possession purely for personal use and others. Racial disparities are cited. [This relates back to the figure of 1,000 given in the executive summary.]

The report then discusses the problems of imprisonment in general terms and discusses the correspondence of drug use and prison. “Most Quakers agree that imprisonment should only be used when there is a danger to people which cannot otherwise be contained or removed” “The Prison Reform Trust suggests that between one third and a half of new receptions into prison are estimated to be problem drug users”. In 2014 14% of prisoners were in prison on drug related offences (possession, supply, trafficking). 66% of women and 38% of men admit to committing crime relating to drug use, e.g.: theft. The majority of this section discusses the issues surrounding incarceration. “Once you come out of prison you’ve got that hanging over you for the rest of your life”

Decriminalisation for personal use, prevalence and policy reform

The report refers to Release who in turn refer to the notion that cannabis possession has effectively been decriminalised in the UK with the introduction of non-criminal sanctions in 2004. However, it is noted that this resulted in the police increasing the targeting of minor possession.

The report states “what emerges from the complexity of evidence collected, is that the harms of criminalisation for personal use far outweigh those of decriminalisation. Also, that decriminalisation does not result in an increase in use, rather, that it does direct

more users into treatment. [Though this could be the result of increased attention to health based initiatives, not the decriminalisation per se]

Treatment services in the UK are discussed, the main conclusion being that there is a mismatch in that treatment services are prioritised for cocaine and heroin but 70% of all drug offences relate to cannabis.

Portugal is held up as a model for the decriminalisation of drug use, drawing on research by Hughes and Stevens. In 2001 Portugal ceased to treat personal use of drugs as a criminal offence, "Dissuasion" now being the emphasis, which in turn prioritises a health based approach. The findings of the research are given which include small increases in use of illicit drugs, reduced use amongst problem users, reduced burden on the criminal justice system, increased take up of treatment, reduction in opiate related deaths and diseases, increased amounts of drugs being seized, reduction in the price of drugs, no signs of expansion in the mass market. It is noted that QAAD looked into the issue in 2012 but was not led to take a position.

The paper then sets out the differences it perceived in the views of those in Cornwall and the views of QAAD. Mostly these are that Cornwall Friends accept clear evidence regarding harms of criminalisation and accept clear evidence that decriminalisation does not lead to greater prevalence. Presumably QAAD do not... [The QAAD report makes interesting reading]

The document ends with a section relating to the "Quaker concern". It states "Our concern arises from the magnitude of harm caused by the current drug policy to each individual affected, to their families and to their communities. Each individual is precious individual lives are blighted by this policy". "We raise this issue as a concern as Quakers because we feel deep compassion for those hurt and harmed by the criminalisation of their personal drug use and by advocating for this concern we are expressing our love in action." "As Quakers we should be asking the fundamental questions: is it right to criminalise a person for the recreational use of drugs? is it right to criminalise a person who has a health related need? should we be providing care and treatment or responding punitively to people's needs? It is simply not ethical in our view to punish people for their vulnerability and in consequence have tens of thousands of people in prison. We ask Friends to examine the need to take action on this issue in order to abide by the principles of truth, equality and compassion."

Notably, there is no call here for an increase in the availability and promotion of a health care based system, despite it's being referenced as an important factor in the supporting evidence given.

Northumbria AM held on 11 September 2016

Minute 9/9/16 Concerns

Further to Minute 8 WG 8/16, some of our Local Meetings have discussed the concerns below and the following Minute from Stocksfield Local Meeting has been received:

Min 4 (4.9.16) reads in part 'Our Clerk has drawn our attention to two matters which will be on the agenda of the MfWfB in the afternoon. Firstly, the concern of Cornwall AM for the decriminalisation of all drugs for personal use. Sue Bennet, Clerk AM, has summarised the issues as outlined by Cornwall Friends, in the attached paper.

Secondly, the concern from Meeting for Sufferings about the need to reform the Criminal Justice system. Background papers have been prepared and circulated.

We are encouraged to know that Friends are actively engaged in taking these matters forward. We support the work being done and look forward to hearing how it progresses.'

b) Decriminalisation of the possession for personal use of all drugs

We receive a minute from Newcastle Local Meeting:

Minute 2016/7/6: Two concerns for discussion in local Meetings from Meeting for Sufferings:

Meeting for Sufferings has asked LMs to consider two concerns and to send their views to MfS through the AM representative.

ii) Minute 14 – Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs: a concern from Cornwall AM

The briefing paper from Friends in Cornwall was circulated in advance of the LM. We ask Friends to read this document, if they have not already done so, and to consider the summary points, including QF&P 23.47 (Grigor McClelland), highlighted by Sue Bennet (lodged with these minutes). We agree that we also support this concern in principle and thank Sue Bennet for making a complex paper clearer.

We also receive a minute from Alnwick Local Meeting:

Minute 3a 08/21 Decriminalisation of drugs

Friends decided in support of decriminalisation of drugs for personal use and wish to see development of good prevention and support services.

Alnwick

We receive the minute below from Sunderland Local Business Meeting held on Sunday 4th September 2016

11.2 Concern re decriminalisation for possession for personal use of all drugs

Sunderland Friends support Cornwall's paper.

The Clerk will send this minute to Cornwall Area Meeting and to Meeting for Sufferings, for the attention of the Quaker Peace and Social Witness Crime, Community and Justice Subcommittee.

Susan Bennet
Clerk to Northumbria Area Meeting

Sheffield & Balby AM held on 11 September 2016

Minute 5. Cornwall Area Meeting concern advocating the decriminalisation of the personal use of all drugs. (refers Sheffield & Balby AM minute 4a May meeting and minute 8 July meeting)

We have explored the concern adopted by Cornwall Area Meeting advocating the decriminalisation of the personal use of all drugs, through a World Café discussion with leadings from our Friend, Norman Anderson.

We feel that while there could be benefits to decriminalising drugs for personal use it would require considerable funding, especially initially, to develop necessary system changes. In the present political climate this is unlikely to be forthcoming and we feel that politicians may be too scared of the media reaction to promote the changes.

Should the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use be adopted by Meeting for Sufferings / Britain Yearly Meeting as a concern we would support this, but do not feel it is a concern which we, Sheffield and Balby Area Meeting feel is our priority at present.

We ask our clerks to send the minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

Sallie Ashe
for the Clerking team at Sheffield and Balby Area Meeting

North West London AM held on 16 September 2016

Minute 16.05.09 Decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use

We unite with Cornwall AM's concern to decriminalise possession of drugs for personal use.

Current Government policy is wasting money criminalising drugs, when it might be used more productively to fund drug rehabilitation services. However this is a complex problem and we encourage wider consultation and debate on the supply of drugs and their decriminalisation.

Your Friend

Dugan Cummings

Clerk, NW London Area Quaker Meeting:

Lincolnshire AM held on 17 September 2016

Minute 16.09.71

Response to two matters from Meeting for Sufferings, namely Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs and Vision for a criminal justice system. Ref. mins 16.05.46 and 16.07.49

The clerks have reminded this meeting of the email sent from MfS in spring of this year.

Alford LM has stated that it is content to go with the feeling of AQM.

Grimsby LM supports these concerns but is not able to submit a minute.

Spalding LM is unable to respond to this at this time.

Gainsborough LM and Boston LM are not in a position to respond.

Brant Broughton meeting has sent the following –

Brant Broughton Quaker Meeting. Meeting for Worship for Business

Thursday, 11th August 2016

1. Matters from Meeting for Sufferings

At our Meeting for Worship for Business on 9th June 2016 we received two items from Meeting for Sufferings and we asked Elders and Overseers to consider them and also agreed to hold a separate meeting to discuss them. This is that Meeting. We undertook to submit a Minute for consideration at Area Meeting in September. We have discussed both items and offer the following:

a. Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

Minute: We have considered the information from Cornwall Area Meeting and recognise the concern. We do not feel, however that we, as a Meeting, are able to do more, at this time, than offer our prayerful support for the endeavours of Cornwall AM.

In friendship,

Janette Fraser
(Lincs AM co-clerk)

Norfolk & Waveney AM held on 17 September 2016

Minute 9/09/2016 Area Meeting response to the Cornwall AM concern regarding the decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use.

We have received from Meeting for Sufferings a document pertaining to the Cornwall Area Meeting concern on the decriminalisation of possession of drugs for personal use, a copy is attached to these minutes. Meeting for Sufferings are seeking a response from us as they look to guide Cornwall Area Meeting toward its next stage. This document was circulated in advance of this meeting to allow Friends and Local Meetings to consider the matter and we have received responses to this document from Beccles, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn Local Meetings, copies of these responses are attached to these minutes.

We have been reminded of minute 16 of our Area Meeting, held in September 2013, when we considered our response to a minute from Cornwall Area Meeting. On this occasion we encouraged Cornwall Area Meeting to continue to develop its concern on this country's drug policy and we forwarded responses from some of our Local Meetings to them.

We feel limited support for the concern from Cornwall A M and agree some drug use needs to be dealt with by a medical / health intervention. However, we still have concerns around issues linked to supply, abuse, issues that lead to drug use and the cost of and availability of treatment.

We ask our Clerk to send this minute plus the three from Local Quaker Meetings to Meeting for Sufferings.

Norfolk and Waveney Quaker Area Meeting Responses 2016 to the Cornwall Concern on the possession of Drugs for Personal Use.

Beccles Local Meeting

Minute 7/7/2016. Possession of drugs for personal use.

We accept the proposal that the possession of drugs for personal use should be decriminalised. We ask the Clerk to forward this minute to the AM Clerk.

Great Yarmouth Local Meeting.

We do not believe that an immediate, punitive, response to the possession of drugs for personal use is helpful to either the drug-user or society. We do believe that early, supportive, health based intervention, quickly and easily accessible to all who use drugs, would be of greater benefit to all.

Kings Lynn Local Meeting.

At our Meeting for Worship for Business in King's Lynn on 3rd July we made the following minute:

3. Cornwall concern for decriminalisation of drugs for personal use.

We support the concern as a sensible and compassionate approach. We feel it should be addressed in the context both of work to understand the fractures in society that lead so many people to turn to addictive substances and also of an improvement in the availability of treatment.

Yours in Friendship
Michael Johnson

Area Meeting Clerk.

Notts & Derbys AM held on 17 September 2016

Minute 49/16 Matters arising from MfS 2/4/16

(a) Decriminalisation of possession of all drugs for personal use

We have considered the two issues sent to us by Meeting for Sufferings, taking into account the responses from our local meetings, agree the two minutes following:

“We wholeheartedly support and share Cornwall Area Meeting’s concern to promote the decriminalisation of all drugs for personal use. We thank them for the detailed research which they have presented. We agree that there is a need for us to work together in order for us to effect change on this issue.”

In addition to the above the Clerks are requested to send the respective responses from our local meetings.

In friendship,
Steve Adams
Paul Nicholas
Co-clerks, Notts & Derby Area Quaker Meeting

Notts and Derby Area Meeting: May 2016

Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

Minute 23/16 (c) Juliet Prager, BYM Deputy Recording Clerk, has drawn our attention to minutes 14 and 17 of the meeting in April.

Minute 14 – Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

“This is a concern of Cornwall AM, which is asking for help with testing the concern. A briefing paper is available, and Friends from Cornwall would be happy to talk with you or visit your AM if that would help. More information is available on the South West Quakers website.

Minute 17 – Vision for a criminal justice system

“Quaker Peace and Social Witness Central Committee is considering this paper. It builds on and develops previous work. The Committee hopes Friends will help test the vision expressed in the paper.”

We note that MfS has requested responses from area meetings by 21st October, to enable it to be included in papers for its meeting on 3 December. We ask the correspondence clerk to circulate background papers to these two issues, to enable Friends to take these concerns to their Local Meetings, and to help inform a fuller discussion at our area meeting in September.

The following responses have been received to date:

Chesterfield:

Minute 16/47 We discussed the question brought to us from Meeting for Sufferings regarding the Decriminalisation of drugs for personal use. Friends hope that any people who use drugs would be supported at every stage rather than criminalised.

Workshop

Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

A small group of us, 5 Friends and Attenders, have discussed the concern from Cornwall Area Meeting about the decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs. We see the problem of drug addiction as symptomatic of wider problems in society. We have discussed the impact problematic drug use has on mental health and our Mental Health services. We agree with the statement “... drug dependent people need health and social care, not imprisonment.” *

* From the Quaker statement presented at UNGASS (United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the global drug problem held in April 2016), quoted in an article in the Friend, 8/7/16

Derby LM

Meeting for Business, 4 September 2016

7. 'Decriminalisation of Possession for Personal Use of all Drugs'

Meeting for Sufferings has also circulated a second paper with the above title. This is a concern of Cornwall AM which is asking for help in testing the concern.

We note the extreme complexity of the trade in illegal drugs. Friends should read the excellent books by Misha Glenny and Stephen Elliott, see the film by Michael Moore,

and study the effects of the proposed reforms in other countries such as Portugal. We recognise the severe health damage caused by some drugs, including those that are legal such as alcohol, and the need of most users for help rather than punishment. We also note that the weight of the law falls heavily on those who might be regarded as the victims of the drug trade, while leaving the traffickers largely untouched. We have considered various alternatives to the present situation, including a strict regulation of the drug trade in a way similar to the regulation of the sale of alcohol and tobacco; decriminalisation of possession for personal use, while mounting a more effective attack on the distribution and sale of these drugs; or continuing to criminalise possession as well as sale of some, though not necessarily all, of the drugs that are at present illegal. However, we are not yet able to agree as to which is the best way forward.

Bakewell LM

Report for Local Business Meeting 4th September 2016 – Sue Isaac
We were recently asked by Area Meeting to consider

Maggie Lightowler-Cook and I read and discussed Cornwall Area Meeting's concern about the decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use.

This was an extremely comprehensive, well researched and convincing paper, outlining the harms caused by criminalising people who use drugs. The paper points out that substance use has been found throughout human history and so "cannot be seen simply as a set of deviant or pathological behaviours", and there is a substantial amount of evidence to link dependent drug use and childhood abuse. Statistics about the consequences of imprisonment on life chances; the connection between drug use, mental health problems and suicidal behaviour and the connection between imprisonment and the first use of heroin are given. The case is made that "the harms of criminalisation for personal use far outweigh those of decriminalisation".

In 2001 Portugal decriminalised drug use, bringing the whole administration under healthcare. The prevalence of drug use has not increased and more drug users have gone into treatment, reducing criminal justice costs and the impact of criminal convictions.

Maggie and I commented as follows:

"We wholeheartedly support and share Cornwall Area Meeting's Concern to promote the decriminalisation of all drugs for personal use. We thank them for the detailed research which they have presented. We agree that there is a need for us to work together in order to effect change on this issue."

Mansfield LM

Held on 21st August 2016 at 12 noon

Minute 6: Items from Area Meeting

Response to Minutes from Meeting for Sufferings.

We have shared the following documents with Mansfield friends and after some discussion we consider it appropriate to support both concerns.

Minute 14 - Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs.

Minute 17 - Vision for a criminal justice system.

West Somerset AM held on 17 September 2016

Minute 16/68 Consideration of Cornwall AM's concern about decriminalising drugs

Cornwall AM are asking for help in testing their concern, and, to this end Sufferings have asked us to consider their paper on the decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use.

We have done this in our Local Meetings and at Area Meeting and are happy for the collated feedback to be sent to Sufferings as our response

In Friendship,
Anne Jackson and Gilly Lee
Co-clerks, West Somerset AM

West Somerset Area Quaker Meeting

A summary of responses from LMs and AM to: Briefing Paper from Cornwall Area Meeting Decriminalisation of the Possession of Drugs for Personal Use

This paper is broadly supported by Friends a key phrase for many was that:

‘It is not ethical to punish people for their vulnerability....’

However, it was felt that little attempt was made to answer, or even consider, the arguments against such a course of action.

Practical points raised include:

- Possession for personal use decriminalised, but any subsequent illegal behaviors should be prosecuted.
- A coherent policy would need to address not just the decriminalisation of possession for personal use, but also the unquestionable criminality of much of the supply of drugs, and how to respond to that.
- Consider self-funded treatment for early offenders, in a similar form to Speed Awareness courses given to first time drivers exceeding a speed limit.
- Concern about the proliferation of Legal Highs.
- The causes and consequences of drug (including alcohol) abuse need to be addressed.
- Decriminalisation would allow a greater degree of regulation of drug quality, and reduce exploitation of users.
- Would like to see a current response to this paper from our established committee QAAD.
- The attraction of young people to 'breaking the law' would be addressed by decriminalisation.
- Prison is needed for some habituated users but this can only work with a well formed rehabilitation program.

In summary there is a general concern that any move towards decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use must be supported with adequate funding for healthcare and education.

Hertford & Hitchin AM held on 17 September 2016

Local Meeting Responses To Meeting For Sufferings Papers

Hitchin LM

Minute 43/16 Papers from Meeting for Sufferings:

Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use;

We have received, via Area Meeting, two papers from Meeting for Sufferings for discussion, initially by local meetings, then by Area Meeting this month, so that responses can be forwarded to Meeting for Sufferings, to assist in their preparation of policy documents. We thank the six Friends who have made known their views in advance. A copy of the two documents from Meeting for Sufferings, and the six contributions from individual Hitchin Friends, are filed with the attachments to these minutes.

We agree to inform Area Meeting of Hitchin Quaker Meeting's view that decriminalisation of drugs for personal use is a worthwhile aim, and that we support the vision for a criminal justice system. We ask our Clerk to send copies of individual Hitchin Friends' contributions to the Area Meeting Clerk.

Hitchin Preparative Meeting 3 July 2016

Drug Decriminalisation and Criminal Justice discussion papers

Six responses from Hitchin Friends

I agree that drug-use should be a health issue and not a criminal justice concern, except for those who supply and distribute drugs. However, I have lived with a heroin addict and know some of the realities of how that particular addiction pushes people to steal, lie and self-justify, legal or illegal... I am sure those who have lived with an alcoholic would say the same. I am therefore of the opinion that we should have, on the one hand, zero-tolerance for the supply of drugs and on the other hand a robust system of treatment centres for addicts. Glad I'm not a policy-maker.

I have read the Cornwall paper - but not checked any the references. The first paragraph is uncompromising on its boundaries and rightly so, in my opinion - "This concern focuses on the need to decriminalise the possession of all drugs for personal use. The concern does not address the production, importing or selling of drugs, nor does it address drug related crime (crimes committed to enable the purchase of drugs)".

My concern would be that as it stands this might be taken as a cost-saving opportunity. There may be a cost-saving eventually, but produce any social or financial benefits, any redirection of resources must have commensurate investment in support structures. This point is adequately made in the body of the document. I would add that such a change will impact drug-related crime and the drug supply chain - and how these are treated. This is not to detract from the validity of the concern, but rather towards pursuing it with eyes. I would hope that this is also acknowledged in some way, in our response to this concern.

What a challenge both these papers provide. They almost reduce me to silence and a feeling of hopelessness. It's a pity they have come together like this, as taken together they test the boundaries of my liberal instincts. I know what Quaker orthodoxy requires

of me but on the other hand I feel that too many assumptions are being made about what individual Friends think.

I find the criminal justice paper too wide ranging and idealistic to respond to, while the paper on decriminalisation is much more of a single issue that I can imagine getting somewhere.

My view from liberal Sweden is I support the decriminalisation proposal but consider the criminal justice paper needs further consideration to identify specific achievable objectives.

I support

- The decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use, as in the Portuguese model.
- Increasing the support and treatment of those who have strayed onto drug usage.

I believe drug use is often the result of pressures in our society today such lack of opportunity, peers pressure, etc.

I would like to go further and generally legalise the use of most drugs even though I know sometimes its use can lead towards a downward spiral. Use of alcohol tobacco can be as equally damaging but is acceptable in our society so the anathema of what society prohibits and accepts in my view is skewed. A more level field could remove stigma and organised crime.

The way to defeat substance abuse is education, support, providing opportunity and building bridges from despair to enlightenment.

I guess a lot of this is supported in the papers but it wasn't so much of an easy read as I had hoped, In general I support, especially when it aligned with my key concerns.

On decriminalisation of drugs the answer does not seem to be so clear cut. I would make the point that decriminalisation can sweep away a lot of the evils associated with criminalisation. I agree that the Portuguese model sounds hopeful, although I feel only a pilot scheme would tell if it worked in this country or not. There still needs to be some form of monitoring though. I would also make the point that some crime is caused by those who fail to take their prescribed drug based medication.

Decriminalisation of drug use - I have long thought that the criminalisation of drug use as a means of trying to engender a change in behaviour is artificial given that many have suffered and died because we have legally allowed nicotine and alcohol, both of which, to differing levels, are addictive. I accept that Government and society in general should seek to minimise dangers to people, but there are many dangers which we allow to continue. There is no legislation, for instance, to criminalise activities like mountain climbing by novices, playing rugby and other sports, sea and wild water swimming, eating too much sugar and riding motorcycles (to name a few). As members of society we are allowed to do these and other dangerous activities and we accept that freedom. We, in effect, allow people to accept risk so I cannot understand why we don't allow them to accept the risk of drug taking.

Further, criminalisation has led to a large increase in risk and danger by its effects. Selling illicit drugs not freely (and cheaply) available in pharmacies or specialist shops has proved a lucrative source of income to criminals of all types. This activity has brought along the collateral damage of drug wars between competing gangs, addicts forced to steal or engage in prostitution and the damage this has made to individuals and communities.

Welwyn Garden City LM

45/16 Consultation on the Decriminalisation of drugs and Criminal Justice

We shared information on 'Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use' and began our consideration of this. We look forward to learning more about this area. We shared part of the report on 'A Vision for a Criminal Justice System'. We welcome the paper and encourage and uphold the members of the QPSW sub committee in their work.

Hertford LM

Minute 16/30 from Hertford Business Meeting September 11th 2016

16/30 Meeting for Sufferings consultation paper

Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use

Hertford Friends support the content of this paper and ask the Clerk to forward this minute to the Clerk of Area Meeting.

Eight Friends met to consider the paper further and their minute is being sent separately.

Minute from discussion meeting held after Meeting for Worship on Sep 4th 2016

We wholly support the decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use. It is not ethical to punish people for their vulnerability and we feel deep concern and compassion for those harmed by criminalisation.

We see the need for an inclusive structure for treatment and support.

Mid-Essex AM held on 18 September 2016

Minute 16/97 Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

In minute 16/56, we asked LMs to consider the paper submitted to Meeting for Sufferings by Cornwall AM and to report to AM by the end of October. Maldon considered the paper at their September LM business meeting together with one prepared by QAAD which fails to come to an agreed conclusion. Other LMs are also experiencing difficulty. We are reminded that when Essex and Suffolk Regional Gathering examined the paper in 2012, they came to no firm conclusions.

We fear that we may be unable to provide Meeting for Sufferings with useful comments in the time available. Even though we are wise to consider our own personal views on these issues, we think that it would be better to defer our consideration as a Meeting for, say, a year or two so that we can take account of views expressed increasingly by wider society. We decide, therefore, not to pursue the suggestion for a one day meeting to be arranged shortly to examine the issues with the help of knowledgeable speakers and ask the clerk to report our inability to comment at this stage."

Best wishes, in Friendship
Peter Garratt

South East London AM held on 23 October 2016

Minute 16/104 Decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use

Meeting for Sufferings has asked Area Meetings to consider a paper from Cornwall Area Meeting on the decriminalisation of the possession of all drugs for personal use. We have had the opportunity to read the full paper, (or the executive summary). We remember that in 2013, Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs (QAAD) prepared a briefing paper on the decriminalisation of illicit drugs. QAAD Trustees continue to focus on influencing drug policy towards more health-based provision as regards drug use and misuse.

Today at our Special Area Meeting we have had the chance to consider the Cornwall paper in some depth, with the help of our guest speaker, Alexander Stevens, Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Kent, and President of the International Society for the Study of Drug Policy and member of the Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs.

He explained that decriminalisation involves the removal of criminal sanctions for possession of drugs. It differs from legalisation, which refers to the creation of a legal market for the production and sale of drugs.

He spoke of the harm caused by getting a criminal record on both relationships and employment prospects.

David Nutt and his colleagues have pointed out that the harms caused by alcohol are greater than those of illegal drugs, but alcohol is not covered by the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

It is an anomaly that, while it is an offence to possess drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, under the Psycho-active Substances Act 2016, it is not an offence to possess substances formerly known as 'legal highs' (unless you are in prison).

In the Netherlands cannabis is still illegal, but the police do not prosecute for possession or sale of small amounts of cannabis.

In 2001 Portugal 'de-criminalised' the possession of up to ten days' worth of any drug, and at the same time expanded treatment, e.g. the use of heroine substitutes. Deaths from drug misuse have decreased in Portugal, which could of course be as a result of the increased treatment options, rather than of de-criminalisation.

The costs of policing and imprisoning people for drug offences is greater than spending on treatment.

He discussed the government's likely resistance to a change in legislation. He concluded that criminalisation does harm that is not justified by any benefit.

After a question and answer session we broke into small groups to consider the questions:

- Should it be a criminal offence to possess cannabis
- Should it be a criminal offence to possess any drug

- Should it be a criminal offence to possess any drug or psychoactive substance in prison
- What else should be done (apart from legislation) to reduce the harms of drug use

Many Friends mentioned the relevance for us of the Quaker Testimonies to equality, integrity and non-violence to this issue.

We are essentially with Cornwall Area Meeting's concern as expressed in their paper, although some of us are still 'threshing' this issue.

Judith Niechcial - Clerk
Yvonne Rigby - Assistant Clerk

York AM held on 12 November 2016

Minute 2016.11.59 Meeting for Sufferings consultations.

We have received a minute from the group at Area Meeting who considered the Meeting for Sufferings consultation about the decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use. Our Meeting for Sufferings representative will have this minute but, in the time available, Area Meeting itself is unable to give its support.

We have considered the paper prepared by Cornwall Area Meeting on the decriminalisation of drugs for personal use, which has been forwarded to us by Meeting for Sufferings.

We find the arguments persuasive and clear. We recommend that Meeting for Sufferings adds a Quaker voice to this campaign.

John Guest, Clerk

Kendal & Sedbergh AM held on 12 November 2016

Minute 16.11.22 Meeting for Sufferings, Dec 3rd 2016. (16.09.15 refers).

Two matters referred to area meetings. 'Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs' (Minute from Cornwall A.M.) and 'Vision for a criminal Justice system'. (Paper from QPSWCC.)

These two issues have had preparatory discussion by Kirkby Stephen Meeting and at a threshing meeting for Brigflatts, Kendal and Preston Patrick Friends held in Kendal.

Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs.

We realise that this is a complex and controversial issue. Some Friends tend to think that decriminalisation would be a progressive move. Others are doubtful. There is agreement that acquiring a criminal record as a result of the personal use of drugs can destroy an individual's chance of rehabilitation and future employment, especially if the individual is young or very small quantities of drugs are involved. Reform is needed as regards this aspect of the problem. We need to consider the experience of other countries which have conducted experimental reform on this issue. We are agreed that the weight of the law should be applied to the suppliers of drugs rather than to those who seek to acquire them for personal use.

Peter Leeming
Clerk

Worcestershire and Shropshire AM held on 19 November 2016

Minute 72/16 Decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs

Helena Chambers, director of Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs (QAAD), led a session to consider Cornwall Area Meeting's concern regarding the decriminalisation of the possession, for personal use, of all drugs. The following minute arises from our thoughts today.

We have considered many aspects of this matter and realised that we have many unanswered questions. We are not ready to reach a unified response. We understand that QAAD supports the idea of a Royal Commission and we support this too.

We thank Helena Chambers for guiding us through these issues.

Angie Dunhill and Jackie Fowler,
Co-clerks