Simpler meetings – area meeting trustees

This document is about possibilities. It shares many ideas collected from Quakers around Britain about how we can simplify the way we organise ourselves. You can find more topics here: www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings. For each topic there is a document and a short video. All the topics are collected in "*Simpler Meetings – what is possible*", which also explains ways you can approach the topics.

Relationships
The relationship between the area meeting and its trustees needs to work smoothly. There needs to be a common understanding of which kind of decisions need to be made by the area meeting in session, and which decisions are right for the trustees to make. Sometimes of course things will move between one or the other, with a bit of consultation. But they do not need to keep moving back and forth repeatedly. We need to trust our trustees.

Another key relationship is between the clerk of trustees and the clerk of the area meeting. Do they get on well? Do they talk often? Do they have the same view about which decisions are right in which meeting? Do things run smoothly?

Relationships between the trustees are really worth working on too.

Prioritising
Like any organisation, like any meeting, it is really important to prioritise which things are important to spend time on and which are less important. Some less important things can take up a lot of time. Are there some things that we can leave altogether?

Using sub-groups
Quite a few Quaker trustee bodies use sub-groups. They might for example have three: finance, property, and policy & people. Then each trustee does not have to think in detail about all of the issues. They can rely on their colleagues to go into the detail on a topic, while the high-level decisions come to the whole trustee body for discernment.

Involving non-trustees
Some area meetings involve non-trustees on their sub-groups. For example, they might have a human resources professional who is happy to share some of their expertise, being on the people and policies sub-group. They can contribute without taking on the whole of the trustee role. Involving non-trustees can be a useful way of being inclusive, and it can draw people into the trustee body.

Delegating
Not all of the trustees' decisions need to be made by the trustees in full session. Some issues can be delegated to a sub-group. This might be for smaller levels of spending, or certain types of item, either delegated completely to the sub-group or to be confirmed at the full trustees meeting. Another way of delegating, of course, is to pay some people to do some of the work. (See a later section)

Using video conferences and email
Some bodies will use video conferences to enable them to get together a group of people to make some decisions without everybody having to travel every time. This also reduces the carbon footprint, saves travel time, and can lead to shorter meetings. It also enables people to join in who would otherwise be prevented or discouraged. That does not replace meeting face to face, but you might use it periodically. Certainly communicating by email frequently enough also helps things move along. Governing documents can be amended to allow decisions by electronic means.

Working with another area meeting
Some area meetings are exploring whether they could do some things in common with another area meeting. They might try to develop policies together. They might use the same suppliers, or processes. Or they might just check with each other how they do things. That can make things much simpler rather than everybody having to reinvent the wheel. (See a later section.)

Policies for area meetings
This really is an area where we seem to be reinventing the wheel a lot. So one part of the Simpler Meetings Project is to source a range of model policies that can be adapted and then adopted by area meetings rather than everybody generating them independently. They will be added to the BYM website, and can be found from the area meeting trustees' page.

Questions to consider

- How are our relationships? With area meeting in session, with the area meeting clerk, and amongst trustees?
- Is there clarity about which decisions are for trustees, and which for area meeting in session?
- Are we prioritising effectively?
- Would it be useful to have sub-groups? And include non-trustees?
- Are we delegating effectively?
- Could we sometimes have teleconference or video meetings, or use email for small decisions?
- Could we co-operate with neighbouring area meetings more?
- Do we have good policies, and do we need to invent them ourselves?

Can you help?

The Simpler Meetings project is gathering and sharing ways that Quakers find work well for them. The aim is to liberate the joy of being a Quaker. You can learn more at www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings. Please send your ideas and suggestions to Jonathan Carmichael, Simpler Meetings Project Manager at JonathanC@Quaker.org.uk.

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