

## **Simpler meetings – property management**

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](http://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.

### **Getting the balance right**

If you ask Friends what tends to take up the most time and energy, and what are some of the biggest burdens, very often the answer is “our properties”. Some of them do generate very useful income for us, or serve us very well, while some are absorbing our money and draining our time and energy. So getting the balance right is really important. There are many ways being used by area meetings to make life easier on premises.

### **On the BYM website**

A good place to start is the property advice page on the BYM website <https://www.quaker.org.uk/property>. The Property Guidance Sheets there cover many topics. There is also the new Meeting House Handbook Template, with useful information set out in a way that each meeting house can use. You can also join an email group there, to seek advice from colleagues all around Britain.

### **Sharing suppliers**

It can be hard for an individual premises committee to find good tradespeople. In some areas they use trusted traders to make it easier to for local meetings. These can be coordinated by an individual, working for the meeting or for a company. Another good method is for meetings to share which traders they use and provide good value. Often we are working in our own little boxes and we have traders that we want to work with. But perhaps we don't let our neighbours or those further afield know about the jewels we have found.

Some area meetings do this on a whole area basis. For example, they might use the same electrician to inspect all their properties, or the same company to maintain fire extinguishers. This will rather depend on the geography, and does not always work for every kind of trade – you might want a local plumber. But it can make life a lot easier for some tasks.

### **A property management service**

Taking it a step further, some area meetings are engaging a comprehensive property management service for some functions. They can get reliable tradespeople, and the expertise of somebody to oversee the work. That can relieve local Friends from a task which can be quite a burden.

A really good example of this has been Norfolk and Waveney Area Meeting piloting working with the Churches Conservation Trust. This is a specialist organisation focused on historic buildings. The area meeting trustees arranged a contract so that each meeting house gets an annual visit. This includes a series of checks, and some planned maintenance like gutters, drains and clearing undergrowth. They also have a good discussion with the premises committee, or whoever the relevant people are, about further pieces of work that might need to be done. They have a pool of reliable tradespeople they work with, and as an organisation their team is really focused on historic buildings and faith communities. The costs is around £1,500 for a typical meeting house, plus a percentage to arrange and supervise extra projects their tradespeople deliver.

The reports from Norfolk and Waveney are very positive. They are sure the work gets done to protect their buildings, and Friends do not have to spend as much time and energy working out what to do. You can learn more here:

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-organisation/examples/managing-listed-buildings-help-1>

### **Extending the role of Quaker property trusts**

There are quite a few Quaker property trusts around the country. There is real scope for some of those to extend their role. They could perhaps cover a wider range of meeting houses than they do at the moment. Some areas might combine several small property trusts into one, or work together with the same trustees or staff, so they have a greater core.

Some Quaker property trusts are looking to expand their remit from just owning and overseeing property into practical support, for example managing utilities in common or managing lettings. There is also scope for becoming an employer of staff for a larger range of meetings and helping with administration and compliance.

### **Increasing income**

It may be fruitful to work together to increase the income from certain meeting houses in an area. This could then pay for support for others, and reduce the volunteers' workload.

### **Having fewer meeting houses**

Of all the ways of reducing the burden on role-holders, having fewer meeting houses probably has the greatest effect. It can liberate energy for other aspects of our Quaker lives. Over a quarter of meetings in Britain run without a meeting house. See the section on Meeting Houses - Alternatives.

## Questions to consider:

- Are we making good use of the resources on the BYM website about property, and the property email group?
- Would it help to share suppliers with other meetings around us?
- Would it be good to use a property management company for some functions?
- Could we usefully extend the role of a property trust, to cover a wider area, or provide a greater range of functions, to support out meetings?
- Are there meetings whose meeting house is a heavy burden? Would an alternative be better? (See also Meeting Houses – Alternatives)

## 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](http://www.quaker.org.uk/simplermeetings). Please send your ideas and suggestions to Jonathan Carmichael, Simpler Meetings Project Manager at [JonathanC@Quaker.org.uk](mailto:JonathanC@Quaker.org.uk).

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