

Area Meeting Review held 4th October 2017

Present: Sue Beardon, Rosie Carnall, Tim Herrick, Doug Candler, Chrissie Hinde, Rosemary Roberts, Matthew Roberts, Gordon Ferguson, Jenny Crisp, Kate Napier, Sallie Ashe.

The general feeling was that what we've achieved in the last 3 years is a vast improvement in terms of the Area Meeting events. The annual all age Sunday event at Sheffield Central Meeting House was a great success and will be continued. The challenge now is to develop the ongoing community of Area Meeting and to create opportunities that Friends want to take up. These should chime with their current interests and activities rather than feel like an added commitment.

We also focussed on some **areas of concern**, which we need to improve and work on over the period ahead:

- Are we still too "Congregationalist" and not taking the opportunities that arise from sharing as a wider Quaker community?
- We are still failing to engage some Friends in shaping our Area Meeting, its shared concerns and priorities.
- We are communicating through minutes and reports, but not putting across the joys and engagement of people in Area Meeting events.
- More Friends need to take the opportunity to engage more widely with BYM, and even if they cannot attend Yearly Meeting Gathering they can and should be part of the preparation for it.
- Clerks have liaised with trustees but not so much with Elders, whose input is needed more at Area Meeting level.
- We need to find ways of engaging our younger members
- We need to ensure we make good use of the AM website and that Friends use it regularly and proactively

At the review we identified some **key priorities**

- Nominations and simplifying structures – too much focus on bureaucracy is a block to developing the all age community we wish to engender
- What is our ministry? A clearer sense of who we are, what our common concerns are is needed.
- In-reach – connected to the point above – we need to work on ourselves and our community in order for outreach to be effective.
- Opportunities for learning and action together: sharing across our meetings to make more use of available resources
- Dealing with the practicalities – the disproportionate size of our local meetings, geographical spread, busy lives - as someone said "less is more!"
- Diversity in meetings – addressing the opportunities through outreach

Ideas for **learning and development**

- First and foremost we need to know what Friends want to learn that would enhance their experience of Quakers
- Meeting for worship for business – ensuring our business method and its relationship to our discernment of the spirit, is understood and enjoyed
- Membership process – giving more people the opportunity to be part of the process of bringing people into membership. Also ensuring that new members are made aware on joining of their membership of Area Meeting and the importance of that.

- Developing concerns – this connects with “What is our Ministry?” – knowing who we are as a community and what are the shared concerns we wish to develop and test, such as Asylum Seekers, currently a concern shared by our LMs.
- An Area Meeting away weekend

Relationships with Britain Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings

- Not every Friend can *attend* Yearly Meeting Gathering, but *preparation* for it is the role of all of us in the Area Meeting community.
- Our financial giving as an Area to BYM is below that of other AMs – collectors will address this when they send out schedules.
- Making good use as an AM of resources available from BYM and the wider Quaker community, such as Woodbrooke on the Road, theatre productions and other resources

Further action

- Trustees, treasurer and clerks: review stewardship and processes, to make them more streamlined, whilst ensuring they enable us to fulfil the functions of an Area Meeting
- Elders and overseers: ensure they are acting as an area meeting group
- Preparation meetings for the Area Meeting events set out for the year on an annual planner to link to LM dates. Tim Herrick is going to look at planner and dates. Elders also need to be involved.
- Create opportunities at AM for role holders to meet together e.g. E&Os, clerks, treasurers etc. – possibly at November area meeting
- Clarifying and listing current role holders and what overlaps there are between meetings – Sheffield Central Quaker Meeting is undertaking a review of all its own posts, and we could ensure that any overlaps between Area Meeting and local meetings, or between local meetings, can be rationalised and simplified.
- Speakers at our Area Meeting events, and between events, are good to create a buzz – as a general principle we should try to invite speakers.
- Many people have appreciated the improvement in reporting at Area Meeting events. We need to ensure that the lessons learned about how to give engaging reports extend to Local Meeting report backs from Area Meeting – focussing on what excited the report giver, what was most relevant to their own meeting, and what it means for future action and development. **Telling stories works much better than giving a list of what happened.** It would be good to have designated reporters from each LM who convey not just what we can read in the minutes, but the sense of the community and the good feeling of the meeting.
- Can we have a single email list for AM minutes and reports – Rosie Carnall will send a request to the communications group.
- Quaker Quest and outreach organised at Area level