

OfS2: What changes are being worked on elsewhere in BYM?

The two places where plans have got furthest are in Wales and the Marches and also in London. Quakers in Yorkshire have a group with the acronym GRASP (Group to reinvigorate and simplify processes) and elsewhere AMs are considering mergers.

Wales and the Marches

The place where structural change is most advanced is in the four Area Meetings that make up Wales and the Marches. Their process started in late 2019 when concerns at finding enough Friends to serve brought to, what was then, Meeting of Friends in Wales (MFW). A committee was formed with two Friends from each AM and two from MFW together with a clerk from outwith the region. Their first meeting was on 2nd March 2020. By September that year they produced a report recommending forming a single charity while the four AMs and MFW retained all their current responsibilities except for those relating to trustees. In Wales and the Marches there are complications, the Quaker boundary and the national boundary don't match so there are a number of Local Meetings involved that are very clearly in England and so have no connection with MFW. There are differences of history, language and culture that the committee had to find a way of respecting.

In the autumn of 2020, the four AMs and MFW minuted that this was the right direction of travel. The committee, now called Symud Ymlaen – Moving Forward, spent just two years imagining how this kind of charity might work and feeling their way forward. This was a new venture, there wasn't comparable experience to draw on. Subgroups named documentation, finance, nominations, policies and property involved a wider collection of Friends from across Wales and the Marches. Meeting of Friends in Wales (MFW) took the opportunity to change their name to Crynwyr Cymru – Quakers in Wales (CCQW).

In July 2022, the Symud Ymlaen – Moving Forward plans, along with the work of the Pan London Group were presented to Meeting for Sufferings. They encouraged this work. The final report was produced in time for Area Meetings in Wales and the Marches as well as CCQW to consider This report can be found on their website.

<https://www.symudymlaen2.org>

All five bodies committed to join the single charity and asked their trustees to work with the Symud Ymlaen – Moving Forward committee. This involves a solicitor being engaged, checking the details of property, investments, bank accounts and employment are in place. With help from BYM staff, they are completing the necessary paperwork for the Charity Commission (the equivalent of the Scottish OSCR). The minutes of the five bodies were forwarded for endorsement to Meeting for Sufferings on 4th March, they minuted approval. The hope is that the new structure will be in operation at the start of the new triennium 1st January 2024.

Pan London Governance

An informal group of Quakers from across London, working in 2018 / 19, wrote a report that recommended the setting up of a single body, a charity covering the seven Area Meetings. This was received with a mixture of enthusiasm and nervousness. Committees were set up to take this forward. Their proposal of 2021 was for a single charity to take trustee responsibility for the seven Area Meetings and the group called London Quakers. In the consultation about this, Friends were worried about how the trustees of a single charity were

to be held to account. In response to this the committee started working on the idea of having a single Area Meeting in London, bringing in the work of the London Quaker Property Trust. (LQPT is the new name for Six Weeks Meeting which has for centuries owned and managed all the London Meeting Houses.) In early 2022, Area Meetings were asked to give an 'indicative answer' to these proposals. All but one agreed. You may have seen advertisements in the Friend during November for the 'Change Managers' they now employ, these change managers are working on a road map, the overall shape of things, aspects of communication and a budget for the process. At a meeting, at the end of January this year, London Friends agreed they would move forward with this plan, it is hoped, but not certain, that the seventh Area Meeting will join them. Their plan is to have 'clusters' within the single Area Meeting, these clusters would be able to easily change, merge or separate. The clusters will have responsibilities for things like learning and community building. How far they also have formal responsibilities for membership, eldership and pastoral care is not yet clear. If they have these more formal functions, then they will need a more formal structure that mitigates against the hoped for simplicity.

Yorkshire

In 2019, Quakers in Yorkshire set up GRASP (Group to reinvigorate and simplify processes which reported in early 2021, entitled Reinvigoration and Simplification. This report has been extensively considered by the Area and Local Meetings. There is currently a proposal for a working group to look at options to simplify the charitable structures. It was seen that simplification is a route towards reinvigoration.

Northumberland

We met with Friends from Northumberland who have changed the way they hold AM.

Central England

Central England AM is the largest within BYM, comparable in size to General Meeting for Scotland so it was helpful to meet with them. When we met them, they had just started to employ a Principal Officer to manage their 29 meeting houses and investment properties which are many and complex, legacies left them mainly by the Cadbury family.

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