# Responses to the Community Questionnaire

The following are responses to the questionnaire sent out by the Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group Community Sub-Group (phew!) *Questions for Local Meetings, Quaker groups and individuals to consider*. Responses are presented “as-is”, only corrected for spelling, grammar and readability. The results are organised by Area Meeting. A more concise version has also been compiled, focusing on the parts of responses which considered whether we need a “middle-level” structure, and if so, what form should it take.

The responses are assigned a letter representing their AM (ES for East Scotland, NS for North Scotland, SES for South East Scotland and WS for West Scotland), an M or and F depending on whether a Meeting or individual Friend submitted it, and a unique number for easy reference.

These responses have been anonymised. Due to their unique nature, it was not felt that the responses of North Scotland Friends (Online) or Summer Shindig could be meaningfully deidentified.

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Helpful abbreviations:

LM – Local Meeting
AM – Area Meeting
GM(S) – General Meeting for Scotland
BYM – Britain Yearly Meeting
QiS – Quakers in Scotland

Compiled by Robert Rayner, on behalf of the Community Sub-Group, July 2024.

# East Scotland AM

## ESM1 – A LM

Is the idea of Area Meeting relevant to a single Scottish body? Where should functions like pastoral care, eldership and membership be considered?

We were not united in our view of the value of AMs. One view was that AM tended to be the same Friends saying the same things as in Local or General Meeting, and that AMs could be laid down with business then undertaken either locally or by a single body of QiS. Others felt that the social life, visiting speakers and contacts with other LMs at AMs was enriching and educational. The possibility of less formal, more fluid, networks was raised and could be explored further within a single body of QiS: the availability of video conferencing introduced new possibilities for this.

### ESF1 – An individual Friend from the above LM

Besides being a time of prayer and reflection and sharing, our local MfW are also filled with joy, especially as we learn about one another. It is an extremely caring and welcoming group. We feel fortunate to have a few young people (which for me means anyone under 40 since I am 75...). They are enthusiastic and come up with excellent thoughts and ideas and are hard working for our LM.

Regarding pastoral care and eldership, speaking just for myself, I think that the level should be local. If decisions are made so that the role of Elder is not local, I understand, and again am happy with all decisions made by our LM. I trust them and they are role models for me.

With donations, I wonder if in the future, the small monthly donation I make would remain with the LM to use as needed or if all of it would go directly to a pool of resources.

## ESM2 – A LM

We are supportive of moving forward in creating QiS. It will create a more streamlined organisation by taking on many AM functions. It may reinvigorate LMs and encourage members to participate more directly in their local Meeting aﬀairs. We acknowledge that the proposed structure will evolve to meet the challenges.

We express concern that decisions and deliberations could become, or appear to become, ‘more remote’. The following are our speciﬁc concerns and suggestions for addressing these.

Membership is held by QiS. This is an administrative task and a SCIO requirement. The process can be the same as at present with QiS Clerk receiving the application and with two visitors appointed: one from the LM and one from another LM. The LM via its nominating group or business meeting, would be responsible for nominating visitors. The LM needs to have a greater responsibility than hitherto under the proposed new structure.

We agree that nominations and appointments of Elders and Pastoral Team are best handled by the LM. We suggest that conﬁrmation of these should also rest with the LM. There needs to be a place/person at QiS level only to resolve diﬃculties that may arise, on request for assistance from the LM. This would remove the need for QiS to conﬁrm speciﬁc appointments or memberships.

These suggestions will avoid the need for replacing the AM the nominations committee members from each Meeting with a nominations committee at the QiS level.

AM provided a sense of wider community and opportunities for spiritual development that was “part of our neighbourhood”, and accessible. QiS may not be able to replace this. We suggest that this can and should (also) be done at a local level.

Pastoral Team and Elders taking the lead, with Meetings coming together in shared interests, and shared programmes. We agree that this is an evolving situation and need to be open and trusting in how we work together to ensure our spiritual growth.

### ESF2 – An individual Friend from the above LM

There is no need for a middle-sized meeting. That would defeat the purpose of the proposed changes which are to simplify and reduce the number of post holders. QiS is the proposed new name. It is confusing to refer to it as an AM when it will combine AM and GM functions.

Membership would be held by QiS This is an administrative task.  We see the application the same process as at present but with QiS carrying out what currently the AM does.  Application would be to QiS Clerk with the visitors being one person suggested by the LM and the other from another meeting. But the local nominating committee or the business meeting would nominate visits, though ask for QiS help on the latter if necessary.

If one reviews sections 12.12 and 12.13 of Faith and Practice, almost all the responsibilities for eldership are carried out locally and will continue as usual. 12.12.(h) and 12.13(c) both of which include an implication of reaching out to resources and sharing of experiences wider than one LM. We see a proposed QiS Community and Spiritual development appointed group providing support for this. But the actual appointments could be local with QiS keeping a record of appointments.

QiS should operate on national political concerns, locally on local concerns, e.g., meeting with local representatives; members’ concerns tested in business meeting etc. And with reference to F&P guidance.

## ESM3 – Away Day

Feedback from ESAM roleholders (and some Friends from further afield) at the Away day was given by four breakout groups.

### ESF3 – Breakout Group 1

Our meetings help Friends learn about formal processes by elders and pastoral friends organising meetings for learning, social meetings, maintain a library, informal chats (“osmosis), and national resources, such as Woodbrooke, and BYM.

We invite newcomers through participating in Discovering Quakers. Treasurers encourage Friends to take courses within the training budget, as well as maintaining a social budget.

We provide support (not necessarily financial) for individual concerns and collective support for external concerns (e.g., Palestine groups). Friends meet regularly with their local MPs, link with ecumenical/interfaith groups and other events, such as Hiroshima Day and Women in Black

AM is currently relevant through processing membership and nominations, as well as providing wider support for roles such as elders. This function could be carried out nationally.

### ESF4 – Breakout Group 2

One LM encourages learning through holding regular QF&P based discussions, which have been useful for new members. Another LM has monthly discussion groups based on topics, such as worship, the peace testimony and ministry. Making use of The Kindlers has been suggested.

Our LMs support members and invite newcomers by individuals being friendly and welcoming; one LM always have everyone introduce themselves and their roles at the end of each MfW.

We aim to support individuals who have strong concerns, e.g. on climate crisis work. PEWG is considered very important. It is important for key people to realise they are not irreplaceable and step back a bit. Outreach can face a capability problem.

We aim to have foster external links through local ecumenical organisations and through the university chaplaincy.

We do not feel that AM is strongly relevant; it seems natural for LMs to take over the functions of AMs. Functions like pastoral care, eldership and membership could be considered at the LM level, with additional support from QiS.

### ESF5 – Breakout Group 3

We help Friends learn about Quakerism through discussion groups and Becoming Friends and Being a Quaker. We invite newcomers and support our community through holding Simply Quiet, Friendship Groups and having a banner outside our meetings.

We collectively witness to our testimonies through participation in Extinction Rebellion, the Loving Earth exhibition and other activities. We participate in our local Interfaith group etc.

### ESF6 – Breakout Group 4

Our LMs support learning through holding meetings for learning, discussion groups and encouraging attendance at courses. Some LMs host meetings to seek ways forward regarding our reorganisation. Some LMs have afterwords, while others do not.

We seek to support our members and invite newcomers by having welcoming doorkeepers and speaking to newcomers after meetings. We host sharing circles and Friendship Groups (Pastoral Care). Some LMs have shared PFs and Elders, making sure that all Friends and attenders are on someone’s “list”. Friends are encouraged to speak on their own topics as a way to get to know each other. We have relaxed shared lunches and picnics and participate in the Light group. One LM has a weekly newsletter.

We collectively witness to our testimonies through financial contributions, physical presence (witness for peace and women in black) and aim to report back to LMs on these.

We attend interfaith meetings and invite other faith groups to speak at LMs.

Distance is currently an issue with attending AMs. Only a small proportion of Friends therefore actually attend AM. Having speakers at AM is informative. We worry that centralisation of pastoral care could isolate decision making from LMs – a fluid arrangement would be valuable.

# North Scotland AM

## NSM1 – A LM

We do see learning as part of our experience of Meeting, but not a central part: it comes first and foremost through what we value most about our LM which is stillness, listening and ministry; also via the resources we supply/recommend for members/attenders/enquirers; also via occasional shared discussion or worship-sharing sessions. It also forms part of our annual NSAM social gathering.

We feel we could benefit from a better element on learning in our meeting (which has only recently started growing). This is important also because we have a children’s meeting and we’d like to feel we are able to share Quaker learning with them. We’d want our learning to focus on the following in this order of importance:

1. Quaker spirituality and testimonies
2. History [including recent and current ‘patterns and examples’ of Quaker living]
3. How Quakers seek to influence the world.

### NSF1 – An individual Friend from the above LM

We had a speaker who is from one of our LMs and is working as a volunteer in Lebanon; the opportunity to support his work was very welcome in the context of our shared sadness about the conflict in the Middle East. Also, the AM as a communication channel has allowed us to suggest Friends’ support for action where we feel there is likely to be a shared concern. But either of these could work easily as well at a Scotland wide level.

AM for Scotland makes sense to me, with more informal as hoc local groupings to organise and provide for particular local purposes, needs or event. For pastoral work the triennium system could still be used if wanted to have named Friends in roles for fixed terms so that people know who to turn to for pastoral care and the Friends in role know it’s not indefinite!

For membership applications, an AM for Scotland [would be appropriate], perhaps with a system of applicants getting a reference from a LM; presumably ‘visitors’ would still be local for travel reasons.

Eldership should be dealt with at a local level but with regular (6 monthly?) opportunities for people in service in a role to meet others elsewhere in Scotland to compare and share experience.

Political issues and concerns should be dealt with at the Local and National level, but with initiative likely to come up from local Friends or cross-Scotland interest groups who can reach out to Friends across Scotland. Recent example is the group campaigning against East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline, with members from NSAM, WSAM and SESAM. One question to solve is how local interest groups reach out to Friends elsewhere in Scotland, which up to now they would probably have done via their AM Clerks so where would the discernment arise about what to disseminate? Perhaps we could have a ‘shared concerns’ session at GM for interest groups or individuals to ‘test’ initiatives.

Community building? The important ones were: Getting to know one another / welcoming newcomers. Looking after one another (pastoral care.) Building links with other Quakers – neighbouring meetings; other Quaker groups; at a notional level, either in Scotland or GB as a whole.

Witness? We did not cover these specific questions in our discussion but the conversation pointed towards a priority being ‘Helping people achieve personal and spiritual growth.’

Sustaining Quaker community? A strong concern for finding ways to include our children and young people in the Quaker community emerged from our discussion.

View of AM? Various opinions so it would not be representative to pick one point on the continuum. We value AM as a route through which concerns from the wider Quaker community are shared with smaller rural LMs/groups such as ours. However, this is and could continue to be done through GM. AM is important for our sense of community across the scattered geography of NSAM but the community aspects of being a Quaker in this region could be continued whether or not we had a regional charity as such. Indeed, being free of charity/trustee requirements and regulation at regional level might be liberating, to allow more energies into the community and spiritual aspects of our Quaker community across the region and into neighbouring regions as the ‘areas’ would not be strictly defined.

Keep AMs? We feel there is a need for a regional level in community terms but not in terms of a legal/charity body.

## NSM2 – A LM

One meeting considered this diagram of a possible structure for NSAM, produced by a Friend.



The diagram is proposed to help re-structure North Scotland AM in the interim between now and hopefully joining QiS.

Please note the following important objectives of and implications from the proposal:

* The core of our Regional Quaker activities continues to be our LMs and their associated Worship groups - all other groupings are intended to serve the LMs.
* All support groups include the LM Clerks (or their nominated alternates) which retains control of all affairs within the LMs and draws on the experiences and knowledge of the local Clerks.
* North Scotland Trustees will largely be ex-officio; being Treasurer, assistant treasurer, LM clerks/alternates, etc. The Clerk and assistant clerk to Trustees would be appointed separately. This may require a revision of the Governing document which would need to be submitted to OSCR for approval.
* This structure is intended to be supportive of a move towards closer amalgamation through-out Scotland in line with the proposals emanating from the QiS initiative. Changes to this structure would be relatively straightforward once the new QiS structure becomes established.

It could be that the Aberdeen Premises Committee would interact directly with Trustees rather than the regional Meeting clerks.

We would expect that Nominations and Pastoral Care would remain a function of regional Meetings so that they are better able to support LMs with Friends coming into membership, and representation in key groups, such as QiS Trustees. Perhaps regional Meetings should appoint representatives to BYM/MfS and collectively report back to QiS (as a means to reducing the risk of ‘centralisation’?

## NSM3 – A LM

We all felt that at different times in our lives, then different aspects of learning obviously mattered more to us, with 7 of the 8 of us in retirement age (and one looking forward to it over the next 5 years) our responses are predicated on that era of our lives.

Spiritual learning was the overall expectation of us from our meeting, with one appreciating the opportunity to access the wee collection of quaker books to learn about the historical aspect of Quakerism as well as the different testimonies contained in QF&P. We receive insights from each other as learning is a constant on our journey. 4 of us meet monthly in addition, to either share creative endeavours or discuss a spiritual book we take in turns to put forward which was felt to widen further our spiritual perspectives. In addition, it was mentioned that wanting further information on Quaker activities or business etc would be sought via area meeting. Sunday meeting was seen to be an opportunity for self/spirit reflection, with the opportunity to share about it in afterword. To consider, how has that spiritual aspect of my life been this week, where can I develop further?

Whilst these notes indicate our current/now perspectives, one person mentioned aspirations about the desire to widen our learning to include connection with other faiths/communities, such as churches together, that exists elsewhere. It was felt that we each individually live out our faith in this regard, more in our local communities, which could be geographical or communities of interest. However, as a group we contributed to investing in the ‘lend with care’ microfinancing project which one of us directs and reinvests the few hundred pounds into small projects mainly supporting women around the world. Some of us have built links with other friends in different meetings on an ad hoc basis, or in attending AM/GM.

Living simply and sustainably is echoed in our togetherness as a meeting – we have no role holders and develop ourselves as a group in a more organic/in the now responsive way. We are able to do this because we are a small group of about 10 folk who dip in and out weekly depending on other activities/family commitments. We tend to respond to our faith callings more individually than as a group, which this simplicity allows. This reflects in our lives mostly in our ’3rd age/stage’ - were there to be younger people as a regular member we recognise they might prefer more communal organising together as opposed to our current more organic evolution as a group.

As a worshipping group, part of a larger meeting, our finances are held by our AM.

Generally, our commitment and appreciation and connections lie within attending worship with our LM, with a couple of us more connected to AM/other LMs. We find our LM a warm, welcoming space for reflection of self/others/the world. We feel blessed to have the safety net of our wider LM/NSAM there just in case we need it.

Children and young people who have attended our LM for the two decades we had a children’s meeting or attended children’s meeting in their later years, are now tapping in to friends’ structures such as am or wider quaker bodies, more than us as regulars/olders.

Simplicity and the light are our core values. We feel blessed that as a small meeting we are able to develop organically in response to what arises.

A Scotland wide body seems to be able to hold membership, whilst pastoral care and eldership could be held within the local meeting. Presumably the local development worker role could also play into that around Scotland, if the need arose. PEWG in its current format could be built around where needed to hold the political arena necessary, in addition to a national body.

We had some discussion around Quaker language/culture which can be a barrier to those unversed in Quaker-speak. This can be offputting and dissuade folk in terms of trying to find out where in the movement is the best place to follow a spirit inspired query. A flow chart/graphic of clear pathways through all the different bodies and what can be brought to them as a query would be very useful. Often structure isn’t the difficulty, so long as legalities are met – it’s the language + culture that needs help to be navigated through.

## NSF2 – An individual Friend

Keep AM as it is, [but] without trustees or property.

Get spiritual support locally.

## NSM4 – A LM

A significant caveat is that this response, while prepared by me as LM Clerk, has not been considered or agreed by the LM more widely. I have tried to reflect views as far as I am aware of them.

It is important to us to be part of the wider Quaker community, and we spend time reflecting upon our faith & practice in a Quaker context. We place a greater emphasis to sharing and learning about our faith and spiritual experience than we do about Quaker structures. We are a small Quaker community in a 'liminal' place so engagement in wider Quaker activity has particular constraints.

Much of our energy goes into our own community, but we sometimes crave a more outward focus. There are individuals in our LM who are active in their witness but this rarely develops into a Meeting wide witness. Occasionally we will be spurred into life on specific issues (e.g., militarism in schools or climate justice) but it is not a habit. We have been part of our local Inter-Faith group. As a scattered membership meeting once or twice a month, we enjoy what we have.

We bring our witness into meeting and gain mutual support from that, but most of what we do is as individuals and have not always found it easy to identify issues around which all want to coalesce.

1.1: Some of our members attend AM but most don’t feel much connection with it - in reality only two or three local Friends have any contact with AM

1.2: Visits from AM folk to our LM are very much appreciated as a boost to morale and sustaining a sense of belonging. AM has occasionally provided financial assistance to local Friends on Quaker activity.

1.3: AM does not actively fail us, but there can be a sense (on the part of both LM and AM) that “out of sight is out of mind.” We should share this responsibility.

We are not united in the prospects for a new approach to QiS. Some are concerned at the potential for a greater distance than there is between our LM and NSAM (the risk of centralisation). Others feel that more radical change is needed - that there is no greater distance between LM and QiS than between LM and AM. A 3rd group (probably a majority) does not have a view.

2.1 A middle level (even for a temporary period) may provide comfort for those yet to be convinced of this proposition, and support new arrangements to bed in.

2.2 QiS should consider and approve membership.

2.3 If there is to be a middle level then pastoral & spiritual care would be one of its significant contributions.

2.4 QiS should take forward political issues and concerns while providing LMs retain the freedom to witness within their own community.

Being part of the Religious Society of Friends is important to us, and we value the support and contribution made by Friends on our behalf at all levels. It makes us feel part of a movement that is geographically wide and historically deep. It remains inspiring that such a small body of people can offer important witness in faith, social justice and public affairs. It also provides reassurance that we are complying with what is expected of us as a religious organisation - as a LM we struggle even to do what is “spoon-fed” to us! If we were not part of the wider Quaker movement, the bonds of our small community might erode over time.

## NSM5 – North Scotland Friends (Online)

We mostly value learning about Quakers and learning about Faith. The online Meeting for Worship has not yet been developed to host any teaching, but we chat amongst ourselves and learn from each other.

Online Meeting for worship has been essential to maintaining a Quaker community, firstly during 'lock down' and then for isolated Friends and those who cannot get to a face-to-face Meeting. Those who do online meetings also connect with the online groups, e.g.: Dublin poetry, Woodbrooke, Glenthorne. Meeting for worship is the core to community and is enhanced by more irregular residential gatherings face-to-face.

Online Meeting for worship does not really serve our witness and testimonies; perhaps providing moral support. Online Meeting for Worship provides the regular space for worship, familiar faces.

Online Meeting for Worship does not really function for 'housekeeping' but the platform is used for online Area Meetings, which does deliver on some of the 'housekeeping' functions.

We see AM as an important part of our Quaker life.

It is AM that provides the Zoom account to enable our Meeting to function. The North Scotland online Meeting for Worship provides some continuity of connection between Area Meetings.

Much of the AM 'housekeeping' does not seem relevant to many isolated Friends and for whom their contact with Quakers is only online. Our pastoral & spiritual care team are too stretched to really assist those who do not meet online and who cannot get back to face to face Meeting for Worship.

A North Scotland Regional Meeting would be helpful; to maintain the sense of community that we have established; to appoint Friends to Pastoral & Spiritual Care; to have a Nominations group that finds Friends to serve both locally and e.g. to serve as Trustees to Quakers in Scotland. A regional Meeting could do membership, with some benefit in national level enquirers meetings.

Pastoral care should be dealt with locally and regionally, while political issues should be national.

# South East Scotland

## SESM1 – A LM

We offer a simple lunch after Meeting and had a special table on three separate Sundays where the questionnaire was discussed; everyone was invited. In total, 29 Friends participated in these discussions, a mixture of newer and more experienced people. Meetings of Elders and Pastoral Friends also considered the questions. The questionnaire had been widely circulated with the notices a number of times and Friends were invited to submit individual responses directly if they were unable to attend any of the meetings. It was noted at LM for Business that the questionnaire was long and not very user friendly, so attempts were made at the discussions to simplify.

Everyone had views about Section A (what is important to the life of our LM) but experienced Friends had, unsurprisingly, more to contribute to Section B because they had had more connections to Quakers outside of the LM from which to draw.

Friends valued the opportunity to discuss these questions and reflect on the life of our meeting. Perhaps inevitably, the discussions were wide ranging and sometimes veered away from the topic but some very useful ideas and observations were forthcoming. This summary response concentrates on the questions asked. The fuller notes from all three meetings have been shared with Elders and Pastoral Friends to inform their activities.

Learning/sharing/building community: In a large meeting with a steady flow of people coming and going, helping people learn about Quaker worship, principles and testimony is vital. There are a number of current initiatives that help people learn from each other and these activities are inseparable from building community. A series of ‘Spiritual Nourishment’ meetings for learning and sharing have been going on for some time, including five ‘Woodbrooke Where You Are’ days throughout 2024, which are open to everyone in the AM. A separate interactive initiative ‘Exploring Spirituality with Quakers’ is taking place monthly this year, considering wider spiritual beliefs and faith. We also run study groups from time to time like Becoming Friends, Hearts and Minds and reading Swarthmore lectures together. Learning during our meetings for worship can be profound, ‘contemplative learning’ that is guided by the spirit, described by someone as ‘a wonder of the world.’

People mentioned other ways we build community: lunch every Sunday after meeting, once a month All Age Meetings for Worship, a lively Young Friends group, the book group, coffee mornings. It was acknowledged that building community is not always easy in such a big meeting with a changing population. The idea that we are all responsible can be daunting. Throughout one’s life, there could be different phases of how much time you are able to give. But others felt firmly that we are like a family; the feeling of belonging and being connected and safe is particularly valued these days. A sense of community can have different levels: spiritual, emotional, practical. Welcoming newcomers and helping them feel safe, included and valued is of particular importance to us.

Sustaining our Quaker community: Our nominations process, appointments and rotas are of vital importance in sustaining our large meeting and sense of community. Organising all the activities mentioned above requires organisation and commitment. Safeguarding and confidentiality issues are critical and we have received some training in this.

We are fortunate in being able to meet in a central building belonging to the AM. This gives us flexible spaces for our activities but also is good outreach to the local community as we have outside lettings enabling people to see our noticeboards and leaflets and experience the ambiance of simplicity.

Witness and way of living: A range of issues are being actively worked on by some, depending on individual enthusiasm and energy. There have been initiatives to do with, for example, the climate emergency, refugees and asylum seekers, the local Foodbank, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, legal issues to do with international ecocide, interfaith work and peace. Most of these involve working with others within the AM or General Meeting for Scotland. Some people within the meeting are more involved with these initiatives than others. Our monthly financial appeals also connect us to the wider world and people are free to follow these up. Someone expressed the desire to have one focus within the meeting that more of us might work toward.

Someone likened Quakers to a three-legged stool: 1. Meeting for worship is the most important leg and all else falls from this. 2. Being a community is the second leg. 3. The third leg is our public service which is strong because the spirit is behind us.

Experienced Friends who engage with AM activities very much value the support and activities provided by this wider group. But it was acknowledged that not everyone engages.

Examples of where AM is helpful include membership visits/issues and peer support for role holders. AM also plays an important role in marriages and funerals. There have been a number of times over recent years when a LM has struggled with something and others within the AM have been able to offer support. AM owns our meeting house and this spreads the responsibility. The spiritual aspects of AM underpin the business. Certain roles like Safeguarding Co-ordinator have been helpful to have at AM level, offering support for LMs. The Woodbrooke sessions run this year have been open to everyone within the AM and this has helped foster wider connections.

Contact with nearby LMs spawns friendships and joy was expressed at being able to see each other regularly. Social gatherings help build community. Activities for children and young people have been shared successfully. Our current system of all-day meetings several times a year hosted by different LMs as well as evening meetings between is working well; we get through a lot of business and being together in a spirit of worship strengthens the decisions. Providing a zoom link widens participation.

Which levels are best for certain activities: There was a strong feeling that, in relation to what our LM values, things are working well at the moment. Eldership and Pastoral Care are roles that largely serve the LM. The appointments are by AM and it is important to have this wider group for support. Pastoral care in particular is important to operate at a local level, given confidentiality and safeguarding concerns. Membership also works well at the minute, with discussions happening locally but the appointing body being AM. There was a strong feeling that it is important to have a ‘regional’ body, a collection of LMs, and against the idea of a Scotland-wide AM, that would simply be too big and unwieldy. Some newer attenders find the notion of joining a Scotland-wide body daunting and off-putting. There is a very real fear amongst some that current discussions could lead to an over-centralisation, threatening the positive things going on in our meeting and our strong sense of a local community as mentioned above. The need for streamlining and simplification was mentioned and the fear that having too many layers of decision making is off-putting.

A strong Scotland-wide Quaker body, however, is important to tackle issues to do with the Scottish Parliament and our Parliamentary Engagement Officer has been a success. Political engagement is important at this higher level. Some General Meeting for Scotland committees have also been helpful. The Scottish Families Weekends and Shindig have been valued; there are economies of scale at this level that make things possible and supports people in more isolated situations.

It was also noted that the activities of our Local Development Worker covering the whole of Scotland have been beneficial, for example, the regular networking opportunities for role holders to share experience. She has also been a link to wider Britain Yearly Meeting activities and resources.

Zoom means that it is easier to connect with people all over Scotland but it has limitations. It is good for getting business done but poorer at promoting a sense of community and friendship.

### SESF1 – Two members and an attender of the above LM

All learning and Quakers and faith are important within our LM.
All community building within our LM is important.
Working for peace and building social justice is also particularly important.

Housekeeping? Governance of the church and events so the processes remain legal, safe and sustainable. Sustaining a community by meeting in individual homes does not require major planning or organising. However as soon as there is involvement:

* with the care of children
* the care for personal information
* the management of buildings
* finance and use of other resources

Then it is absolutely essential to comply with the law [which necessitates] ‘housekeeping’. As a minimum there are certain structures and processes that must be followed.

* Nominating and appointing people to key roles
* Handling and accounting for money
* Membership
* Marriages and deaths
* Children and young people
* Safeguarding and confidentiality.

Other things? All the legal duties including ownership of premises, charity law, employment duties, financial sustainability.

We see AM as an important part of our Quaker life.

Where has AM supported [your LM]? Provides the structure and support for all of the answers to Section A. Provides direction spiritually and in terms of church governance. Is the legal basis for our worshipping group. It is an instrument for connections to wider communities.

Where has AM failed? Possibly linking with other AMs.

Do we need a middle body? We are yet to be convinced for the need for the new national body. We rarely engage with or relate to GM which as far as we gather usually has less attendance than our AM does. AMs can function with strength and share support. We need AM, as without it there is no local accountability and the workload of supporting the active community is unsustainable for LM. One of the QiS documents proposed the use of professional staff for the new single national body. There are no costs associated with this statement. We are concerned at the lack of this information and wary that it will be large and grow without acknowledgement of where the funds will come from to pay the staff, or the resources to manage their contracts.

The new national body will be required to make routine maintenance decisions as well as provide direction. This means great responsibility and ultimately power will lie with the Clerk who could absorb power and could act more in terms of a Chief Executive. We say this based on our experience of the QiS process to date and the difficulties GM has in reaching decisions with such a diverse group. We feel the current system, if not ideal, of allowing power to rest at the AM level works with more sharing of support between areas or joining as required rather than a wholesale change.

Membership should be held at the AM level.

Eldership and pastoral care should be administered from the AM and LM level.

Issues and concerns should be dealt with at any level, depending on the topic.

What can wider body offer? Need people locally and we are concerned that a national group could act as the initial QiS work in not listening carefully and altering as needed i.e. taking only one agenda and ignoring diverse views.

Property, which many find comforting and a place for outreach, cannot be easily managed remotely.

Further thoughts - Thank you very much for putting this questionnaire out. We acknowledge there are different views. It is quite difficult to address this as a group within a Meeting. The value of all responses within a Meeting is critical. The structure of the questionnaire does seem to predispose some answers and therefore difficult for individuals with these different views but asking for these views is deeply appreciated and very important in a Quaker community consensus approach.

### SESF2 – An individual Friend from the above LM

I value learning about Quaker spirituality and testimonies, history and how Friends seek to influence the world the most. Getting know each other, welcoming newcomers and pastoral care/eldership the most important aspects of community building.

I do not know which way my LM supports individual witnesses. All aspects of sustaining our community are seen as important, but outreach and membership does not seem to be seen as important, and given the story of the early Friends, I think should be.

Some of our members attend AM, but most don’t feel much connection with it. Our LM values AM’s community building, getting to know one another better, sense of togetherness. Excellent written summaries, before and after, of what’s happening from the clerk and a good, but very long newsletter.

I think we need to consider why so many of our meetings are undiverse, and mostly ageing. And how we can respond to the inspiration of the early Friends, who were amazing in their courage, and visibility.

It does not make sense for QiS to be like an AM for Scotland. It simply cannot be like an area meeting; Scotland is *far* too big. The early Friends knew what exactly they were doing when they created *regional* Area Meetings. There’s a need for a middle level.

Membership should be considered and approved at the present AM level ideally. Pastoral care and eldership should be administered locally, but some kind of regional back-up meeting needs to exist for support, and more complex matters, or areas of disagreement.

Political issues should be dealt with on both levels. It depends what kind of issue. Important national and international issues and concerns need to be responded to, and felt to be real, at local and regional level, as well as national. And vice versa. They all work together.

I do not know what the wider Quaker body can offer our LM. It all depends. So much of this has come up in response to dwindling and ageing congregations. We have left it very late, I now realise, to address why are our congregations dwindling and mostly ageing, and work out what are our priorities for the next few years, and what structures might serve that best. Many people just cannot attend GMs, for instance, which dot every ‘I’ and cross every ‘t’, and which, at the beginning, when people are feeling most energetic, go through item after item of what often feels like procedural box-ticking which could be communicated in other ways.

## SESM2 – A LM

It was good to have Friends with us representing the outlying members. Much of the focus was on administrative matters e.g. clarity of roles and whether the clerk's position could be shared out to a greater extent, could there be a better system for attracting Friends for reading A&Q in MfW perhaps by having a monthly rather than annual list for volunteering - subject to the audio system working, One would happy to read from time to time; for the outlying members, the zoom connection was especially appreciated as a good vehicle to continue to be able to actively participate in our worshiping community. This is something that may be unique to our LM within our AM. More generally all Friends really welcome the silent meeting we have together and feel that they belong to it irrespective of whether physically present or online,

The pandemic had interrupted the regular discussion group meetings in the Barn at the Loch which were well attended and appreciated and much missed. It was felt consideration should be given by the LM to such sessions being resumed on a regular, possibly monthly, basis and that they might also be used where business relating to the LM and AM might be considered.

### SESF3 – An individual Friend from the above LM

For me the overarching thing about Quakers is the silent meeting for worship, closely coupled with the opportunity to share and connect with other people drawn to the meeting. Coffee, chat, meetings for learning are all an important part of this but are still grounded in the silent meeting and the listening to the quiet voice withing when we can become still enough to hear it. We can accompany each other in our own searching and journeying and be a place that others can discover with joy.

We need people and some structure to make this happen, to pay the bills, do the accounts, meet our legal commitments as a charity and so on. This is a significant amount of work and I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributes to these tasks. But let us not lose sight of the need to just be, there is much that perhaps we can still leave open and unstructured. Perhaps this is what is most difficult but most important to discern, both individually and collectively

## SESM3 – A LM

We have heard of the difficulties experienced by North Scotland and East Scotland AMs, the proposal for a single charitable trust for Scotland and the issues arising in respect of governance and co-operation within the remaining existing Structures. We would not oppose the creation of a charitable trust for Scotland, but we would want membership and pastoral care to be appointed and supported at an intermediate not a national level. Taking forward issues and concerns in the political arenas should be dealt with at national level and follow the shape that we already have.

## SESM4 – A LM

We see our Meeting as a place to learn about matters of faith, through experience and the teaching ministry.

We value our learning about Quakers in the following order:

1. Quaker spirituality and testimonies
2. Structures, roles and processes
3. History
4. How Quakers seek to influence the world
5. It is felt we learn by worship and discernment. We can supplement our knowledge from books, including from our library.

We value our learning about Faith in the following order:

1. Understanding God/the Spirit
2. Living with our neighbours
3. Other faith traditions
4. Learning about other matters not listed above.
5. Quaker concerns for equality and the environment are important to us personally.

We value all of our community building greatly, but value it in the following order:

1. Looking after one another (pastoral care) and how worship is organised (Eldership)
2. Getting to know each other/welcoming newcomers.
3. Building links with other Quakers – neighbouring meetings; other Quaker groups
4. Building links within your neighbourhood or wider community
5. Building links with other faith groups

We are part of our local Churches Together and have a representative on an inter-faith Group.
We have members with strong links to a Worshiping Group.

We help people achieve personal and spiritual growth through Meeting for Worship, Eldership and Pastoral Care, Socials, Meetings for Learning, plus mutual encouragement and support.
We have a member who is our Peace and Social Witness Correspondent.
Generally, Friends live out their witness in the wider community, rather than in collective Quaker action.

We sustain our community by:

* Maintaining rotas, nominations and accounting, which are necessary requirements for the smooth functioning of the Meeting, particularly as we have a Meeting House.
* We work towards greater outreach within our community.
* Marriage – we would refer to AM for a suitable Celebrant.
* Deaths – consultation with family and arranging a funeral to meet the wishes of the deceased can usually be undertaken by our role holders.
* Children and Young People – We do not have a children’s meeting at present but have a room and suitably qualified person to care for them should the need occur.
* Safeguarding and confidentiality are a necessary requirement within Meeting.

Also important to us are:

* Nurturing friendships, supporting each other.
* Meeting a wide range of people.
* Collective decision making. Quaker basics – silence, simplicity, honesty, non-violent lifestyle.

Some of our Members attend but most don’t feel much connection with it. We see AM as a necessary part of our current structure, but its meetings don’t inspire us.

For our Worship Group, we have a relevant AM and have very little contact with it. Some of our Members attend but most don’t feel much connection with it.

It is useful to have AM Clerk/assistant, a Safeguarding Officer to advise when issues arise. Support from AM surrounding Eldership and Pastoral Care (and their nominations) and the treasury team is also valued.

2.1 The functions of AM are numerous and it is generally felt that a middle level is required.

2.2 Whilst some members feel that membership could be dealt with locally, most are happy for AM to deal with Membership.

2.3 Pastoral care and eldership are overseen in practice at LM level but overseen by a higher level in case of problems arising. If there is a crisis or conflict in the local community, there must be a wider group with the authority to help find a way forward.

2.4 Political activity could come through Local, Area and National levels, depending on the nature and scope of issue.

3. LMs can undertake many of the tasks currently done by AM but need the support of a middle level should they run into difficulties. Meanwhile sustaining the relationship with the wider group brings benefits of a larger perspective and network. A key link with BYM is through representatives appointed at AM level to National GB bodies.

4. We would recommend a two-step process: 4.1 Strengthening General Meeting (with a new legal status as a SCIO, additional Trustees and more professional help in some areas). 4.2 Give AMs a choice to relinquish responsibilities (e.g. property and representation on GB National bodies. This builds on the traditional structure of Meetings for Worship for Business. Friends might have more confidence in General Meeting to appoint trustees and hold them to account, than they do in a body which has not yet met and whose membership and processes are still unclear.

## SESM5 – A LM

We all see AM as an important part of Quaker life.

### SESF4 – An individual Friend from SESM5

The most important thing for me is helping my son get to know the wider Quaker community and meet other children. I’ve also found some of the learning activities at AM to be very thought-provoking.

I think there needs to be a middle level for social and learning activities, not necessarily for admin.

I do not know where membership or political issues should be administered. Eldership should be locally managed.

### SESF5 – An individual Friend from SESM5

The all-day AM sessions are helpful in as much as they offer the community a choice whether to attend part or all day. That encourages people to come along at some point during the day, even if not to the ‘boring’ bits.

There needs to be a middle level between LM and QiS. Scotland is geographically very large and the population concentrated in the central belt so it makes sense to allow geographical clusters of LMs for building fellowship and community.

Membership and political issues and concerns should be administered on a QiS level.

Eldership etc should be managed on an AM level because each area needs to be consistent across all its LMs, especially when collaborating to support each other.

### SESF6 – An individual Friend from SESM5

We see AM as a necessary part of our current structure but its meetings don’t inspire us.

It is always good to feel part of bigger picture, by hearing reports. Other Quakers can inspire us by letting their lives speak.

Makes sense for the new body to do legal and financial matters and some community building, but LMs and geographical areas seem appropriate for community building, making connections, local activism and outreach.

Membership should be administered nationally, after discussion, encouragement locally.

Eldership should be locally managed but with two-way communication with national.

For political issues and concerns, it depends on the issue but big things would need national voice to get noticed. The local level is important for where concerns might start.

### SESF7 – An individual Friend from SESM5

All these concerning learning about our faith are very important, to me and my meeting structures, roles and processes can sound less appealing or important but actually can be critical to being Quaker and doing things in a Quaker way and holding the meeting together as a Quaker meeting.

All aspects of community building are valuable and important, but without pastoral care and eldership it’s not a Quaker meeting and that’s so important to ensure we’re doing well. Getting to know each other and welcoming newcomers will inevitably come through this – and with pastoral care shared by the whole meeting.

We support each other well in our witnesses and testimonies. We often share tips and advice on living simply and sustainably, and our Signal chat allows us to keep conversations outside our Sunday meeting time. Many of our members are involved in working for peace and social justice and we all uphold those doing so. I see working for peace as something within families and workplaces as well as national and international relations.

Our study groups and Becoming Friends give space for more discussion than we can do on Sundays. I hope we’re helping people achieve personal and spiritual growth in the strengthening silence of the meeting and in our warm and supportive community, but I’d like to see more Quaker ‘tools’ and processes used more readily, such as meetings for clearness for our own life decisions, whether big or small and space for more spiritual discernment.

Housekeeping is very important, sometimes it’s a slog and sometimes it’s a joy but without all these things the meeting can’t run well.

We see AM as an important part of our Quaker life.

Our meeting is quite small and so when we join the wider AM, and especially when AM comes us, it gives us a context and a connection and a sense of being in a wider body of Quakers. When we have needed funding for individuals to attend Quaker courses or events we have applied to AM for support.

Sometimes AM fails with clarity and simplicity on how to apply for financial support for those who need it to take part in Quaker community events.

I’m not sure whether what a middle level is called is the relevant thing, whether it’s a Yearly Meeting or AM…it makes sense to have a single national body for Scotland, but yes, we need some middle level to coordinate LMs in a geographically similar area. But I don’t think this need to be AM as we know it, for example our LM is geographically very close to two other LMs but we don’t know them as they are currently a different AM. The new middle level could be more community focussed for keeping Quakers in touch with each other in a geographic area, organising shared events etc.

It makes sense for membership to be approved at a National Level, with the familiar pattern of one visitor from the LM and one from another geographically nearby.

We need pastoral care and eldership at each LM, but this could be coordinated nationally.

Depends on the political issue but big things would need national voice to get noticed. Local level important for where concerns might start.

## SESM6 – A LM

We find learning about Quakers important, particularly in how it affects us now, namely:

* Structures, roles and processes
* Quaker spirituality and testimonies
* History
* How Quakers seek to influence the world.

Learning about faith is important, with a caveat that different people mean different things by ‘faith’, and some don’t find the concept particularly meaningful. In particular:

* Understanding God/the spirit
* Living with our neighbours
* Other faith traditions.

Also important are:

* Learning about each other
* How we connect with the world
* How we link with non-religious movements, particularly in relation to climate challenge and to our local community
* Learning in practical terms how to support Quakers engaged in these issues.

The follow are important roles for our group in relation to community-building:

* Getting to know each other/welcoming newcomers.
* Looking after one another (pastoral care) and how worship is organised (eldership)
* Building links within your neighbourhood or wider community
* Building links with other Quakers – neighbouring meetings; other Quaker groups; at a national level, either in Scotland or in GB as a whole; internationally
* Building links with other faith groups.

We find it difficult to connect with QiS and BYM – reporting back when it happens ‘seems to fall into a void’. We don’t have a habit of hearing reports back from AM, Meeting for Sufferings or GMS, which other LMs do. There needs to be an interest within the meeting (we have asked our Elders & Pastoral Carers to consider this as a result of this conversation).

We have a good track record on encouraging personal growth and mutual learning: one of our Elders has recently led sessions on spiritual growth, which have been well taken up and appreciated. We have run Becoming Friends several times and will repeat it this autumn. Some friends are considering setting up an LM book group.

Some friends have particularly valued financial support from the AM, and through a legacy trust.

Some have expressed feeling glad that ‘others take [housekeeping] responsibility so I don’t have to’.

We have expressed concerns about safeguarding – recognising that we all need to be aware of safeguarding issues, regardless of who has formal responsibility.

Marriages and deaths are occasional but important, and support from AM is needed.

We are good at celebrating together, e.g. through ceilidhs.

We have considered the question of how newcomers find out more – who to ask if they are unsure of things; how they find out what they need to know; how to find a way through our processes. We try through newsletters and notices, but there is still more to improve.

We have recently completed a spiritual review of our life as a LM; this covers much of the above, and other matters. However, it is noticeable that it looked inward at our meeting, and less at our relationship with the wider world of Quakers.

We have a relevant AM and have very little contact with it.

There are individuals who are very involved with AM and GMS (e.g. as AM Clerk and in GM roles) but there is a gap between their work and the rest of the meeting; we tend to leave them to get on with it. If a layer is removed, maybe that will make us become more active as AM won’t be there to do things for us.

Learning about people outside our meeting through attending AM, (and more of us attend when we are hosting it). Connecting faces with names and email addresses; learning how Quakers operate (on particular topics, e.g. the previous day’s AM discussion of the marriage declaration)

Some of us feel that our AM has failed sufficiently to consider the difficulties encountered by the other Scottish AMs that have led to the QiS process. Also, SESAM has no process of encouraging LMs to reflect and report on ‘how the spirit is prospering within our meetings’.

Does it make sense for the new body to become AM for Scotland? Strongly, NO!

Do you feel a need for some middle level between the LM (or other Quaker group) and a national body? There is, but not in its present form.

We ask ourselves, is this a one-size fits all approach? We are unclear how QiS will think through what is needed at all levels.

We see gains and losses however things move forward. By meeting together, Quakers witness to what we stand for; we mustn’t reduce things to ‘mush’. There may be an opportunity by strengthening the central core to give greater flexibility as to how groups relate to one another.

We must respect ideas of Quaker authority and recognise that this doesn’t imply that we can’t do things our own way where we wish to.

Rolling everything legal into one body makes total sense; but the community and spiritual life is something different, and this must be done separately, and not necessarily at the same speed.

The key question is how we manage the relationship between the national body and local worshipping groups.

We must remember that our finances exist to enable our spiritual and community life.

### SESF8 – An individual Friend from the above LM

I think we do have a relevant AM. I am sure some people won't see the point of AM. AM meetings can seem ponderous. We come to Quakers for spiritual nourishment & Community in our LM and we are not necessarily aware of the benefits to us all of something that is a bit more distant. Without AM I don’t think we would have Shindig, actions like Stepping Through a Doorway, Quaker Peace influence or encouraging government to stop militarisation in Schools

### SESF9 – An individual Friend from the above LM

All aspects of learning are present in my local meeting, my quakers in business membership activity and in my area and general meeting activity.

All aspects of community building are important, though linking across other faith groups is wider than just intra-religions and it now includes lots of grouping of belief systems like witches, meditation groups and other spiritual associations.

We share practice about living simply and do things like setting up car share schemes or food sharing schemes. We train in peace building both inside the meeting and outside, we take part in social justice work and encourage political involvement to try to influence power. We go for walks and coffee regularly with other members and attendees 1-1 to make sure they have some space about their spiritual needs.

Sustaining our Quaker community is very important hence we share the rotas and talk about such roles and matters.

We see AM as an important part of our Quaker life.

AM has been a great opportunity to learn with others across the region and also to host others, helping us be connected to a wider movement.

AM has never really failed to deliver something we needed. There was some unfortunate conflict that was painful. Yet I trust that for some mysterious reason the conflict needed to be area wide in order for some systems change reason. I think it may have been necessary storming for some parts of the system to accept the direction of travel that we are all on about trust and diversity.

Making QiS a new AM for Scotland does feel like a risk and I feel some way of oiling the wheels thematically could be useful. For example, Quakers in Business became too remote, too UK, too fast and is now failing. I didn't like how London centric it used to be, yet something in between could have helped.

Membership should be dealt with regionally.

Pastoral care, eldership and political issues should be dealt with locally, with regional support.

## SESM7 – A LM

We think learning about Quaker spirituality and testimonies, history and how Quakers seek to influence the world is particularly important. Increasing our understanding of God/the spirit, living with our neighbours and our recent Meetings for learning on diversity and inclusion are also important.

We value all aspects of building community.

Our worship supports all aspects of our witness and testimonies, especially by:

* Providing a safe space
* This meeting is very strong on peace making.
* Meetings for learning are helpful for personal and spiritual growth.
* Social justice – Gaza, foodbank etc. MP and MSP meetings
* Work done by a Friend on peace groups in Israel another Friend went into Sesame and will go to Northern Peace Board.
* Our rota for monthly collections and having folk speak about them in informed way.
* Social events and book group build community and help us understand each other’s concerns.
* Participation in Women in Black
* Wednesday MfW at 7 VT
* Newsletter and ‘Getting to Know you’ very informative, especially for those new to the meeting.

At local level, a rota is needed for vital things e.g. unlocking. Everyone helps with refreshments. No children attending at the moment but we are prepared to welcome them.

At local level, sustaining housekeeping for nominations is important. Who decides what is key?! Intermediate level could help with nominations beyond LM.

In terms of monetary housekeeping, we need to pay rent at the Open Door, annual Zoom licence, and keep accounts for our charities. Not a huge job. Could money be held in a single pan-Scotland account but clearly allocated, budgeted and accounted for different purposes. Standardised spreadsheets etc to simplify matters? Professional bookkeeper at GM Level.

We do outreach both as individuals and as a group e.g., Quaker week publicity, but guidance and support from AM/GM could be helpful. Membership process could be started at local level but include others from different Meetings to visit, as we do now.

We help and support couples towards marriage with aid of AM. We record deaths and assist with funerals if asked; we work on memorial minutes and send these on to AM. Have a named person at GM level as registrar with small group to support?

Currently no children attend MfW but we have a group ready to swing into action. Some Friends keep in touch with teenagers and others working with children and young people. Need to have some overview to ensure suitable arrangements are made. Informal oversight at intermediate level and officially at GM level.

We have must have a named person at GM who ensures we are safeguarding compliant and who arranges training as required. In conjunction with intermediate, if appropriate, and certainly at LM level.

Regional meetings helpful for personal growth and spiritual care; admin management of Society at GM level? See flow diagram.

We see AM as a necessary part of our current structure but its meetings don’t inspire us – it is an important part of our Quaker life. We feel that the ethos of our LM is to see AM as important but individuals will respond differently at different times in their lives.

AM Puts on helpful events e.g. the event organised by another LM last year at St Marys cathedral, Woodbrooke course, Warm Spaces. Since AM has included children, and worked on social aspect etc, there has been benefit to our meeting.

Meetings of AM can be heavy going and not exciting.

We feel strongly there is a need for an intermediate level or even levels, if not geographically configured, e.g. on topics such as membership. Need LM to feel connected to something beyond ourselves. Perhaps more informal and social than current AM relationship.

Membership should be going to LM for approval to either AM equivalent, or GM for confirmation – to be discussed!

Eldership and pastoral care should be held at LM, but with oversight/support from AM equivalent, or GM. If tricky situations arise, may be beyond the ability of the LM to cope.

GM could give steer on political issues and concerns, as already happens with the PEWG, but in reality, may need to be in conjunction with an intermediate (geographic or according to interest) group.

Our AM has encouraged intergenerational relationships and looked after the interests of younger and older people, and folk from diverse backgrounds including refugees (Fàilte). It is hard to feel it should be replaced or abandoned but we understand the need to think again in view of the very heavy burden particularly felt by some AMs. Some work already is strengthened by being owned by GM e.g. PEWG and the meetings organised by Zoe for Elders and Pastoral Care Friends. But relationships are built more easily and can flourish at a more local level and we ignore this at our peril.

Life is uncertain but we go forward in faith, guided by the Spirit.

We are united in the belief that there needs to be a Meeting between Local Meeting and General Meeting. This will not necessarily be the traditional Area Meeting; it might be more interest group based. But it will be vital because of the relationships that already exist and will be built. Hence the blurred edges in the flow diagram. We’re on a journey together and are all aware that a similar journey is underway in Wales, London, and other parts of England.

Queries:

* Meeting houses and implications of having one charity
* How often would GM meet? For how long?
* How to encourage attendance: constraints on time, money and energy
* How many hours on business will be spending altogether
* How to attract trustees
* How to make meetings exciting and knock on effect on the intermediate level.

### SESF10 – An individual Friend from the above LM

I particularly value learning about the structures, roles and processes, History and how Friends seek to influence the world. Working on the Quaker Tapestry, I have a whole lot of stories up my sleeve! My LM could always do more to learn about faith, though all parts are valuable. Serving on ACTS committees is a great way to do this. Personally, I can no longer serve on committees, as I don’t remember and modern technology is beyond me.

I personally witness through being a member of Women in Black and Christian Aid’s campaign against climate change. Six times a year we meet by the peace tree in Princes Street Gardens, witnessing for peace. I went on the second Aldermaston march and have been witnessing in as many ways as possible ever since! All aspects of community building are important, as are all aspects of ‘housekeeping’. I attend LM, AM, GM and YM because I like the way Friends do businesses – I know people there and like to know what is going on.

# West Scotland

## WSM1 – A LM

We find learning about Quaker structures, roles and processes very important, and Quaker spirituality and testimonies quite important. Getting to know each other, welcoming newcomers, pastoral care and eldership are all very important aspects of our LM’s community building. Building links with other Quaker groupings is quite important.

In terms of witness, we talk about issues after our MfW, but that is all. In terms of housekeeping, we sustain the Meeting going as best we can. We see AM as a necessary part of our current structure but its meetings don’t inspire us. AM helps sustain the Crinanlarich Westerly Friends Gathering.

We do think it makes sense for one unified new body to replace AMs for Scotland. Membership should be considered at the QiS level. Pastoral care and Eldership should be situated at the LM level and confirmed at the QiS level. Political action should be led by a national body. We’ve found LMs are best at providing study groups. Areas with low population density, such as ours, need external support.

## WSM2 – A LM

We consider our Meeting is a place to learn and explore matters of faith. We believe all of the subject matters referenced fit together and are the basis of who we are and influence and reflect our beliefs. We do also consider that in addition to learning about how Quakers seek to influence the world we also recognise that we, as individuals and Quakers are influenced by the world and changes within it and this too is important to discuss and understand.

All of the ways highlighted as ways to build community are important to us and we try to do so as far as we have capability as a small Meeting. Despite being a small LM all of our members are part of or connected to other influencing groups within our community and we bring our views to others in the community. We are linked on many levels to the wider Quaker community. We invite other meetings to join us on Zoom during Meeting for Worship, some members attend the AM evening worship and we extend an open invite to any other Quakers to join any learning courses that we book. A number of our members are also part of other faith groups and this deepens our connection with other faith groups within our community.

Witness and way of living: as individuals, members do their bit in different ways across the stands listed and share feedback to others to help them widen and deepen their understanding e.g.. Palestine, Loving Earth Project, Interfaith Group. We encourage each other to continue our personal and spiritual growth through discussion groups, Woodbrooke events, subscriptions to Quaker publications and email newsletters.

Sustaining the Quaker community: we are aware of and active in all of the activities it takes to sustain the Quaker community. We work together in our Meeting to keep things on track within the LM and members contribute to the wider Quaker organisation as role holders in Area Meeting and at national level. We provide other practical support to sustain West Coast Friends Gathering and Shindig.

We see AM as an important part of our community. A number of our members attend regularly and contribute to its life. It has been helpful to our Meeting through the topics that are brought for discussion, e.g. ecocide - the broader group discussion brought about through the AM discussion, also the opportunity to understand what other meetings are doing and to be able to connect with them during AM. We do feel that AM has failed to provide people to share its workload and would appreciate more people becoming involved.

We believe that the new body should become AM for Scotland and do not see a requirement for a formal middle level between this and local meetings. We can see a role for an informal layer of discernment of local meeting concerns before these are brought to AM for Scotland, however this could be managed without any formal arrangement, meetings would simply seek views from other meetings to test their concerns.

Pastoral care and eldership should sit at the local level with appointments made nationally. Issues and concerns in the political area should sit at national level.

## WSM3 – A LM

As a meeting we gathered over coffee to consider our feelings about the transfer of the AM to a national collective. Generalised pointers were the trigger points to individual responses and the discussion expanded into how QiS might be an identity.

One observation was that the merging of AMs may facilitate a release of energy and people. It was suggested that the current format saw the gathering of the same people becoming ‘well-kent’ with each other and if not entirely exclusive not particularly open to change. A situation not attractive to young people. The role of trustees at a national level might lead to some arrangements for the minutiae of localised business in effect recreating the AM model. This is a concern that the continuance of current models of business is a closed view which may benefit from a more radical approach.

There is a dread of business expanding to fill the time allotted to it. An unnecessary list of agenda items is creating a business of being a Quaker. In essence the business tail wagging the Quaker body. The justification of addressing requirements engendered by being a charity raised the question why remain a charity? The anxieties created in trying to meet appointments and business rules are palpable and destructive of the reasons for being Quakers. It was pointed out there must have been successful meetings and organisation prior to becoming a charity. Questions around charitable status have been sidelined by reference to the benefits of such organisation. Yet no-one has ever laid out and explained, let alone examined quite exactly what these benefits are. Do the costs of legal fees and professional services outweigh the few pence in the pound gained in gift aid? We are living with a mantra that is vague and obstructive.

A fundamental change to the organisation of QiS should consider much stronger localism. If a centralised management is to be adopted, then the structure needs to explicitly lay out which responsibilities lay where? With an emphasis on localised precedence.

This in itself would raise the local voice in an ever-distant management system. The strength of identity is in the LM. Changing the locus of business meetings does not change our face as Quakers, in some respects where management lies is an irrelevance. There is no role of current office bearers that could not be handled at a local level.

These are the views of local Friends collected by the clerk who bears sole responsibility for their content.

## WSM4 – A LM

‘Quaker worship has as it roots in Jesus’ life and his challenges to us, particularly the challenge to love God, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself. In recent times it is predominantly the latter part of this command which feels to me to hold us, theists and non-theists, together at Meeting for Worship.’ Quakers seek to influence the world [by asking] ‘What am I going to do about it?’

Understanding God/the spirit is very important to us.

‘I never know what each meeting will be like’. The main emphasis of our discussion was on the experiential nature of MfW and Opening to the Light as a way of learning rather than formal sessions - although we do have regular learning sessions on the above topics.

What is valued is the presence of Friends, the silence and respect for the journeys of others. The respect for people and seeing faith being lived out in the lives of others. Trust in others and feeling ‘at home.’ The primacy of compassion and truth and the lack of dogma.

Being a non-credal non-hierarchical body. By the absence of the pressure from the credal affirmations common to other worship groups we are freed to wrestle with the challenge of how we can show our beliefs (faith?) by our actions – by how we live.

Getting to know each other/welcoming newcomers and looking after one another are both important for building community. Building links within our neighbourhood and wider community is difficult for us as the membership comes from a widely dispersed area. As a meeting, through individuals, we have links with local groups that support our testimonies such as charities addressing issues faced by prisoners, refugees, and inclusion.

We build links with other Quakers in their neighbouring meetings; other Quaker groups; at a national level, either in Scotland or in GB as a whole; internationally

Some members feel part of the wider body (one member feels more part of the wider group than the LM) but on the whole Friends only connect to the LM.

We build links with other faith groups on an individual basis now. Our local Churches Together, that we were members of, is no longer active.

The meeting strives to live simply and sustainably by supporting fair trade and recycling. We use a building that has recently invested in heat pumps and solar panels to which we contributed.

We hosted the Peace at the Heart Exhibition and some members have attended Faslane MfW.

We support the local Interfaith Community Justice Group.

We encourage attendance at Woodbrooke on the Road and other courses.

We deal with housekeeping by maintaining rotas for the jobs needed – opening the premises, caring for children, making the refreshments etc.

We have a rota for these jobs that works well for us. The demands of setting up the tech for blended meetings has added to the list and our ageing membership sometimes makes it difficult to fill all roles without relying too heavily on the same people.

Nominating and appointing people to key roles - At present we do not have an appointed clerk and we are experimenting with a rota of clerks for 2 months at a time.

Handling and accounting for money - We have a good treasurer and we hope we will look after him well.

Outreach and membership - We have recently signed up to Discovering Quakers.

Marriages and deaths - None of either in the past year

Children and young people - Sadly, our vibrant group of young people no longer happens although some do go to Shindig still.

Safeguarding and confidentiality. - We have a diligent safeguarding officer and we will treasure her too.

What other things are important to your meeting/group that haven’t been listed above?

We value shared meals and getting together socially when we can, including our book group.

Some of our members attend AM but most don’t feel much connection with it.

It is difficult to answer whether AM is supportive as a group. We are grateful to those who regularly attend AM meetings and others have attended events that AM has organised.

There needs to be some middle level but without the burden of charity status. This would mean in effect the QiS national body becomes an AM in relation to BYM.

If the high level QiS group were to have working groups or sub groups to consider things like membership and eldership and pastoral care then these could have representatives from bodies at a middle level. These middle level bodies would not need to have the same geographical structure as current AMs but could include groups based on interest as well as region.

Membership could be approved at a national level provided that it is considered at a middle level where people are known. The national body cannot be expected to know everyone in sufficient detail to discern questions of membership, eldership and pastoral care.

At present eldership nominations come from LMs where people are best known. This could continue but they could be considered at a middle level and passed to the national level for approval.

Issues and concerns presently sit well at a national level and could continue to do so.

For many in our meeting it can feel quite ‘congregational’ but we recognise the value of the wider body and the information and support that we receive from national groups.

We need to be guided by simplicity in all this.

It feels like there may be challenges for all religious groups to be prepared to change the ways they do things; even to be prepared to join forces with religious and non-religious alike, probably, given the issues we all face…

We recognise that Quakers all have a bit of rebelliousness in them but we need to put our trust in the process.

### WSF1 – An individual Friend from the above LM

I have learnt about the Religious Society of Friends, its history and organisation and beliefs mostly through the wider Society.

I learn about faith at my LM, where I worship and lay myself open to the spirit. It is a continual process.

I learn about other matters from others, their lives and ministries.

For me, eldership is the most important community building service, with pastoral care of all who come to the Meeting, regulars and newcomers. My Quaker community stretches well beyond my LM - to Area, General and Yearly Meeting. I am currently the link with our local Churches Together, presently inactive except today when an election hustings is being held under our auspices.

We are very conscious of what is required to sustain our Quaker community locally and I feel we are a strong group with several new attenders. I know that younger Friends, including members of my family, feel part of the wider Quaker family and keep in touch with them.

We are aware that individual membership is held at the AM level. I recognise that for most of those who attend our Meetings it is the Meeting for Worship that brings them, and while realising we are part of something bigger are not personally concerned about this. One point in time when the AM’s support was most appreciated was when our local community faced unprecedented violence.

As a member of the second working group on this, I recall our being very conscious of the needs of the “Friend on the bench”. For most of these, it is perfectly understandable that they may be unaware of the wider picture, though of course we need a viable organisation behind the local worshipping group or meeting. Given our very small numbers nationally we need to do all we can to foster the spirit of the community being Scotland-wide. We must be careful not to produce layers of complexity between the LM and QiS.

I see QiS being the equivalent of what we currently call AMs, and membership being held at that level (as of course of the Yearly Meeting). The most sensitive appointments are Elders and Pastoral Friends and we need to be careful to nominate those who can exercise these functions at LM level while supporting them nationally. Advocacy is best coordinated at the national level while often being most effective at the local and personal level.

We need to find the means to meet together in person socially but with supporting worship. Only then can we truly get to know each other.

## WSM5 – A LM

These notes are not offered as an actual minute, but rather as scribbles taken down during the meeting – in the hope that they will give a flavour of Friends’ thinking.

We need to consider how we sustain our communities – because community is central to all we are and do.

What relationships do we have and need?

As individuals we need a place where we feel we fit.

How far can we separate the personal (fluffy, touchy-feely) from the business (committees and nominations) side of community-building? How do we link groups such as hillwalkers or Young Friends with the centre?

We are aware of the different needs of other (mostly smaller) meetings. Learning groups are valuable not just for learning about Quakerism but also at a social level. Online groups are mostly seen as a positive.

We need a better balance between the good and nurturing, and what we might call the bad – or at least the necessary but difficult and/or uninspiring. And where is the space for the spiritual which is after all what brings people to us?

Is it right to see the jobs as burdens, given that they are opportunities to contribute to the life of the Meeting?

If we look out for each other properly then everything else should follow.

As regards AM: do we just want the good social and spiritual stuff, but not the dully necessary? – but then if it is necessary, dealing with it is a spiritual matter…

It’s already happening in much of Scotland that there are “worshipping groups” but not much else.

Maybe we need to concentrate on sharing experiences as widely as possible – but do we need all the reports and minutes all the time? Can we find more involving ways to integrate committee work and outreach with the whole Quaker community?

Children and young people benefitted from a whole-family approach to their family weekend away – all together as a group, working together in all age groups. In their Quaker family they feel loved, valued, and nurtured, including by the older children.

Quaker groups can cover as much or as little geographical space as they like. So do we need to worry about hierarchical structures? – we can feel we are belonging in Quaker meetings anywhere.

The importance of openness and trust.

QiS are active and visible, there’s loads of work done in our name – impressive! – which maybe shouldn’t be diluted by the nitty-gritty currently done at AM level.

Our LM is lively and vibrant in and of itself but perhaps not great at integrating with other levels (though better than it used to be at supporting other smaller WSAM meetings) Yearly Meeting is different again and much valued by those who go to it as a wonderful chance for more and wider interactions.

We wonder: if we do decide to change our structures, will that affect our sense of community, or how smaller meetings (particularly) are supported? Reliability and safeguarding issues may require something formal.

Do we then need something between LM and larger groups? Or do we just need for GM to meet more often?

We need to allow for change to be possible.

### WSF2 – An individual Friend from the above LM

**Learning**

Learning is an important part of my Quaker life, though I don’t always have as much time for formal learning as I should like. I really relished the opportunity to do Woodbrooke’s Equipping for Ministry course, and regret that this is no longer an option for Friends.

I am very grateful to be part of WSAM’s Learning Group and be able both to give input/ offer learning opportunities and to take part in the various small on-line groups from time to time. It’s not always possible to take part in ‘in person’ events, and I greatly value the opportunity to get to know people from all across the AM.

I am more interested in deepening my spiritual life than in learning more about Quaker processes! I am also blessed in serving for QiS ecumenically and thus learning a lot about the other Christian denominations here: I wish very much I had time to be involved in interfaith matters too, but simply don’t.

I see great opportunities for learning in a ‘united’ Quaker Scotland – being able to be part of on-line study and discussion groups whose members come from all around the country would be wonderful, both for learning and growing individually and for developing relationships with Friends in other areas.

**Building community**

This is extremely important.

All the categories you list are vital parts of building community. I am still in touch with some friends from my Pendle Hill days. I have found a very welcoming community in the West of Scotland and my EfM cohort who still get together from time to time.

I relish all the opportunities to build relationships with other people, Quaker or not, that come my way, and would encourage everyone to offer service at whatever level they can as a way of building a wider community of Friends that ultimately stretches around the globe. A ‘united’ Scotland could offer many such opportunities to forge links across existing boundaries.

**Witness and way of living**

It can be hard to do this alone! I am grateful for the nudges and example of the people I meet in all the Quaker circles in which I move, though at times the realisation of how far away I am from the ways of living I should like to achieve can be daunting...

**Sustaining the Quaker community**

Ditto!

The ecumenical circles in which I move show me that much the same problem exists within many Christian denominations. My contact with another YM [which is very small] shows me that there are other ways of being Quaker than those that pertain in BYM. I am very grateful that other people in the British Quaker circles in which I move have [at least some of] the time and energy to offer service that at present I have no capacity to give.

I can see clearly both that there is great need for people to offer service and real difficulty for the same people to have the time and energy to offer it. Doing what Philadelphia YM did at one point – laying down all the groups and committees and suchlike, and starting with a blank sheet/ asking ‘what is *essential* if we are to be able to hold MfW tomorrow?’ – is worth considering…

**Other important things**

Finding what I am called to do, and letting go of all the things I’m not called to at this particular time – and being very grateful that my gifts have been recognised and developed so that I can offer service to the best of my ability. Everyone should have this experience…

**Area Meeting** has always been important to me from when I first came into membership over twenty years ago. By attending AM one sees what’s going on outside one’s necessarily limited experience within a LM. One also extends one’s Quaker acquaintance and sees brilliant examples of Friends following a concern/ serving in a particular role/ making their particular contribution to the whole Quaker family. It’s also an opportunity to observe the Quaker business method at work, sometimes on very sensitive or challenging issues. It’s also interesting to become involved with other AMs and learn that things can be done in different ways, that some AMs do and others don’t do particular things.

**Quakers in Scotland**  - ditto, and also seeing attention to matters that affect all Qs in Scotland. It’s amazing to hear about the work that is done e.g. with Holyrood, with other churches and faiths, etc etc etc – the list is almost endless, and so much is done by such a small number of people all of whom are passionate about their particular work. Again, one’s horizons are broadened and great friendships forged.

These thoughts can also be applied to BYM – the wider the area one is involved in, the greater the appreciation of the complexity of the Quaker family and the vast range of stuff being done by a relatively small number of people. One also makes friends one would not have otherwise met. And all this also applies to Friends worldwide – Friends are both the same and wildly different around the globe, and I think this is an important thing to learn.

**Wider body** what can best be done by what group?

It makes sense that simplifying business by not having many groups doing the same thing [e.g. treasurers, trustees] is a good thing. It also makes sense that having small local friendship groups, and readily accessible worship opportunities, is important: but for some of us that’s not always possible or desirable – so, making opportunities to join with wider, and maybe geographically scattered, groups is also important.

I see no reason why AMs can’t continue to meet for the purposes of friendship, worship, and spiritual development – which last is very frequently neglected due to time constraints and the amount of necessary business that has to be done. Using Zoom means that study and discussion groups can be attended by isolated Friends, ones from small meetings, and those for whom travelling is not an easy option. At the same time, it is important to have opportunities for Friends to gather in physical spaces – but here there is a risk of excluding those prevented by lack of time, money, or health.

**Further thoughts**

At present, much of our Quaker work is done by people who are retired, single, or otherwise freer to offer service. It would be good to investigate ways of involving Friends who are currently prevented in offering service – eg by not always having meetings that require one to give up huge amounts of time on the weekend. Equally, meetings during the working week [eg the ecumenical ones I’m involved in] generally mean that anyone in full-time employment is excluded. I don’t have a solution!

I would hope that, by reforming/ restructuring the way Qs in Scotland do things, we would be able to invite Friends to come together to worship, to nurture ourselves, and deepen our friendships, thus enabling us to carry our Quaker witness out into the whole of Scotland.

## WSM6 – A LM

We see much of the learning as being relevant for those new to Quakers, and when things change e.g. a Book of Discipline revision. The structures are a necessary container for Quaker spirituality to function. Learning how business meetings work is essentially experiential learning. We see learning about Living Our Faith as very important, but it was missing from the questionnaire. Our meetings encompass a range of diversity which feeds into the strength of our unity.

We see all aspects of community building as important and do all of them. Individual Quakers follow up these as they are led.

Historically we have not contained ourselves within doctrine and dogma. We find the use of ‘belief’ in this section difficult. Our members live our testimonies as they feel called to do and follow their leadings.

As a smallish group we communicate with each other about day-to-day housekeeping. We sense tensions between Safeguarding and Confidentiality. The Scottish Book of Members makes us vulnerable as well as offering a way of making connections. Our Safeguarding Policy statement should acknowledge that all of us can be vulnerable at times in our lives.

We found the lack of Spiritual underpinning for these questions made them hard to answer. We are not a social group but a religious one.

Clear guidance for those responsible for posting things online on the General Meeting for Scotland, Area and Local Meeting websites, and Scottish Friend would be useful.

We see our engagement with AM in the range of sporadic attendance to deep connection. As a meeting few of us attend AM with any regularity, but we know and use connections across the AM. Time and distance are key factors in choosing not to attend. One member felt that AM had become too business focussed and that when there were topics in the afternoon there was more of a draw for people to come. We feel that smaller groups benefit from people going to AM. One member recalled how in the past the southern part of Scotland was one MM which was felt to be too large and unwieldy, and split into SE and W. We need to be careful that smaller groups are adequately supported in any further regroupings.

When we were struggling with an issue, we called on someone from outside our LM to Clerk a business meeting.

We felt AM did not support us adequately when our LM used to have collections for outside charities. The AM treasurer told us that we should not do this anymore in the way that we were doing this, as the money was going through our bank account. Because of the increasing age of our treasurer, and the difficulty in finding volunteers regularly to take charge of the charity collections each month, we have stopped taking collections for outside charities. We felt as though we had had been reprimanded and did not have support to find a way to continue our collections within the framework of rules that OSCR has.

We felt that individual meetings have to be able to find their own way, and AM and QiS need to offer some flexibility.

One member felt railroaded into membership when they were the obvious candidate to be Elder for the meeting.

One of our members has found it more difficult to donate to Quakers at AM level than many other charities, hopefully the new QiS will enable a smooth online method of donations like the button on the quaker.org.uk website.

We see a tension between the role of Trustees and the existing/future structure of Quaker Business Meetings. Would a clear definition of roles make this clearer?

There was a question that were we being rushed to do things by OSCR? Most organisations are not so consultative as Quakers and they need to be reminded of our processes; that we take time and care, to get the best result.

There was some concern that those who have disengaged from Business Meetings (for whatever reason) could feel excluded from the thinking and reasons for the proposed changes. Are these choices we are making for ourselves or things being forced on us by outside bodies? Could we have a summary of the background and rationale with any future consultations, please?

There are social and spiritual gatherings apart from AM, but these are usually smaller and specialised.

Some felt that “housekeeping” was a difficult term, these are necessary functions, housekeeping was historically done by women and undervalued. Can we find another name?

We felt that keeping AM for community focus and support was important, though many of us have welcomed the insights gained from the Scottish Zoom groups that Zoe Prosser has organised for role holder support.

We did not have a clear sense for where membership should be held and approved. West Scotland has developed a process of accompanying people into membership (because we felt that we never refused an applicant) asking the 2 named friends to bring a report “when the time is right”. For most people this doesn’t change the normal process of one visit, and a jointly written report. There have been occasions when an applicant has applied too early e.g. without enough personal experience of Quaker meetings for worship and business, and the initial meeting might recommend that the applicant take some steps to engage more in person with these aspects, and a further visit arranged before the report to AM has been written. The Visitors wording of the minute appointing the visitors enables them to extend the process.

We felt that pastoral care and eldership should be maintained at the present level. Pastoral care and Spiritual guidance should not be too distant from local meetings. We hope that QiS may arrange training/support on a national level too, especially at triennial changes.

Political issues and concerns should be dealt with at the appropriate level, whether the issue is local, Scottish or UK wide.

We see the benefits of having a body to address policy at national level (e.g. Safeguarding) and tailor it to our specific Quaker requirements for local and area meetings and other groups.

We also see the need for communications from local and AM to national level.

Where is the opportunity to “test our leadings”?

Where is the process of discernment about concerns?

We had a discussion about Safeguarding. We feel that having a national policy gives a uniformity and can mean a single route for seeking appropriate advice. Local implementation and reporting routes are vital too. Central Support for the local policy function is essential. There has to be a clear route for action/reporting available at all LMs and groups. We feel that the policy should include recognition that we can all be vulnerable at different points in our lives, not just those in the currently recognised vulnerable groups. The issues of gender violence and stalking were mentioned. Previously there has been a suggestion that this should be in the Witness section rather than Housekeeping but this could be a result of the low value attached to “housekeeping” historically.

## WSM7 – A LM

How do we expand our community when we are a scattered diverse group? How do we ensure that we are a scattered diverse group? How do we ensure that we are a gathered group without building barriers in other areas of our communities? Our experience of being a remote gathering largely online has been deeply enriching. We can envision how this could have value for others. We can see that a single AM for Scotland would make this more possible.

Our online experience is enriched with face to face in person meetings. The annual Westerly Friends gathering is deeply important to us.

We recognise the importance of the role of the AM and the value that it has for us. We are a part of a greater whole and we have benefited from support from West Scotland AM. We can see that receiving this support from an AM that is Scotland wide could be acceptable to us.

## WSM8 – A LM

We feel that Paper A prompted us to consider many issues relevant to how we sustain ourselves as a spiritual community. Like other small rural Meetings, AM can often seem remote from our more local concerns. Zoom-based Meetings have certainly made communication easier but perhaps at the cost of opportunities for social interaction between Friends other than local members.

This potential tension between local community and membership of the wider Quaker community leads us to feel that, while a single level body for Scotland would certainly be more efficient and avoid much duplication of business, some intermediate clustering of LMs would be necessary to deal with such issues as registration, nominations and acceptance of new members. Such clusters could start as fairly informal opportunities for different Meetings with similar concerns to learn from each other (we already have just such an arrangement within our AM). Thus, such clusters need not be geographically based: cities such as Glasgow, Dundee and Edinburgh are more likely to share concerns which differ from those faced by rural and island Meetings.

How particular clusters come together and operate would vary according to circumstance and need but we feel we can confidently move forward in faith towards a single formally structured body for Scotland and rely on the spirit and initiative of local Meetings to avoid the potential negative aspects of centralisation.

# External to AMs

## XM1 – Summer Shindig

Learning – learning about Quaker life, particularly the testimonies and ‘living as a Quaker’ are a key part of Summer Shindig. For some of the young people attending the event, Shindig is their first experience of Quaker worship or the first time they have met others with a Quaker connection, while others will be regular participants in their local Meetings. Our week has a theme – the 2024 theme, for example, is ‘Sustainability begins with simplicity’ - which usually draws on the testimonies and which is drawn from suggestions from the young people. We have three ‘community sessions’ – a talk, film, or workshop – usually, but not exclusively, delivered by Friends, encouraging thought and reflection on an aspect of the theme. We then follow these with age-based break out ‘discussion groups’ and on the final full day of Shindig, a plenary session reflecting on what we have learned through the week. We also learn about testimonies, Quaker life and faith through the Working Group Agreement (agreed by the young people at the start of the week), Meeting for Worship on the Sunday and the nightly epilogue (a shorter MfW at the end of the evening). Young people are also encouraged to reflect on and discuss Quaker beliefs and practices throughout the week in informal contexts.

Building community is central to Shindig – the event was established in the 1960s to build community for young Quakers and has continued annually ever since. A key focus of the week is living together and building a Quaker community at the event, which is enjoyable, fun, inclusive and supportive. A team of volunteer staff offer pastoral care throughout the week and volunteers also take the lead on supporting worship as detailed above. As an event our links with community, local Meetings and other faiths are somewhat weaker – our event covers Scotland and the North of England, with alternative events in the rest of the UK, but until this year the event had been held at Ackworth Friends’ School in West Yorkshire. As this was ‘out of our area’ (Yorkshire Holiday School) we had only very limited engagement with Ackworth MfW but hope to build much stronger links with Ayrshire MfW and other West of Scotland Meetings in our new home at FSC Millport on the Isle of Cumbrae. However, we hope that the young people attending the event will go on to have stronger links with their local Meetings as a result (this is certainly the case for many staff). We have also in the past had links with Ramallah Friends School (via Hexham Meeting) and have had Shindig participants from Ramallah.

Witness and ways of living – this varies from year to year depending on the theme, nature of the community sessions and activity groups. However, previous sessions have led to discussions around activism, peace work, sustainability and other aspects of Quaker testimonies and the event contributes to the personal and spiritual growth of all who are involved.

Sustaining the Quaker community – many of these aspects (finances etc) are undertaken by the Trustees. The administration and organisation of the event is undertaken by our volunteer co-ordinator (part of the clerking team) with support from others on the clerking team. During the week, one of the clerking team is nominated safeguarding lead. A weekend training session takes place in late June ahead of the event each year where other organisational tasks are distributed and much of the planning takes place, we meet daily as a staff team during the event and have a day -long ‘debrief’ a few weeks after the event. We are aware of an increased burden of administrative/organisational responsibility in recent years and have sought ways to redistribute this among the clerking team, expanding the clerking team this year to include a site liaison co-ordinator and a young person’s needs co-ordinator, reflecting the increased vulnerability and additional needs of many young people in the aftermath of the pandemic.

It is important to note that Shindig is run by Northern Friends Youth Events, a charity in its own right – while it is a Quaker event, it spans a number of English Area Meetings as well as Scotland GM (Scotland General Meeting, Teesdale & Cleveland, Wensleydale & Swaledale, Northumbria, North Cumbria and Kendal & Sedburgh Area Meetings).

As above, we do not have an attachment to a particular AM.

We do not have a strong view on which levels business should be administered at, as we currently span all of Scotland and the North of England. However our experience as adult volunteers (with a mean age under 30!) is that it is very difficult for younger Friends – particularly those with full time jobs and families – to commit the time needed to sustain Quaker events and structures, and the more that we can streamline and share that load, the better.

Our relatively small numbers mean that shared/national events will reach more young people and strengthen links between young people and Quakers. We play the ‘geography game’ at the start of Shindig (participants move to a rough position in the hall to represent where in the world they live) and it is clearly visible from this that there are Meetings/geographical areas with large numbers of young people (and hence the ability to organise local events, build links etc) and others – particularly in smaller, more rural Meetings – who may be the only young Quaker in their area. This is certainly something to consider in arrangements; we have also benefited considerably from collaborative work with other areas (Yorkshire) in planning and developing our child protection and safeguarding training.