

23/09/08 Options for Scotland

Further to minute 23/06/11, we receive the further report of the Options for Scotland 2 Working Group (Paper A1). This has been before all four Area Meetings in Scotland, and we receive their minutes as follows (Paper A2):

- 23.08.04 of East Scotland AM held 12th August 2023;
- 035/23 of West Scotland AM held 19th August 2023;
- 15/23 of North Scotland AM held 26th August 2023;
- 2023/09/08 of South East Scotland AM held 6th September 2023.

Copies of these minutes and the introductory paper from the Options 2 Group are filed with our minutes.

The report includes this paragraph:

“In order to make progress we want Friends to feel that they will enjoy and be energised by being part of a single community of Quakers in Scotland. To get there we have to undertake the administrative and legal steps required to make the transition to new arrangements. This transition must be flexible to accommodate the pace of change at which the AMs and GM feel ready to move. We imagine that the Options for Scotland 3 group will undertake its work by involving Friends across Scotland so that what emerges feels realistic, hopeful and worthwhile.”

The clerk has summarised the path to this point. We have heard from members of the current working group, giving personal reflections on their service. The experience of becoming in unity felt wonderful, as well as the benefit of being together with Friends across Scotland. There was hope coming from the sense of adventure. Our structures are like windows which give access to the Light beyond. We have to care for our windows and ensure they can be seen through, but it is the Light beyond that is our purpose.

The clerk wrote to Paul Parker, Recording Clerk, to seek advice on the constitutional status of General Meeting for Scotland in relation to a possible merger into a new charity. This is because General Meeting is defined in section 5.03 of *Quaker faith & practice*, which may only be changed in substance by Yearly Meeting in session. Paul Parker has replied to say:

“I’m encouraged to see that General Meeting for Scotland is progressing with its consideration of options for Scotland. I’m comfortable that if a single body were created to provide governance of all Quaker activities in Scotland, replacing or absorbing the functions of the current GM and the four AMs, then BYM would see that as the successor body to General Meeting for Scotland for the purposes of *Quaker faith & practice* 5.03.

“Meeting for Sufferings has already given its encouragement to Friends in Wales & the Marches and in London to move to having an overarching body, and, as you say, Scottish Friends would need to do the same. I don’t think it would be necessary to

seek additional endorsement in advance from Yearly Meeting before proceeding to put in place arrangements for the duties laid upon the GM in 5.03 to be carried out by the new overarching body. I would assume that the current financial arrangement whereby the GM receives a grant from BYM for those functions would continue also.

“Once the arrangements are in place, the book of discipline can be amended to reflect them. This could probably be carried out by Meeting for Sufferings under the arrangement whereby minor amendments can be handled by them and reported to Yearly Meeting after the event. It’s likely that the new book of discipline will focus on underlying principles more than on the detail of how they are reflected in structures. That means the current 5.03 may well be considerably simplified and more explanatory in nature, so it will just be a question of keeping the current text in line with practice until that can be approved by YM, which we currently expect to be in 2030.”

The questions asked of Area Meetings (and General Meeting) were:

1. Is the AM interested in taking the planning for a single charity further? (A definite commitment will come later when we have done more detailed work on things like the constitution so that Friends can have a clear idea what they are considering joining.)
2. Is the AM happy to have the GM nominations committee find any further names needed for Friends to serve in particular ways in relation to Quakers in Scotland? (For example they may need to find Friends to serve as the first trustees of a new SCIO.)
3. Are Friends happy to work with Friends across Scotland in fleshing out the various aspects of Quakers in Scotland beyond the work towards the single charity?
4. Are Friends content that General Meeting write to Meeting for Sufferings on behalf of all Area Meetings explaining the work we are engaged in?

All four Area Meetings answered in the affirmative to all four questions. Dundee Friends Property Trust also wishes to be part of this process.

We note the comments and affirmation from area meetings and also note the concerns expressed in the South East Scotland AM minute. Friends have spoken to and considered those concerns.

We, as a General Meeting, also agree affirmatively to these four questions.

We asked last time for a new working group, Options for Scotland 3, to be set up and will hear nominations to it, and consider its convenorship, shortly. The clerk, as asked, drew up terms of reference for this group and we ask the clerk to update these in the light of comments made today, and to bring the revised document to our

November meeting for approval. We agree to change the name of the group to Quakers in Scotland Co-ordinating Group.

What we have agreed to today gives authority to the new group for our Scotland-wide process to work with our structures so that our diverse and active community of Friends can adapt to the situation we are now in. We are giving authority for:

- draft documents to be brought to us for the decision on having a single charity, following liaison with the six trustee bodies;
- wider options to be brought to General Meeting and the four Area Meetings on how best our meetings might evolve, if they wish, and be grouped together;
- how we could improve common ways of working together, such as for eldership and pastoral care, and for learning and growth.

In moving forward we need to ensure we maintain the Quaker principle whereby all can take part in decision making in a structure that allows for that. We also need to ensure that a new trustee body is able to continue the broader long-term work currently undertaken by GM Trustees within the context of a wider remit that would include finance and property.

We are grateful to the Options for Scotland Working Group 2 for their service on our behalf as it is laid down today.

We began this wider process some five years ago, starting with a reading of *Advices & queries 27, Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?*

This is still very relevant for us today. We have celebrated what we are already, and hope what we can become will give us new adventure.