

21/03/19 North Scotland Area Meeting minute and AM responses

The following minutes apply: 5, Nov. 17; 9, June 18; 5, Sept. 18; 12 and 15, March, 19; 12 June, 19; 7 and 8 Nov., 19; 20/03/12, 20/10/07.

Piers Voysey, clerk of NSAM, has introduced their minute 53/20. It originates from: a very real concern in North Scotland about finding Friends to serve as Trustees; their efforts towards creating simpler Meetings; and ensuring their limited time and energy are focused on spiritual nourishment of Friends and the Meeting as a whole, rather than administrative burdens.

At their meeting on 19th October, 2020, Friends in NSAM united in accepting two proposals made at a Meeting for Clearness, set up at the request of Robert Wilson. These are:

- NSAM welcomes the co-operation of the four Area Meetings and General Meeting for Scotland to date, and they hope it will increase in the future, resulting in further efficiencies.
- They suggest that a single legal body for Quakers in Scotland, amalgamating the current four Area Meeting charities and that of General Meeting for Scotland, might be an option to be considered, with the proviso that any new structure must recognise local and regional expertise regarding organising social and spiritual events.

In raising this concern at General Meeting, North Scotland Area Meeting wishes to encourage GM to be prepared for change, should the time come when one or more area meetings cannot meet their legal requirements with regard to trusteeship, including financial accountability.

After receipt of NSAM minute 53/20, and further to minute 20/10/07, our General Meeting clerk invited East, West, and South East Scotland Area Meetings to consider North Scotland Area Meeting's proposals. Their responses were circulated in advance of this meeting, as part of Paper G. To inform our discernment on this matter, Paper G also includes: a summary of the work already done by GM on NSAM's concern about the lack of active membership and its effect on finding Friends to serve in essential roles, like trustees; the minutes of Inverness LM referred to in NSAM minute 53/20; and briefing papers produced by ESAM and WSAM.

We thank the area meetings for their consideration of NSAM minute 53/20. Our clerk has summarised their responses to the two proposals.

Each area meeting has embraced the suggestion for greater co-operation, closer working and mutual support between the Scottish Area Meetings and General Meeting. They felt that the sharing of experience and expertise will simplify and reduce the workload.

At this time area meetings are not in unity over the proposal for a single legal body for Quakers in Scotland. Each area meeting consulted expressed reservations about the proposal. There was an understanding that a move in that direction would have a profound effect on area meetings and would need detailed and complex oversight by AM and GM trustees. At the same time there was a willingness to remain open to new ways of working.

Two area meetings suggested that the way forward was for GM to set up a working group. The remit of the group might be to reflect further and more deeply on a range of solutions and models, which would assist us in developing Quakers in Scotland.

GM Trustees “feel that the fundamental issue is building a flourishing Quaker community in Scotland and that a process of discernment is needed before moving to any particular change in organisational arrangements.”

We agree to take what steps we can within our current structures, to improve the functioning of our Scottish Quaker community.

We encourage GM in partnership with AMs to arrange more opportunities for role holders to meet and support one another and to explore other ways of working together.

We ask GM to set up a working group, with the following remit:

1. To reflect further and more deeply on a range of solutions and models which would assist us in developing Quakers in Scotland
2. To identify options for GM and AMs to consider, including organisational changes we can make within our current structures which would benefit us all. Work already done will be considered along with new thinking. We hope the group will be creative in generating and exploring further options.
3. To set out the pros and cons of each option
4. To write a paper on their findings for the consideration of GM and AMs

The working group should include members of each of the four Area Meetings and GM, not necessarily existing role holders. The number of Friends serving on the group should be no less than 8 and no more than 10.

We are aware that the details of this working group might benefit from further scrutiny and send this outline remit and setup to AM clerks for comment, before asking GM nominations committee to bring forward names of Friends to serve on the group.