

Options for change: benefits and disadvantages

The Options for Scotland report for Area Meetings and General Meeting includes a table summarizing the benefits and disadvantages of the options under consideration. The following offers a little more detail about this analysis.

Status Quo

Benefits:

- We are saved the significant effort required to bring about the necessary organisational change, which leaves us with more energy to focus on strengthening our meetings.
- We continue to manage things locally in ways that we are familiar with, using established community connections and identities to build on.
- Four smaller geographical areas mean that travelling to attend AMs is more manageable.
- Many opportunities for Friends to offer service.

Difficulties:

- Small meetings struggling to fill roles may founder without support from AM.
- We continue to incur the time and financial burdens of duplication: to administer and submit 6 different sets of accounts, 6 annual reports, 5 safeguarding reports. Duplication of costs if each AM pays separately for external, professional support.
- Duplication of knowledge and administration required to meet legal requirements as owners of premises, employers, providers of childcare, financial custodians, and charities.
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining trustees and other roles with skills to cover employment, health and safety, property management, lettings, finance and charitable regulation.
- These amount to a heavy and increasing burden on trustees and AMs which may mean we are unable to recruit enough adequately able trustees in one or more AMs.
- If Trustees and AMs are unable to oversee all of their responsibilities adequately then we would face significant reputational risk impacts, including on neighbouring Area Meetings.
- 3 of our 4 AMs have significant financial challenges to address in the next 3-5 years [North Scotland – premises management, West Scotland – Glasgow Meeting House, South East Scotland – loss of hiring income], which will add to the burden for AMs and their trustees.

A: Reconfiguration of responsibilities between General Meeting and Area Meetings

Benefits:

- AMs would have reduced administrative and regulatory responsibilities that would enable them to focus on developing witness, worship and community
- Some reduction in the number of roles, but retaining trust status for AMs will also mean that some responsibilities (albeit less onerous) will have to be retained at AM
- Some Friends are more likely to want to do something for the people they know, than for an organisation with which they have little contact
- There is potential to engage more Friends in holding roles which are less about carrying responsibility than about witness, worship, community and ensuring good communication
- A clear opportunity to increase consistency, efficiency and professionalism across a range of functions

Difficulties:

- There would be an increased load on those serving GM without wholly losing the AM Trustee role. There would be a need to ensure clarity of where responsibilities lie.
- GM hosted roles will grow in scale and responsibility.
- There will not be a radical reduction in the number of roles overall.
- To gain many benefits there will be costs. These should be quantified at some stage, and there should be confidence that they can be sustained, and that any additional necessary income will be found.
- Centralisation carries the risk of disconnection between local Friends and the work undertaken on their behalf at a Scotland level (noting that some Friends on the bench may not feel connected with their AM currently). It may also result in decisions and activity which do not reflect the whole community of Quakers in Scotland.

B: A single charity for Scotland but retaining Area Meetings

Benefits:

- A single charity replacing four simplifies the organization: eg one set of Scotland-wide trustees (10-15) will be needed instead of the 40 plus for GM and AMs.
- AMs will retain their own identity, offering a familiar connection for many local Friends, while undertaking less formal business. This could release energy for spiritual development, community building and social action.
- The economies of scale could allow more paid assistance for the management and administration of finance, employment and property which together will bring greater consistency and efficiency
- Most accounting could be done centrally releasing AM treasurers from some of their work
- The change to charitable structures with OSCR would give AMs and LMs more flexibility to regroup where and when appropriate
- Pooling funds could provide better opportunities for larger scale witness and community building
- Continuing with AMs who have some limited formal business will ensure groupings of Friends beyond the LM will continue to meet, countering the tendency towards congregationalism.

Difficulties:

- Will require the involvement of OSCR in the arrangements and costs of merging or winding up local charities and property trusts
- Some risk of confusion over the roles and responsibilities between the Scotland-wide charity and other AMs; potential to question whether AMs can survive with less formal responsibility
- AMs will retain responsibilities requiring roles and so it is unlikely that there will be a radical reduction in non-trustee roles
- May be harder for Nominations to find people to serve as Scotland wide trustees with a heavier workload. Scotland wide trustees will have less local knowledge, which could lead to remoteness of decision making
- There may be a fear that centralisation will focus on the needs of Friends in the central belt.
- This will be dependent on good communication which will not be straightforward to achieve
- The cost of paying for services, including the administration of the Scotland-wide charity

C: A single Area Meeting for Scotland (laying down Area Meetings)

Benefits:

- A single charity replacing four simplifies the organization: eg one set of Scotland-wide trustees (10-15) will be needed instead of the 40 plus for GM and AMs.
- With one AM for Scotland, this may be easier to explain to Friends, and it reduces the risk of confusion between the Scotland-wide charity and non-charity AMs
- The economies of scale could allow more paid assistance for the management and administration of finance, employment and property which together will bring greater consistency and efficiency
- Pooling funds could provide better opportunities for larger scale witness and community building
- The larger reduction in formal roles creates a bigger pool of new and experienced Friends who can better share expertise, learning and experience
- One Nominations team for Scotland, which could include representation from all the LMs (as in Central England)
- With fewer formal roles to fill, there would be more energy and capacity to develop community ties across the whole of Scotland, including communities of age and interest, both face to face and embracing technology to reduce the obstacles of physical distance
- Membership at Scotland wide basis might be more attractive to young Friends who move about. More Friends would have the benefit of hearing membership applications, one of the best bits of AM agendas.

Difficulties:

- Centralisation carries the risk of disconnection between local Friends and the work undertaken on their behalf at a Scotland level (noting that some Friends on the bench may not feel connected with their AM currently). It may also result in decisions and activity which do not reflect the whole community of Quakers in Scotland. This may result in the need to form local sub-committees, recreating what we already have
- Risk of a loss of a sense of community that AMs can encourage
- Will require the involvement of OSCR in the arrangements and costs of merging or winding up local charities and property trusts
- May be harder for Nominations to find people to serve as Scotland wide trustees with a heavier workload.
- Reliance on technology to overcome the challenge of geography
- This will be dependent on good communication which will not be straightforward to achieve
- The cost of paying for services, including the administration of the Scotland-wide AM.