



# Coronavirus

## *Advice to area meeting trustees*

27 May 2020

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## Introduction

This is a developing collection of advice for area meeting trustees, in these uncertain times. It has been prepared by BYM staff with input from some experienced Friends across BYM. It aims to help guide your thinking, and focus on Quaker aspects, rather than being exhaustive advice. You will need to consult Government guidelines and other official advice as it is published and as it changes – links are included at the end. We aim to produce a second version in a few weeks' time.

## Our worshipping community

Worship and community are central to our Quaker meetings. While these are primarily the responsibility of other roles such as elders and overseers, their successful continuation is key to achieving your charitable objectives. So it would be wise for trustees to be sure that these aspects are being considered and supported.

## Worship spaces

In line with the latest government advice, meetings should not gather in person at this time. This includes meetings in public and in private homes. Quakers could arrange to all sit worshipfully, separately in their own homes, or meet online, or both. It will help enquirers if notices about current arrangements are put on noticeboards and websites.

All Quaker meeting houses are closed (as at 27 May), with the possible exceptions of funerals and essential voluntary or public services, in line with government guidance. Places of worship in England may be able to open in July, depending on the progress of COVID-19 suppression. This will be with careful attention to social distancing, hygiene and other public health measures. Government guidance on places of worship, and weddings, has not yet been published.

Meetings in your area may be beginning to explore the options for restarting or continuing their worship once lockdown restrictions ease, whether separately, online, in-person, or with a combination of these. Any plans for resuming in-person worship will need to take full account of how this can be done safely. Meetings should refer to relevant government guidance once it is published.

Some aspects may need to change, for example holding worship in-person but without the usual socialising afterwards. The number of people who can worship in your meeting rooms may be greatly reduced by social distancing, or by the time it takes for handwashing. There may be options for meeting outdoors, or at several times of day. However, there is likely to be a long period when many worshippers are unable to join in-person worship.

For meetings wanting to run combined or 'blended' online and in-person meetings, this may require investment in technology to enable this style of worship. The technology will also be useful for other building users facing the same need to meet in person and online.

## Meeting houses – room lettings

Letting rooms for meetings and similar activities can be considered part of the hospitality sector. The UK Government Recovery Strategy makes clear that "All other sectors that are currently closed, including hospitality and personal care, are not able to re-open at this point [1 June] because the risk of transmission in these environments is higher. The opening of such sectors is likely to take place in phases during step three" [no earlier than 4 July in England]. "They should also meet the [COVID-19 Secure guidelines](#). Some venues which are, by design, crowded and where it may prove difficult to enact distancing may still not be able to re-open safely at this point, or may be able to open safely only in part." (See also guidance for Wales and Scotland.)

You should consider the scope for re-opening once Government guidelines for the hospitality sector are published, and as the timescales become clearer.

## Meeting houses – discrete areas and functions

Facilities such as nurseries will begin to open in June in England. Meetings which host nurseries should be working with the provider, local authorities and trustees to prepare for this, and consult relevant [official guidance](#).

Some meeting houses will contain offices, or discrete workspaces like counselling rooms, which will be subject to [Government guidance](#) for their sector.

Some meeting houses may be hosting essential voluntary or public services, such as food banks or homeless services. Official guidance should be sought on these.

## Buildings – overall

Government and [Health & Safety Executive guidance](#) should be followed, for example regarding cleaning and hygiene measures. Trustees need to be clear about which aspects are your responsibility, and which are the responsibility of those using your buildings. You may need to consult your insurers. You, or local premises committees, may need to amend terms and conditions of hire.

Care should be taken to consider whether the activities, entrance routes and use of toilet and other facilities would overlap between different users of the building. It may be necessary to open for some users and not others: some prioritisation may be needed. Indeed, it may be possible to open a building for some uses, but not for the Meeting itself. Whilst it may be legally possible to re-open, you may decide that this is not practically feasible. You may also find it is not financially feasible, as it may cost more to open a building with low occupancy than to keep it closed or limited.

Each site will need individual consideration, assessing the risks. Local circumstances may mean that different buildings can be open to different extents and timescales. You will need to take account of the capacity of the local meeting community, or employees, to manage the building in these new circumstances. (See below about decisions and involvement.)

## Finances

You need to review your budget projections, reserve levels and reserves policy, and act accordingly to preserve the future financial stability of your meetings.

Many area and local meetings will face a major fall in income from lettings and potentially other property income. This may last for a long period beyond the formal Government restrictions, as community organisations and individuals choose to be cautious about meeting together, or making commitments. Your donations, legacies, investment income and the value of investments may all fall. Some costs may rise, for example: cleaning; hardship funds; technology (to meet changed hirer needs or

to hold blended – combined online and in-person – worship); meetings needing to move to alternative premises. Employment costs will need to be met, including possible redundancy costs.

If you find your area meeting might be in financial difficulties in 2020 or 2021 please give BYM early warning of this, by emailing [supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk).

## Employees, volunteers and contractors

Quaker guidance for employers is here: [www.quaker.org.uk/employers](http://www.quaker.org.uk/employers)

If there is a warden living on site, their need for a safe living and working environment needs to be thought through. Some employees may need extra protection if they are vulnerable or in a high risk category.

Area meetings also have a duty of care towards their volunteers (on and off-site), and to contractors, so you will need to consider Government guidance with them in mind too.

## Beyond money, employees and buildings

Trustees may need to consider aspects such as safeguarding (including online), burial grounds, data protection, cybercrime, and other governance issues during this emergency period.

## Phases of the pandemic

To help you think through phases of the pandemic, the table on the final page offers a view of different aspects of our Quaker community, and how they can affect one another. You could use the table to prompt discussion of the issues and timescales. This version is only a starting point, to encourage you to explore different perspectives.

## Decisions and involvement

These are unprecedented times, full of difficult decisions and a lot of uncertainty. You will find that people are experiencing the pandemic in very different ways – some isolating short-term, some working, some facing long-term isolation and loss. Some people you have relied upon may be unable to participate. You should expect people to bring different perspectives and priorities to your collective decision making. So care, kindness and listening will all be important, alongside official guidance and practical good sense, seeking the right way forward.

Our Quaker structures and practices can have many layers and inter-dependencies. Trustees need to take a lead, and will need to take some difficult decisions. You probably need to meet more frequently than usual, and you may need to delegate in new ways. However, you will need to take particular care to communicate, involve and consult. In particular, consider which issues need to involve particular

roleholders or individuals within meetings, and which issues may depend on the decisions of: local premises committees; employees; local treasurers; local business meetings; area meeting; elders; clerks; registering officers and those responsible for funerals; major users of buildings; users with particular needs. It may be helpful if your discussions with a local meeting involve some trustees from outside that local meeting.

*Do you consider difficult questions with an informed mind as well as a generous and loving spirit? Are you prepared to let your insights and personal wishes take their place alongside those of others or be set aside as the meeting seeks the right way forward?*

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## Further support

You can contact Britain Yearly Meeting staff at [supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk](mailto:supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk)

You can get useful advice from colleagues in other area meetings:

- A conversation with neighbouring trustees may be very useful.
- You can join the Property Advice e-group [here](#).
- You can join the Wardens e-group, by scrolling down to Support [here](#),
- You can find out about the Wardens Talking sessions under Training and Events on the same page [here](#).
- Your area meeting treasurer can consult colleagues on the Treasurers e-group.

## Guidance links

### Britain Yearly Meeting coronavirus advice

- [www.quaker.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.quaker.org.uk/coronavirus)

### Updated government guidelines

- England: [www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response](http://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response)
- Scotland: [www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/)
- Wales: <https://gov.wales/topic/980/latest>

### Health and Safety Executive guidelines

- <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm>

### Regulators:

- Charity Commission: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-charity-sector>
- OSCR: <https://www.oscr.org.uk/news/oscr-publishes-covid-19-guidance-for-charities/>

### Medical updates

- England: [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/)
- Scotland: [www.scot.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/](http://www.scot.nhs.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/)
- Wales: <https://covid19-phwstatement.nhs.wales/>

### Resources from some other churches

- United Reformed Church <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3365-urc-issues-coronavirus-advice-to-its-churches>
- Church of England <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

<b>Government rules</b>	<b>Original firmest lockdown</b>	<b>Restrictions initially ease. Some activities and work return. Social distancing continues.</b>	<b>Restrictions gradually ease. Places of worship and hospitality phased in.</b>	<b>Fewer restrictions. Some continue.</b>	<b>“New Normal”</b>
<b>Time</b> – months are uncertain	March, April, May Longer in Wales and Scotland	At earliest 1 June (England). Wales and Scotland likely later	Phased, at earliest 4 July (England). Wales and Scotland likely later	? Autumn	? well into 2021
<b>Job Retention Scheme (furlough)</b>	Scheme in place		Scheme modified	Unknown (potentially scheme ended)	
<b>Quaker member and attender behaviour</b>	Isolated, bar some workers. Many online, some not. Sense of community. Some ill. Some die. Grieving.	Isolated. More workers return. Many online, some not. Sense of community Some ill. Some die. Grieving.	Older, frail and health vulnerable still shielding/isolated. A few can meet in person. Others cautious. Some keen on normal. Some ill, some die. Grieving. More workers back.	Legacy of isolation, ill health and losses. Increased use of online methods.	
<b>Quaker meetings</b>	Online worship. Non-tech worship. Newcomers and Returners. Less social and learning. Some people not online, by choice or limited by technology. Some people lost. Lost meetings? Role-holders missing. People stepping into roles and greater involvement. Some online business meetings and committees. Activities Postponed.	Online and non-tech worship continuing New online social & activities continuing New ways of working emerging / stabilising Some people newly recognised or participating More online committees and meetings for worship for business (MfWfB). Online learning Newcomers/returners settling in Some Quakers drift away. Role-holders missing Some meetings may crumble.	Online meetings continue Physical worship and community return for some people Blended physical + online worship emerges MfWfB and committees begin mixing online and in person Memorial meetings catching up Activities and agendas catching up New plans and opportunities. What gaps are left? Energy levels?	“Normal plus” Online worship continues. Blended physical + online worship continues. Some committees and MfWfB online and mixed. Opportunities? Gaps ? Losses ?	
<b>Children and Young people</b>	Isolated, missing school Missing out if internet not available or slow Online children’s meeting. Opportunities for online youth groups regionally and nationally. Sense of community	Main Quaker connection for many young people - regional residential summer events or YMG -cancelled. Some young people drift away. Differences exacerbated: some shielding with families; some can meet; internet inequalities. Online opportunities continue and develop including opportunities to develop all age faith conversation. Some schooling returns physically.	Some schooling returns - more pressure, less time to engage with Quakers. Physical worship and community returns for some people Online meetings continue Mixed Physical + Online worship and community emerges	Legacy of mental health conditions, interrupted schooling and milestones. Physical events return. Online youth groups continue as replacement and continuation of national physical events	
<b>Events (not worship)</b>	Many postponed or cancelled. Some moved online		Planning lag Some moved online	Some events possible, but not others. Reduced attendances. Residential unlikely, many cautious (esp. about public transport). Opportunities to gather in different ways or with different groups.	“Normal” Legacy of digital explosion for physical events
<b>Room hirers</b>	Not allowed	Some re-start eg Nurseries, counsellors A few small groups may restart	Occasional larger groups. Most choose not to.	Gradual rise	Normal Legacy of digital explosion
<b>Wardens and other local Quaker workers</b>	Some furloughed, some not Some preparations A few with buildings open		Much less work for some time. Some part-time furloughing. Changed work where buildings open ‘Covid-19 secure’. Catching up on backlog and re-bookings. Some meetings face financial crisis.		Normal Some face implications of financial and hirers’ changes
<b>Meeting Finances</b>	Lost income. Drawing on reserves. A few financial crises. Area meetings decide how to support any local meeting in financial difficulties.			Still lost income Some financial crises	Depleted reserves.
<b>AM Trustees</b>	Rapid decisions. Furlough? Reserves? Absentees. Uncertainties. Pull together Pausing some work.	Managing properties with fewer people available. Decisions re opening or not and for what - complexity and involvement. New furlough decisions. Some AMs or LMs facing financial crisis. Still many uncertainties. A chance to face strategic issues?		Still financial issues. Legacy of disjointed period. Some issues clearer. Opportunities for changes.	Longer term reconsideration.
<b>Reflections</b>	Learning new tech & new ways of living. Stresses. Dreaming of new normal.	Reflection on what is essential in life & Quakerism. Dreaming of new normal Preparing for new normal People having different experiences of pandemic.		Pressures of “back to normal” Make some changes Reflections continue	Longer term reconsideration

