



Central England Quakers  
Area Meeting Office

## Central England Quakers Area Meeting for Business

**July Area Meeting Will be held by Zoom**

**On Tuesday 14th July at 6pm**

The main items on the agenda to include

1. Membership Matters

2. How have our meetings been getting on in unusual times? *The clerks feel it may be helpful to 'take the temperature' of our area by hearing 'how truth is prospering' in our local meetings at this time. One person from each LM is asked to give a very brief account (2 minutes!) of the state of your meeting, which might include whether/how you have been able to hold worship, how you are ensuring pastoral care for one another, any new activities, any difficulties you have been encountering. Or you might prefer to single out just one thing you want Friends to know about.*

We will hear from each LM in turn and then reflect on what we have heard

**{Note to LM Clerks:** we are **not** asking for a formal minute from your meeting! We simply ask that one Friend from your meeting (who could be your representative, or an Elder, Overseer or Clerk, or just someone who volunteers to do it) come prepared to speak for 2 minutes, to give Friends from across the AM an impression of the current spirit of your meeting.}

3. Meeting for Sufferings report (paper below)

4. Possible new AM staff role (2 papers below)

5. Nominations and appointments

# Central England Area Meeting

## July Area Meeting will be held by Zoom on Tuesday 14th July at 6pm

Joining details: Topic: Area Meeting July 2020

Time: Jul 14, 2020 06:00 PM BST

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85199315437?pwd=MGpWVUUzRXJPckthRGQ5Y2ZtVTk0UT09>

Meeting ID: 851 9931 5437

Password: 091663

To join by phone:

Dial 0131 460 1196

When asked for meeting ID, enter: 851 9931 5437 followed by the # key

If asked for your personal ID, ignore this and simply press #

When asked for the password, enter 091663 followed by #

If there are problems with the above phone number, try one of these alternatives:

0203 051 2874

0203 481 5237

0203 481 5240

Please read in advance the protocol for meeting by Zoom (see below) and be sure you are familiar with the system.

Anyone wishing to attend who is not in formal membership is asked to seek permission by contacting the AM secretary **by 12 noon** on the day of the meeting.

The meeting is expected to last up to 2 1/2 hours, with a comfort break in the middle.

# Central England Area Meeting

Meeting by Zoom in July – please read in advance of the meeting

Thank you to those Friends who gave feedback into using Zoom to conduct area meeting.

If you plan to take part in the June meeting, please take a few moments to read this.

## Ahead of the meeting

The first time you use Zoom will need to download the programme onto your computer (or app onto your phone / tablet) - we suggest doing this beforehand. You can download Zoom here: <https://zoom.us/download>

If you haven't used Zoom (much) before, please have a practice on the device you will be using. To join a test meeting and have a practice, visit <https://zoom.us/test> and click **Join**.

As a minimum, you need to know how to:

- Mute/unmute your microphone
- Use the 'Raise Hand' button in the Participants list
- Use the 'Thumbs Up' button on your main screen

This guide shows where these features are on your device: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/200941109-Attendee-controls-in-a-meeting>

If you are not in formal membership, you must notify the AM Secretary of your wish to attend **by 12 noon on the day of the meeting**. If there are any items which need to be dealt with by members only (e.g. applications for membership), you may be asked to go to a Breakout Room for that item (*equivalent to the normal practice of asking you to leave the meeting room during a face-to-face meeting*).

## On the day

This guide will take you through how to join the meeting from your device: <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362193-Joining-a-Meeting>

The meeting's 'waiting room' will be open 15 minutes before the appointed time of the meeting. Please aim to arrive then, so that there is time to sort out any last minute technical issues, which can happen to any of us. It is not helpful if everyone leaves it to the last minute to arrive! When you first arrive, you will see a message, saying that the host will admit you shortly. Friends will be admitted one by one to the main meeting room. As you enter the meeting, you may want to greet Friends already there by saying hello or giving a wave, and others may say hello back, but otherwise please don't try to hold a conversation in the meeting room - remember that our worship begins when the first person enters the room so other than saying hello to one another we will use the gathering time to centre ourselves into worship. Please try to turn off anything that might make a noise in the background – computer/phone notification sounds in particular.

## During the Meeting

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The Central England Area Quaker Meeting Charities: registered charity number 224571

The clerk will open the business meeting, and at this point our Technical Host will mute everyone else's microphone.

The clerk will present the agenda and introduce items, calling on presenters if needed. If you wish to speak to an item, please use the 'Raise Hand' button (*equivalent to standing and waiting to be called*), and the clerk will be able to see a list of who has done so. Remember, the clerk cannot physically see everyone in the meeting at once, so waving your own real hand will be no use – use the button!

When the clerk calls one person by name, they should unmute their microphone (or the Technical Host may help). All the other raised hands will be lowered by the Technical Host (*equivalent to sitting down when someone else has been called*). When you have heard what the speaker has said, if you feel moved again to speak, you will need to use the Raise Hand button as before. When you finish speaking, please remember to mute your microphone. The clerk or assistant clerk will read draft minutes aloud to the meeting – we will not attempt to show the text on screen.

To indicate a minute is acceptable, please use the Thumbs Up button (*equivalent to saying "I hope so!"*). The clerk will be able to quickly scan across the images of participants and get a sense of the weight of approval. If you want to speak to the draft minute, use the Raise Hand button as before.

The clerk will end the meeting and the Technical Host will close down when other Friends have left the room.

Helen Rowlands  
(For clerking team)  
02.06.2020

A list of nominations will be sent out by email ahead of the meeting. It is not easy to replicate the practice of asking nominees to leave the Zoom meeting while their name is being considered. So any Friend wanting to ask a question or raise a concern about any of the nominations is asked to contact one of the Nominations Committee clerks or Area Meeting co-clerks **by 12 noon** on the day of the meeting.

## Agenda item 3

### Meeting for Sufferings Report

Meeting held online by video conference on 6th June 2020

Unusual circumstances call for adventurous living! Meeting for Sufferings was very well attended on zoom, and the Quaker worship and discipline of a business meeting was just as present. The clerking team and the Friends House staff who provided tech support conducted the meeting very well.

#### Main items on the agenda:

- BYM trustees report;
- Meeting for Sufferings dates;
- Virtual Yearly Meeting;
- How the truth is prospering in coronavirus times – in smaller breakout groups.
- Arrangements Committee had decided that the meeting should be shorter than normal, and planned for required business to be completed in a morning.

The meeting opened with a period of worship during which a short paragraph from Quaker Faith and Practice (19.61) by Margaret Fell was read: The truth is one and the same always, and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power and spirit of the living god endures for ever, and is the same and never changes.

### BYM Trustees Report

Trustees have been very busy since lockdown and Caroline Nurse, clerk of trustees, expressed her relief and gratitude that we have trustees – many difficult and important decisions had to be made very quickly: closing Friends House, and furloughing some staff, enabling work from home for others. Ongoing financial matters and the impact of loss of income have been and are being managed. Linda Batten, BYM Treasurer, gave us an update on our financial situation. Although legacy income in 2019 was unexpectedly large (£7 million of the £17 million income), we were reminded that this is unusual and that we need to move to a point where the regular income of BYM is matched with the routine expenditure – basically all of us living Friends need to give more while we are alive! But still BYM is in a good position with a surplus of over £8 million to weather the coronavirus crisis.

One positive consequence of the virus has been to develop new ways of working, sometimes more effectively and efficiently. Local Development Workers are helping colleagues withing BYM to understand the needs of local Friends and Meetings – rolling out the LDW programme has become more of a priority. Meeting via videoconferencing is also something for us to consider for the future, for some Friends it makes attendance more accessible and easier, and in the case of Meeting for Sufferings it saves quite a lot of money! The need for us to be creative may be balanced with the need to see each other in person. We were reminded that Friends around the world have been meeting online for several years.

### Meeting for Sufferings dates

The proposal to reduce the number of times that MfS is held over the next triennium from five to four each year, was met with many questions and anxieties. Would that lead to many more reports and much less discernment? This was a common worry and the minute recorded that concern

while accepting the provisional dates. Arrangements Committee was also asked to review and report back.

## **Virtual Yearly Meeting**

BYM clerk Clare Scott Booth spoke about the decision to cancel Yearly Meeting Gathering this year. The ongoing uncertainty of when face to face meetings, conferences, gatherings would be able to take place made it impossible to plan for such an event at all for 2020. The recommendation from Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee is for a virtual Yearly Meeting to be held on 15th November, and to last for only two to three hours, to keep our business going (routine and necessary matters) and to worship meaningfully together. Attendance will be open to all Friends who will need to book in advance, with a total of about 1000. MfS agreed to this proposal.

## **How is the truth prospering in our Meetings?**

For this session we were put into breakout rooms to enable smaller groups to talk about our own Area and Local Meetings. This proved to be a very interesting reflection on Friends and our ability to respond to difficult and different circumstances. We heard that many or even most Local Meetings were using some form of video conferencing for Meeting for Worship, and some interesting observations were made: more visitors to MfW, younger people at MfW, older and more infirm longstanding Friends able to attend MfW, very spiritual MfW, more children and young people attending and 'events' for them being organised. We also heard from Local Meetings which were meeting without technical intermediaries to just hold the silence at the normal time, from those who were uncomfortable with video conferencing, those who feel it is divisive and/or exclusive. Two particular issues were spoken of in the closing session – that the pandemic has highlighted the inequalities in society, and reminded Friends of our privilege; that we have become rather more inwardly focussed on maintaining and sustaining our Meetings at the expense of responding to the needs of our world.

Cathy Khurana  
CEQ Meeting for Sufferings Representative  
30.06.2020

## Item 4

### A) Proposal to employ a principal officer for the Area Meeting

At the Area Meeting in May 2019 Friends considered the request from trustees to employ an Operations Manager to support the work of trustees<sup>1</sup>. Trustees were unable to appoint anyone to this post and recognised the full extent of the task that needs to be done to cover the work the treasurer to trustees is currently doing for both the area meeting and trustees. The recent emergency responding to COVID 19 has brought into focus the need for a full-time executive post in CEQ. The last three months has highlighted the risk to our CEQ charities. Our reliance on volunteer trustees to manage the responsibility for employees, safety of buildings, the immediate loss of income and the long-term financial uncertainty, can no longer be considered safe. At their meeting in June trustees considered what steps needed to be taken to respond to these risks and asked a small working group to consider the way forward. This group met at the end of June and agreed that, in the light of current circumstances, there is now a real need for the Area Meeting to consider appointing a principal officer. There is a clear job to be done. The Area Meeting co-clerks are members of this group and agreed to bring this proposal to the Area Meeting in July.

In November 2019, alongside the trustees' appeal for professional support, Area Meeting received minutes from Elders and Overseers Support Group and Clerks Advisory Committee sharing a concern for our smaller local meetings<sup>2</sup>. Local Meetings have been consulted but as a consequence of the Covid 19 restrictions this concern has not yet been brought to Area Meeting for consideration. Having heard the report from Elders and Overseers Support Group it is likely that more support and closer working relationships are needed with the area meeting. This proposal to employ a full-time principal officer needs to be considered in context of the whole of the Area Meeting in 2020 and the next 5/10 years.

The image of the hub of a wheel is helpful to see how a principal officer could assist the sharing of knowledge between LMs; co-ordinating property/financial/employment services across the AM; lettings services; preferred suppliers etc. These various functions and their relationship to AM co-clerks, clerk to trustees, treasurer to trustees AM treasurer and local meetings will need to be carefully thought through, as will the exact job title. However, it will be a very practical way to offer support to Friends in LMs in the longer term.

To support this new post the Area Meeting will need to find an additional £40,000 in the budget for 2021. In 2020 £20,000 is budgeted for the Operations Manager post and this year we have a balanced budget. At present trustees' finance committee are monitoring the costs of the lockdown and this will become clearer as we move into the second half of the year. We know that there will be no gift from Priory Rooms this year and this will affect our budgeting for 2021 in the autumn. If Area Meeting prioritises this proposal to support the work of trustees this will be taken into account when the 2021 budget is drawn up and brought to Area Meeting in November.

Trustees are asking Area Meeting to support this change in direction and that we continue to work on this proposal to recruit a full-time principal officer to work across the Area Meeting.

From the trustees working group Gill Smith (WAR), Huw Davies (HAL), Sue Thompson (COT), Judith Jenner (COT) with AM co-clerks Alison Ironside and Helen Rowlands.  
29th June 2020

## 1 2019.047 Trustee Matters

Judith Jenner, clerk to trustees, has laid before us the proposal by trustees to employ someone to support the day to day work of our charity and ensure that we are compliant with the legal requirements laid upon us. Many tasks carried out by trustees and service committees could be done by such an employee, the key criterion for such a role being anything that a suitably qualified person could manage that does not require making policy decisions. Much of the work presently covered by the treasurer to trustees also falls into this category; where there are grey areas the employee could seek guidance in how to proceed.

We agree in principle to using a paid professional and ask trustees to investigate the practical considerations of such a venture and report back to a future area meeting.

## 2 2019.106 Minutes Received

Minute quoted in full below.

### **B) The Life of our Area Meeting - an update from the AM Clerks**

This paper is provided to keep Friends up-to-date with developments and to provide further background for the consideration of a possible new area meeting staff post. Whilst we are not taking this as a stand-alone item for discussion in July, we think it may be helpful for Friends to be aware of responses received so far. If any other meetings are in a position to contribute we will be happy to receive their responses in due course. The prohibition on meeting in person is serving to intensify issues in some quarters as well as giving us new experiences and eliciting creative responses.

At area meeting in November 2019, we made the following minute:

### **2019.106 Minutes Received**

We have received minutes from two of our Area Meeting committees asking for a renewed consideration of our Local Meetings, as several are small and struggle to continue, particularly finding it difficult to appoint Friends to roles and responsibilities:

#### 1. Minute received from Elders and Overseers Support Group, 8.10.201

2019.30 - E&OSG are aware that many of our small Meetings across the area are struggling. We feel that a review is due; we ask AM to look at imaginative ways of using our Meeting Houses differently and working together more collaboratively.

#### 2. Minute received from Clerks Advisory Committee

CAC2019/16 Minute from AM elders & overseers support group

We have heard minute 2019/30 from the E&O support group about smaller meetings in our AM. We also note the invitation from Britain YM to all area meetings to put in an expression of interest for a local development (formerly vibrancy) worker in our area who could provide meeting centred support.

We have heard that several meetings in our AM are struggling with low numbers, and in particular Edgbaston.

As an area meeting we may have enough funds to contribute towards our own local development worker.

We recommend that this goes on to the November agenda. We ask the clerk to send this minute to the clerk of trustees [Judith Jenner] and clerk of AM trustees finance committee [Robert Morris].

Hilary Johnson from Elders and Overseers Support Group has spoken to this matter and raised some inter-related issues of nurturing and growing Quakerism through our meetings and associated buildings. We are conscious that the matter of smaller or struggling meetings is a recurring concern in our Area Meeting.

We ask all our Local Meetings to consider some of the ideas raised today: getting together in a different way, for example holding semi-programmed Meetings for Worship; holding Meeting for Worship at different times or on different days; local Meetings might identify and advertise their prime concern.

We want to hear from every Local Meeting and will return to this matter; we ask our Local Meetings to send a minute to the AM clerks by the end of March.

We ask the clerks to submit an expression of interest to BYM for a Local Development Worker for the Area Meeting.

We had expected to return to this matter in March, but that meeting was cancelled due to the national lockdown in response to the Covid-19 virus. It has not seemed right to put a matter requiring this depth and quality of discernment back on the agenda while we were getting used to holding virtual Area Meetings.

Meanwhile, five Local Meetings and our Trustee body managed to send in minutes before the lockdown, and these are attached at the end of this document.

An application was made for a Vibrancy Worker to be attached to our area. The scheme has a five-year time scale, aiming to have a worker available in every area meeting by the end of that time. We have been informed that we will not have a worker assigned to our AM until later in the project, as priority is being given to meetings at greater distance from the existing Quaker 'centres of gravity' of Friends House and Woodbrooke.

## **Minutes received from LMs**

### **Cotteridge LM**

2020/12 Cotteridge Meeting response to Area Meeting's minute 2019.106:

".... We ask all our Local Meetings to consider some of the ideas raised today: getting together in a different way...; holding Meeting for Worship at different times or on different days; Local Meeting might identify and advertise their prime concern. ...."

Cotteridge Meeting has spent time as individuals and collectively considering our response to this minute from Area Meeting. A threshing meeting was held in early February which was an all age event, widely advertised so as to encourage as many as possible to give their views. We have been grateful to have had this chance to think about how Cotteridge Meeting meets together as

well as how we can link up with other meetings locally. Notes and individual responses to this have been filed with these minutes.

We heard from our children about their enjoyment of the 'Age 10+' events held monthly around the different meetings in our Area Meeting. We would be keen for older Friends in the Area Meeting to get together in different ways and we shared ideas such as social events, sharing time together in worship, opportunities for learning and charity events which would be widely advertised to other meetings.

We had many ideas for how worship could be held differently: could we provide opportunities to worship together on a weekday afternoon, this could be a chance to introduce our silent worship to a wider community, possibly with the opportunity to join together for food afterwards. We appreciate other elements in our own worship such as singing, all age or programmed worship. We are aware that we are one of the larger meeting communities in our Area Meeting. We would be willing to work together with other local meetings to think more creatively about how we complete some of our practical roles such as book-keeping, children & youth work and safeguarding. We could also consider using our funds to pay people to support this work. We are aware that we need to be more outward facing. Our process of engaging with this issue has brought up a number of additional issues:

- We believe that our regular Children's Meeting is part of how we maintain our vibrancy. How can we ensure we are able to welcome children and their parents to become part of the meeting community?
- How can we support attenders to find out more about Quakers? Can this be a role for local meetings to join together?
- How can we engage more fully with our local community? What local initiatives should the Quaker voice be part of? Should this be at a Cotteridge Meeting level or together with other local meetings?

Throughout our thinking we are aware of our own limitations. We should work within what is possible. We are aware of many of our own subgroups and committees struggling to fulfil commitments and some have vacancies. Members and Attenders are already stretched, and we should be realistic about what we can manage and who will organise it.

We look forward to further conversations with our neighbouring meetings and within the Area Meeting more widely.

## **Hall Green LM**

2020/11 Discussion of paper prepared by Hilary Johnson

Following minute 2020/03, the paper produced by Hilary Johnson has been circulated to members and attenders and been made available after MfW. Elders have discussed this paper and have produced the following minute.

'Suggestions from Hilary Johnson re working together. We have read and discussed these interesting suggestions. However, we feel that we should be able to clearly articulate our Meeting for Worship (and what it means to us) and also have a clearer understanding of our Quaker identity before deciding which outreach option to pursue. We see a distinction between raising awareness of Quakers among other faiths and seeking to bring more people into the Religious Society of Friends'.

After the discussion at Business Meeting today, we feel that our Meeting House is a valuable community resource which is clearly identified as Quaker. We realise that both the Meeting and

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ourselves have particular gifts which we could develop We recognise that most people who come to a Quaker Meeting for Worship particularly value the silence which is almost unique to Quakers but outside the Meeting for Worship and in the wider world we need to be more audible.

We would welcome the possibility that the Area Meeting employs a 'vibrancy' worker and we will encourage our members to support the 'Drop-in Anytime' events if organised at Edgbaston Meeting.

We will share this minute with members and attenders who were not present and also ask the Co-Clerk to send it to the Area Meeting Clerks.

Bob Morris,  
Co-Clerk Hall Green LM

### **Selly Oak LM**

SEL2019/61 Small Meetings / South Birmingham Meetings

We record this as a holding Minute and look forward to returning to it at February Local Business Meeting.

We have experimented with holding semi-programmed Meetings for Worship, holding Meeting for Worship at different times on a Sunday this year and have found them to be very positive and helpful for a wide range of Friends and Attenders in our Meeting. We are planning to continue to experiment and use these alternative formats in 2020.

As a first step towards working more closely together with other South Birmingham Meetings we plan to approach Bournville Meeting around having a single joint Events Diary. We hope that this will lead to further steps towards the other local Meetings.

SEL 2020/06 Small Meetings/South Birmingham Meetings/Collaboration and Experiment.  
(SEL2019/61) (CEAQM2019.106)

We ask Elder/Overseers to arrange some small group discussions during Feb and March which will hopefully feed into our response to the AM request for the AM in April. This will be an agenda item in our March Local Meeting for Business. (This was not taken due to lockdown.)

### **Stourbridge LM**

19/20 Concern for smaller Meetings.

Area Meeting asks us to respond following concerns raised by the Elders & Overseers Support Group and Clerks Advisory Group about smaller meetings in our AM. Several meetings in our AM are struggling with low numbers, particularly in finding Friends to fill Quaker roles. Should Area Meeting take up the invitation from Britain YM for area meetings to put in an expression of interest for a local development worker in our area who could provide meeting-centred support? As an Area Meeting we may have enough funds to contribute towards our own local development worker.

Area Meeting would like to hear from every Local Meeting before it returns to this matter; it asks them to consider some of the ideas raised in November: getting together in a different way, for example holding semi-programmed Meetings for Worship; holding Meeting for Worship at different times or on different days; local Meetings might identify and advertise concerns and activities

which give their Meeting its special character. It asks all the Local Meetings to send a minute to the AM clerks by the end of March.

Stourbridge Meeting is not in a good position geographically to give direct support to the smaller meetings in Area Meeting, apart from Woodlands Meeting for Worship and possibly Walsall. We will share our outreach programme with neighbouring meetings in the hope it will be useful to them. We note the suggestions for doing Meeting for Worship in different ways, but are not minded to take them further for ourselves at present.

We encourage Area Meeting to express an interest in having a Local Development Worker and hope it will offer to contribute to the costs of Britain Yearly Meeting.

We will send this minute to Area Meeting.

## **Warwick LM**

Minute 20/07 Concern re South Birmingham Meetings

We have received a minute from Area Meeting, asking us to send a minute by the end of March, regarding a concern that several smaller meetings in our Area Meeting, especially in South Birmingham, are struggling to keep going. We have also received a document from Hilary Johnson, of Cotteridge Meeting, outlining her ideas for support and regeneration for these meetings and also from Ruth Gaston, of Warwick Meeting. We applaud the energy and enthusiasm of both these Friends.

We are also asked to respond to the idea of applying for a local development worker in our area. This matter created considerable discussion.

We heard from Jane Holt, a member of the Elders' and Overseers' Support Group, that we are encouraged to work collaboratively with meetings local to us, as could South Birmingham meetings, in order to become more of what we already are and to support one another practically.

We agree that this is a matter of concern and support the idea of applying for a local development worker who might work to support smaller meetings that are struggling in particular, but not excluding other meetings.

Our Friend, Ruth Gaston, is particularly impassioned to support the South Birmingham Meetings. We very much recommend her to Area Meeting as a Friend of passion and vision who has tested and carried her vision for five years and who is completely open to help and support the South Birmingham Meetings in whatever way she can.

We therefore suggest that a group is formed comprising Hilary Johnson, Ruth Gaston and other Friends. This is the time to move forward.

We ask our Clerk to forward this minute to Area Meeting

## **AM trustees meeting on 5 March 2020**

T2020. H Working more collaboratively between local meetings

In November Area Meeting received minutes from the Elders & Overseers Support Group and the Clerks Advisory Committee expressing concern for struggling Local Meetings. AM minute 2019.106 asked that local meetings should consider this and send their minutes to AM before the end of March. Link trustees are in contact with local meetings and trustees considered the question of working together more collaboratively from this perspective. We suggest:

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The Central England Area Quaker Meeting Charities: registered charity number 224571

- Sharing staff between local meetings who are responsible for bookings/caretaking/cleaning,
- Advice on premises matters
- A Vibrancy Worker
- Having a line manager to manage a number of employees at different local meetings
- Joint study groups and events with other local meetings.

We will send this minute to the Area Meeting co-clerks.

Area Meeting Clerks

30.6.2020