

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull Street Meeting House and online on 19 November 2022

2022.90 Opening worship

We have started our meeting with a period of stillness during which we heard of the death of our Friends Anthea Price (SUT) and Deborah Taylor (BOU). We also heard *Quaker Faith & Practice* 2.08 as follows:
To me, worship is recognising and communing with the divine, whether it is within myself, in others, or in the world. The pre-condition of worship is my belief in worth-ship, my own and that of other people.
A member of the Quaker Women's Group, 1986

2022.91 Representatives

The clerk has given permission for Peter Doubtfire, at attender at Bull St to join us today. The following meetings are represented: B&R, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAL, KIN, SEL, SOL, STO, SUT, WAL, WAR. We are aware that Hartshill meeting have been unable to send representatives but we hear that they are in good spirit.

2022.92 Membership matters

We record the deaths of Anthea Price, member of Sutton Coldfield, LM died on 10/10/22 aged 80; and Deborah Taylor, member of Bournville LM, died on 01/11/22 aged 81

2022.93 Oak Tree House

We have received copies of the original Oak Tree House Trust Deed, along with the minutes of a trustees' meeting held Thursday 25th August 2022 which, effectively, allow the Sir Josiah Mason Trust (SJMT) to become the sole corporate trustee on 1 September 2022. We note (a) that this transfer has all gone according to plan, and (b) that we appointed the Quaker Advisory committee at our last meeting (Min 2022.85). An informal group, Friends of Oak Tree House, have met with staff from SJMT to discuss ongoing social events at the House. We understand that there are a number of vacancies, especially for Quakers, at the House at the moment, and we encourage Friends to make this known in their meetings.

2022.94 Local Development Worker

We are delighted to hear that Hilary Topp (COT) has been appointed as our LDW. As well as Central England Hilary will also be serving Staffordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire, and East Cheshire Area Meetings. We look forward to working with Hilary and wish her much joy in her new role which she is due to start on Monday 21 November.

2022.95 CEQ Annual Report & Accounts 2021

We have received the 2021 CEQ Annual Report & Accounts which were approved by Trustees and submitted to the Charity Commission in September. Copies have been sent to all LM Clerks and further copies are available from the CEQ Office, and via the CEQ website. James Bradbury has spoken to these.

The accounts show figures for both Charity and Group. The Group accounts include figures for Priory Rooms (Bull Street) Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary. 2021 was a better year for CEQ than 2020, with the Charity accounts showing a net positive movement in funds of £357,670 compared with a negative movement of £269,604 in 2020.

A reduction in Donations and Legacies compared with 2020 (which was due to some "windfall" receipts in 2020 rather than any general decline in income) was offset by an increase in income from Charitable Activities, primarily due to a successful £108,000 insurance claim for loss of room hire income in 2020, which was received in 2021.

It was necessary to draw £57,000 from reserves in 2021 in order to maintain Central Fund bank balances within the limits set out in the CEQ Reserves Policy.

The value of our investments (listed securities and investment properties) increased by £452,529 in the year.

Friends are invited to contact the Treasurer to Trustees, James Bradbury, if they have any questions about the Report & Accounts.

We have heard that two people were made redundant during the period. These redundancies were carried out in accordance with the law and best practice, and the employees concerned received appropriate payment. We are grateful for their service during their time with us.

We record our grateful thanks to the valuable work done throughout the year by our local and central Treasurers.

CEQ Central Funds budgets for 2023

Central Funds are those managed by Trustees and exclude bank accounts and investments held by Local Meetings and Branches.

A paper has been circulated in advance of the meeting containing a detailed commentary on the budget assumptions and proposals, accompanied by a chart illustrating receipts and payments through the Central Fund bank accounts. The budget proposals were approved by Trustees on 15 November.

James Bradbury, Treasurer to Trustees, has drawn our attention to some key points:-

- Due to the loss of trading caused by COVID, the Priory Rooms gifts for this year and next will be zero. This income shortfall has coincided with the need to recruit paid staff to undertake some of the charity's central administrative work.
- We have had to draw on reserves this year, to the tune of £48,000, to offset a deficit, and the 2023 budget anticipates a further £35,000 withdrawal from reserves. Until Priory Rooms returns to profit Central Fund expenditure is likely to exceed income.
- At the start of 2022 we launched an appeal to Local Meetings to raise £20,000 for Area Meeting Central Funds in 2022, and we are pleased to note that this target was achieved. Trustees are asking Local Meetings to make a similar contribution to Area Meeting Funds in 2023, and the justification for this is set out in the paper. Trustees are mindful that Local Meetings are facing increased energy costs, and in some cases increased staff costs, but it seems only fair that Local Meetings should contribute to the cost of administering the charity of which they are a part.
- The budget assumes grants for our Branches, and external beneficiaries (eg ecobirmingham, Woodbrooke and BYM) broadly similar to the previous year, and we accept these recommendations.

In summary, the charity's finances remain under considerable pressure at the moment as we are facing – simultaneously – the loss of a key source of income and the need to recruit paid staff to cover some of the work currently undertaken by over-burdened volunteers. We are having to draw on reserves, which are finite, to offset losses. We need Area Meeting to consider what “love requires of us” in terms of our priorities, and how to secure sufficient income to pay for them. A conversation was started at a special Area Meeting last May, and we hope it will continue.

We approve the Central Funds budget for 2023, together with the proposal to ask Local Meetings to provide further financial support for Area Meeting expenditure in 2023. We thank James Bradbury for presenting these reports and all our trustees for the work which they do on our behalf.

2022.96 Prison Chaplaincy report

We have received a report on the Prison Chaplaincy Conference held at Woodbrooke 7-9 October 2022 which is filed with these minutes. We are aware of the difficulties faced by chaplains as they deal with prisoners who are often traumatised and in a system which is unable to meet some of their basic needs. We are grateful to Peter Fishpool for writing the report and to the other prison chaplains who work on our behalf.

2022.97 Footsteps Energy Champion Initiative

Further to our minute 2022.070 (Fuel Poverty and Energy Champion concern) we have received a written update from Chris Martin, presented by Claire Bowman, as well as a minute from Warwick LM broadly supporting the work. This follows the minutes received from Cotteridge and Bull St in September. We have heard that Stourbridge are happy to support the £4,000 grant, if Friends in Birmingham are happy and we have heard that Friends in Sutton Coldfield also support this concern.

We agree that the Area Meeting Climate Emergency Action group be given £4,000 for 2023 so that this can be used to support the energy champion initiative next year.

2022.98 Special Working Group – Update

We have received a paper from Rae Ritchie, convenor of the working group set up by Area Meeting in May last year, along with a minute from the group. We agree that the group should hold an all-day all-age special meeting on Saturday 13 May.

2022.99 Area Meetings in 2023

We have received the proposed schedule of Area Meetings for next year and our clerk has spoken to the matter.

2022.100 Anti-racism survey

We have received a letter from Kate McNally, outlining her intention, as part of her Eva Koch Fellowship at Woodbrooke, to conduct a survey on anti-racism in the Yearly Meeting. This follows the concerns at Yearly Meeting expressed in minute 38 in 2017, minute 17 in 2021, and minute 27 from 2022, all concerned with our response to racism. We agree to circulate this to Local Meetings as well as to our Responding to Racism Group asking the latter to respond on our behalf.

2022.101 The change of name of Overseer

Following a request from Meeting for Sufferings we have asked our Local Meetings to consider changing the name of Overseer and we have heard from seven of them. Four have adopted "Pastoral Friend" instead (BOU, BUL, COT, WAL); one refers to its "Pastoral Care Group" (COV), and another to its Pastoral Support Group (WAR). The seventh (SUT) chose Pastoral Carer initially but subsequently decided on Pastoral Friend, making five LMs that have adopted that terminology. Our Elders & Overseers Support Group has been renamed Elders & Pastoral Friends Support Group. We agree to check with Elders & Pastoral Friends Support Group before sending the details to Meeting for Sufferings.

2022.102 Nomination and Release from service

Our Nomination Committees suggest that John Sheldon (WAR) continue as co-clerk for 2023. A search group is looking for other names. We appoint our Friend accordingly. We note Claire Bowman's request to be released from service on the Area Meeting Trustees Finance Committee. We agree to this request and thank our Friend for her service on our behalf.

2022.103 Trustees Terms of Reference

Following the appointment of the Principal Officer Trustees have prepared new Terms of Reference for themselves and their service committees. These are tabled for consideration at the next Area Meeting.

2022.104 Thanks and next meeting

We thank Bull Street Friends for their hospitality to us today. The next Area Meeting will be held at Bull St on Saturday 28 January 2023.

John Sheldon
Clerk this time