

Minutes of Central England Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) held at Bull Street Meeting House and online on Saturday 18 November 2023

Clerk: Rae Ritchie
Assistant Clerk: Paula Button
Elders: Wendy Burnett and Richard Pashley

2023.092 Opening worship

We have observed a period of stillness during which we heard the statement issued by the Area Meeting Clerks on Saturday 4 November 2023 about the arrest of four Central England Quakers during a protest at an arms fair in Telford.

2023.093 Representatives

The following Local Meetings are represented: BGR, BOU, BUL, COT, COV, HAL, HAR, KIN, SEL, SOL, STO, SUT, WAL, WAR.

The clerks welcome the following Attenders joining us today: Alison Iboro Offong (SEL), Terry Stanley (BUL), Elise Coblenz-Baumann (BUL) and Mary Mather (WAL). The clerks also welcome Steven Petter of Wolverhampton Local Meeting.

2023.094 Membership matters

(a) Deaths

We record the deaths of our Friends Judith Sanderson (SUT) on 30 September 2023 aged 73 and Sara Ann Packer (COT, formerly HAL) on 14 October 2023 aged 72.

(b) Journey into membership application

We have received an application for membership from Georgie Thomas, an attender at Barnt Green and Redditch Local Meeting. We ask our Nominations Committee to find the names of visitors for Georgie.

(c) Transfer in

We have received a request from East Kent AM for the transfer of Jo Jackson to our Area Meeting. We accept this request and ask our Clerk to issue a certificate of acceptance and to welcome our Friend into membership of our Area Meeting.

(d) Internal transfer

We note the following internal transfer: Julia Yelloly from COV to HAR.

2023.095 Meeting for Sufferings report

Claire Bowman (BOU), our Meeting for Sufferings representative, spoke to a report about the Meeting for Sufferings held on 6-8 October 2023, the first in-person residential since the pandemic. Claire highlighted the changes being considered at Meeting for Sufferings that will affect membership of the Society of Friends. There is some feeling that new processes are needed to accommodate Friends who attend Meeting for Worship in different formats, such as online, rather than Local Meetings.

Claire also shared that Meeting for Sufferings is considering changes that will affect Meeting for Sufferings itself. There are concerns about diversity in representation at Meeting for Sufferings and questions about whether combining Meeting for Sufferings with Yearly Meeting at several points throughout the year would work better.

Several Friends spoke strongly against these proposals and the detrimental effects they may have on the strength and vibrancy of the Society of Friends as well as the quality and spiritual nature of discernment. This reflected the feeling of the meeting overall. We ask the Area Meeting Clerks to write to Meeting for Sufferings to share these concerns, particularly around how they may affect spiritual discernment, and to ask for more detailed information about the thinking behind them.

Claire told us that the minute regarding Imprisonment for Public Protection sent from Central England Area Meeting was taken very seriously. This has been shared with Scotland General Meeting for their consideration too. Our Friend Tricia Bradbury has been working with Quakers in Criminal Justice Group to develop a template letter so that individual Quakers can write to their MPs about this issue, given that MPs often judge strength of feeling based on the number of letters. This template will be included at the end of these papers. A template letter for Friends to write to their MP about Modern Day Slavery is also available.

Claire shared her concern that the Yearly Meeting Sustainability Monitoring Group only has two members. Anyone wishing to support this work should contact her to find out how they can get more involved.

2023.096 CEQ Annual Report and Accounts 2022

We have received the 2022 CEQ Annual Report & Accounts which were approved by Trustees and are due to be uploaded to the Charity Commission website as soon as the IT issue affecting its online systems is resolved. Copies of the report and accounts have been shared with Local Meeting Clerks and are published on the Central England Quakers website. Friends have been given the opportunity to ask questions but none were received.

The objectives and activities of the charity are clearly stated in the Trustees' report, being the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of Quakers in the Central England area and emphasising strengthening the life and witness of our Quaker meetings, spreading the message of Quakerism and undertaking Quaker service.

The key financial figures to note are as follows:

1. The outturn for CEQ in 2022 was not good – overall an operating loss for the charity of £220k (2021 loss of £95k). This is for our Local Meetings, branches and central funds and was mainly caused by increases in costs of repairs and maintenance, utilities charges and the additional salaries and professional fees necessary as we organise ourselves more efficiently.
2. In 2022 we also had a loss on our investments of £310k compared with a gain of £453k in 2021. The overall loss for the whole organisation, including the Priory Rooms, before investment gains and losses was slightly less than 2021 at £142k (2021 £206k) but following the investment loss was £451,922, which compared with a net gain in 2021 of £247,504.
3. Our balance sheet remains healthy but our overall funds are reducing (that means without increased sources of income, we are selling investments.)

The question for Area Meeting is where do we want to focus our energies and resources in 2024 and beyond? The Trustees need guidance as they make difficult decisions for the future. We will return to

this as we consider the recommendations of the “What does love require of us?” Special Working Group, which has explored the future of Central England Quakers, in the months ahead.

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

2023.097 CEQ Forecast Accounts 2023 and Budget 2024

Central Funds are those managed by Trustees and exclude bank accounts and investments held by Local Meetings and branches. A paper containing the forecast accounts for 2023 and budget for 2024 for both the General Fund and Trustees Fund has been circulated in advance of this meeting. The budget proposals were approved by Trustees on 31 October 2023.

Anne Ullathorne, Central England Quakers Area Meeting Treasurer, spoke to this item and highlighted that:

- (a) All Local Meetings and branches should be making a simple budget for the year ahead. Some Meetings will have deficits and some surpluses and decisions need to be made as to how we go forward. If our Meetings are important to Friends, perhaps those who are able to support them financially can increase their donations.
- (b) At the central level there are four funds to support the Area Meeting. Firstly, the Building Fund which supports Local Meetings with grants and loans for improvements and repairs. The budget covers modest requests and there is also an investment fund. Secondly, there is a Centrally Managed Meeting Houses Fund. This covers 4 meeting houses (Edgbaston, Northfield, Barnt Green Redditch and Kings Heath) and at present is only showing a forecast break-even because of the subsidy (of £16,500) that has been given from the Trustees’ fund. Trustee Finance Committee have estimated expenditure for 2024 and consider that these Meeting Houses need to generate an income in 2024 of £75,000 from room hire and car parking (2023 £65,000).
- (c) CEQAM General Fund is the fund for the income and expenditure of the activities of our Area Meeting and although the budget assumes a contribution of £25,000 from our Local Meetings as well as £30,000 from the Trustees Fund, there is still a deficit, though trustees think that it can be managed without drawing down from investments.
- (d) The Trustees Fund represents the servicing that takes place for the organisation of our Area Meeting and simplified figures are set out in the paper. The Priory Rooms has had a better year this year and because of that can transfer part of its profits to this Fund. This then covers our estimated expenses and it could be possible to transfer a little more to the AM General Fund or underwrite a loss from the CMMH Fund, as was done this year.
- (e) We agree to pay £20k to Britain Yearly Meeting for this year and budget £20k for next year too.

Anne and others present also highlighted the challenges and opportunities that Central England Quakers face in terms of finances. In many ways, the Area Meeting is fortunate in terms of finances given that we have investments, but we may still have to make difficult decisions about what to support and what we may need to lay down. With this in mind, we ask Local Meetings to provide further financial support for Area Meeting expenditure during the year ahead.

We thank Anne Ullathorne for presenting these reports and all our trustees for the work which they do on our behalf. We approve the Central Funds budget for 2024.

2023.098 Minute from Trustees

The Trustees shared a minute from a meeting held on 31 October 2023. The minute refers to two investment properties close to Northfield Meeting House. Originally a single property, this has been split into two separate buildings that are leased to Oulsnam Estate Agents (number 51) and EcoBirmingham (number 53).

The minute from Trustees reads:

T23.10.06 Property:

51 & 53 Church Road: These investment properties are no longer in use for Quaker activities / purposes and costs of their maintenance are rising beyond their investment value. After considering the recommendation of Property Committee (minute CEQPC 100723.05) and the asset appraisal reports, available for this meeting, Trustees support the discernment of their property committee and will inform AM that we intend that these two properties be sold.

This minute refers to a minute from a Trustees Property Committee meeting held on 9 October 2023, which states:

CEQPC 100723.05

7.3 Future viability of the Church Road investment properties. We have received an asset appraisal of these properties from KWB Property Management (item 6 of the papers for this meeting refer). Property Committee feels that this set of buildings is problematic and its future will be costly in cash and committee resources. We recommend to trustees that they ask the PO to investigate further the disposal of these properties with professional advice.

Gill Smith, clerk to Trustees, confirmed that the Trustees have consulted with EcoBirmingham about this issue. They have just signed a new three-year lease and this would protect them in the event of the property's sale. They are also considering moving to new more central premises.

2023.099 Woodlands Quaker Home

The Trustees of Woodlands Quaker Home have shared the following statement:

Trustees have asked a small working group to review the arrangements under which Woodlands Quaker Home occupies the land and buildings at Penn. At present there is a peppercorn rent lease in place, but this only has a remaining term of some 12 years and has some anomalies. A longer-term lease would be preferable for both CEQ and Woodlands, and steps are being taken to prepare the ground for this.

2023.100 Minute from the Community Justice Group

The Community Justice Group (CJG) shared the following minute from a meeting held on 25 October 2023:

2023/13 CJG Branch Status

The Principal Officer has raised the suggestion that the group may want to consider laying down their branch status and instead becoming a committee of the AM. This will hopefully mean less work for members, particularly the role of treasurer, as the main difference will be the closure of the separate bank account and the group's accounts being managed through the General Fund.

The group are keen to ensure that donations via the Contribution Schedule can continue and are ring fenced for CJG use. On the basis that that can be facilitated the group will propose to Trustees and AM the bank account is closed at the end of the year (and hence the branch status is laid down) with funds being transferred to the General Fund. A final set of accounts will be produced for 2023.

Following the meeting the above proposal was considered and supported by CEQ Trustees at their meeting held on 31 October 2023, and it has been established that donations via the Contribution Schedule can continue and will be ring fenced for CJG use.

Area Meeting approve the branch being laid down and to CJG instead becoming a Committee of the Area Meeting, with an annual budget held within the General Fund, with effect from 1 January 2024.

2023.101 Asylum Group

Barbara Forbes (BUL) spoke to the meeting about the pastoral and charitable work done by individuals and Local Meetings across Central England Quakers to support refugees and asylum seekers as well as how the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN) has developed an advocacy role over the years. The CEQ Refugee and Asylum group was part of this network and was extremely active until the pandemic. Leaflets explaining the group's work in different areas and on different related issues are available.

QARN continues to advocate on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees, work which has become even more important in the current political climate. Barbara shared some of the planned campaigns, including one to send Valentine's cards to MPs asking them to have a heart for refugees. To support this campaign, Barbara and others with a concern for refugees and asylum seekers hope to revive the CEQ group. Area Meeting supports this request and encourages Local Meetings to promote the group and individual friends to get involved by contacting Barbara (forbesbarbarae@yahoo.co.uk). Area Meeting clerks agree to consider the group and how Area Meeting can support its work and will return to a future meeting with ideas. It is a challenging topic at a difficult time but we can be a voice for those who cannot speak out.

2023.102 Membership Clerk Role

The role of Area Meeting Membership Clerk was created to relieve the burden of work on the main Area Meeting Clerk when just one person held the role. This additional support is no longer required now there is a team of three co-clerks in place again, hence the role of Membership Clerk is laid down with immediate effect.

Going forward, the Area Meeting Clerks will consider every application for membership and will speak to the relevant Local Meeting Clerk about applications before bringing them to Area Meeting. The Area Meeting Secretary will share an overview of the application process with each applicant so they understand how it will work but management of the process will stay with the Clerks.

We thank the outgoing Membership Clerk, Stella Roberts (COV), for her dedication to the role. The Area Meeting Clerks will also liaise with Stella to ensure that they continue with best practice. The Clerks welcome any additional feedback on how the journey into membership works, both spiritually and practically. As an Area Meeting, we will return to the wider question of membership in 2024.

2023.103 Nominations

(a) Nominations Committee suggests:

- Anne Giles (BOU) to serve on the Lettings Advisory Committee from December 2023 to November 2026
- Patricia Bradbury (STO) to serve as Area Meeting Safeguarding Co-ordinator from December 2023 to November 2026
- Jane Stanley (WAL) to serve on the Records Advisory Committee for a further triennium from December 2023 to November 2026
- Patricia Bradbury (STO) to serve on Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee for a further triennium from December 2023 to November 2026
- Mina Tilt (HAL) to serve on Quaker Christmas Parcels Committee for a further triennium from December 2023 to November 2026
- Stephen Holt (WAR) to serve as a Priory Rooms Director for a further term from December 2023 to November 2027
- Barbara Groombridge (WAL) to serve on Communications Committee for a further triennium from November 2023 to October 2026
- Roderick Keefe (COT) to serve on Clerks' Advisory Committee for a further triennium from January 2024 to December 2027
- Sarah Evans (COT) to serve as Registering Officer for a further year from December 2023 to November 2024
- Claire Bowman (BOU) to attend the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR) conference, Working Together in Faith, in March 2024

These names being acceptable we appoint our Friends accordingly.

(b) Nominations Committee also suggests:

- Helen Waters completes the tabular statement as part of her office duties

This being acceptable we agree to this addition to Helen Waters' duties as Area Meeting Secretary.

(c) Release from service:

- Rosalie Rider (STO) as an elder and from Area Meeting nominations committee
- Stuart Masters (SEL) as an elder
- Claire Bowman (BOU) as a pastoral Friend
- Jill Stow (COT) from the Quaker Peace Education Project (Peacemakers)

We thank our Friends for their service.

2023.104 Area Meeting dates and venues in 2024

The dates and venues for Area Meeting in 2024 are as set out in the table below. Area Meeting Clerks are looking to organise additional devotional Area Meetings in February and December, when there is no business meeting, in response to the "What does love require of us?" Special Working Group recommendation that we find more opportunities to come together as a worshipping community.

Month	Day	Date	Time	LM host	Agenda items deadline
January	Saturday	27 th	1400-1700	BUL	9th
February	No business meeting but possible Meeting for Worship				
March	Wednesday	20th	1800-2100	HAL	5 th

April	Saturday	27 th	1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business	SUT	9 th
May	Wednesday	22 nd	1800-2100	SEL	7 th
June	Saturday	22 nd	1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business	COT	4 th
July*	Tuesday	16 th	1800-2100	WAR	2 nd
* We suggest that Local Meetings hold their business meetings on Sunday 30 th June					
August	Devotional + Fox@400	17 th	1400	HAR	N/A
September	Saturday	28 th	1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business	STO	10 th
October	Tuesday	22 nd	1800-2100	BOU	8 th
November	Saturday	23 rd	1000-1300 workshop 1400-1700 business	BUL	5 th
December	No business meeting but possible Meeting for Worship				

2023.105 Reflections on Quaker Week activities

The Area Meeting Clerks ask that Local Meetings prepare a short statement about their activities during Quaker Week 2023. What did the meeting organise? Was the intention to nurture the life of the meeting, be a form of outreach or both? How did you organise this? What was attendance like? What lessons did you learn from it?

This input will help to shape planning and preparations for Quaker Week 2024, which the Clerks would like to put on the agenda at Area Meeting in July 2024. Please submit your statement to the Central England Quaker office by Tuesday 5 March 2024.

2023.106 Thanks and next meetings

We thank Bull Street Friends for their warm welcome and hospitality today.

We hope to meet again, should nothing occur to prevent, on Saturday 27 January 2024 at 2pm at Bull Street Meeting House. Please submit agenda items via the Central England Quakers office by Tuesday 9 January 2024.

Signed in and on behalf of Central England Area Meeting

Rae Ritchie, clerk this time

Template letters for writing to MPs

Suggested text for email or letter to send to your MP. You must include your postal address at the beginning or end of the letter or email so they know you're a constituent. Text in red should be removed or replaced.

Imprisonment for Public Protection

Dear [full name]

Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP)

Last September, the UK parliament's Justice Committee found that IPP sentences cause 'profound psychological harm and mental torture'.

You may be aware that these indeterminate sentences were abolished in 2012. Yet I understand there are still nearly 3,000 people subject to their original IPP sentences, with no release date set. This is a shocking statistic when our prisons are full to capacity.

[Write something about your personal feelings or interest in this subject. For example "As a Quaker, I believe that all human beings are equal and deserve to be treated humanely." Or "As a Quaker Prison Chaplain, I have seen first-hand the impact of these sentences on people's mental health."]

Quakers have been at the forefront of penal reform since the early days of the faith in the 17th century saw many imprisoned for their beliefs. We count among our number the great prison reformer Elizabeth Fry and have campaigned for the total abolition of IPP sentences for many years.

Quakers in Britain have urged the government to re-sentence all remaining IPP prisoners and we are in communication with others, including Justice Secretary Alex Chalk, to establish how this might be achieved.

As my MP I ask you to push the government to resolve this cruel issue in line with the [recommendations](#) made by the Justice Committee in September 2022.

Yours sincerely / In Friendship

[Full name]

[Postal address]

Note: Numbers involved as of June 2023: 8,185 IPP prisoners overall; of which 1,312 have never been released and 1,597 are back in prison following recall.

Modern Day Slavery and Corporate Supply Chains

Dear [full name]

Modern Day Slavery and Corporate Supply Chains

I am writing to you on behalf of Members of [Local Meeting name] Quaker Meeting (of the Religious Society of Friends) to express concerns about the need for the UK to do more to counter modern day slavery.

Despite the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights article stating “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”, estimates suggest there are currently around 27 million people worldwide, including in the UK, in conditions of forced labour.

The 2015 Modern Slavery Act, with its Transparency in Supply Chains Clause requiring businesses with an annual global turnover above £36m to publish an annual Modern Slavery Statement, is welcome. However, to date its largely voluntary approach does not appear sufficient to drive the scale of needed change in corporate behaviour.

A legal duty for companies and other entities to conduct due diligence across their operations and supply chains, together with significant penalties for offences (e.g. along similar lines to some of the sanctions for tax evasion or bribery in the UK Criminal Finances Act 2017 and the Bribery Act 2010) is needed if the incidence of slavery in UK supply chains is to be further reduced significantly.

Without stronger controls on global supply chains, the UK may appear complicit in the on-going scandal of modern slavery. Therefore would you support introducing mandatory reporting with strong legal sanctions to ensure that there is no forced labour used by any company operating in the UK within their global supply chains?

Yours sincerely

[Full name]

[Postal address]