

## Chapter 4

# Area meetings and local meetings

## AREA MEETINGS

### **Constitution and functions**

- 4.01 Until 2007 area meetings were known as monthly meetings. The change was made to give more emphasis to the area meeting as a spiritual community rather than a regular event, and in the interests of accuracy because many monthly meetings no longer met monthly.

Monthly meetings were an important part of the gospel order established by George Fox, which played a large part in ensuring the survival of the young Society of Friends. From 1659 onwards monthly meetings were set up, first for men only, then for women and finally joint; they combined business with social ties, caring for the poor and prisoners, education and ministry. By 1676 they were the unit of authority for membership, marriages, property, records, the recognition of ministers (until 1924) and the recognition and laying down of local meetings; most of these functions continue today. So too does their formal responsibility, completed by 1789, for the appointment of elders and overseers.

- 4.02 The area meeting is the primary meeting for church affairs in Britain Yearly Meeting. Its role is to develop and maintain a community of Friends, a family of local meetings who gather for worship and spiritual enrichment. It should provide that balance between worship, mutual support, administration, learning, deliberation and social life which can make its meetings enjoyable occasions and build up the spiritual life of its members.

Area meetings act as facilitators and co-ordinators, ensuring that their constituent local meetings have access to opportunities for

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fellowship, spiritual development, and spiritual and pastoral care, including the care of children and young people. They also provide mutual support through the shared testing of concerns.

Area meetings also carry responsibilities for ensuring the right stewardship of local and area resources. Each area meeting is a separate charitable entity and it may be required to be registered as such with the relevant charity regulator (see 15.01). Area meetings which are registered or preparing for registration will operate under a formal governing document, which amongst other matters should set out the arrangements for trusteeship (see 15.03-15.05). A model document suitable for charitable registration is available from the Recording Clerk.

The area meeting consists of those who are by minute recorded as its members.

- 4.03 The organisation of area meetings will vary, depending on their size. Each area meeting should decide how to manage local business to suit local needs and resources.

Area meeting time can often be used more efficiently if detailed matters can be prepared in advance. However the whole meeting should deal with matters which are fundamental to its identity as a spiritual community.

Area meetings may wish to work with other meetings to carry out certain functions such as managing property (see for example 5.08). Not all area meetings will need to set up a complex committee structure. Meetings should bear in mind the importance of balancing the benefits of flexible patterns with the need to be accountable. Whatever business arrangements are adopted, it is helpful if they are regularly reviewed, to ensure that they are practical and workable. It is also important that certain specific responsibilities are considered carefully.

- 4.04 Each area meeting should appoint members to serve as:

a clerk and assistant clerk, or Friends to share these responsibilities;

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- a treasurer;
- a registering officer (see 16.10);
- a nominations committee;
- a body of trustees (see 15.03-15.05);
- a custodian of records or a committee for the purpose (see 4.39).

Meetings may when appropriate appoint a member of another area meeting, but in such cases advance consultation between the meetings is advisable, and the decision must be communicated by minute.

Area meetings are responsible for eldership and oversight and most will also appoint from their membership an appropriate number and distribution of elders and overseers (see 12.05-12.06 and the notification requirements in 12.09).

The Recording Clerk should be kept informed also of the names and addresses of clerks, clerks to trustees, treasurers and registering officers.

### 4.05 Other appointments which may be found helpful are:

- an additional assistant clerk to deal with membership matters;
- an assistant treasurer or finance committee;
- a children & young people's committee;
- an outreach committee;
- a warden(s) and premises committee, where the area meeting is the employing body (and see 13.39);
- Friends to advise on funerals (see 17.07, 17.08, 17.14).

Other appointments may also be helpful to the area meeting. In addition appointments will be needed to other bodies with which the area meeting has a relationship (see in particular 4.16, 4.17).

### 4.06 The meeting should also consider which matters are appropriately left to the discretion of elders, overseers, trustees or the clerks as appropriate.

It is important that detailed guidelines be drawn up for the officers appointed by the area meeting, so that those who undertake these

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tasks are fully aware of what is involved. Area meeting appointments should be made for a fixed period, generally not more than three years, after which they should be reviewed.

*See 3.22-3.25 Nominations and appointments*

- 4.07 Each area meeting shall meet at such frequency, times and places as the meeting itself may direct.

The clerk may arrange for a special area meeting to be held if necessary. Such a meeting must be arranged by the clerk if a written request from five members is received. As wide notice as possible of a special area meeting should be given in each constituent local meeting. Formal notice must be given at the close of each meeting for worship held on the previous Sunday.

- 4.08 The area meeting is open to all its members. Other Friends should notify their presence to the clerk before the meeting begins and, if drawn to speak, should be sensitive to the fact that it is not their area meeting (see also 11.27). Attenders may be present only with permission of the clerk, which should be sought well in advance of the day of meeting. It should be borne in mind that some matters, particularly membership, are confidential and cannot easily be discussed with non-members present.

- 4.09 Area meetings will from time to time have to consider minutes or papers from Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees or the standing committees through which they work. Other new area meeting business will normally come through a local meeting or through an area meeting committee or a representative of the area meeting on another body. It will usually be appropriate for an individual Friend with a concern to bring that concern to her or his own local meeting before approaching the area meeting. If the local meeting recognises the concern, it should forward a minute to the area meeting (see 13.09-13.18).

- 4.10 The area meeting shall keep the following matters under regular review:

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- a. the right and regular holding of meetings for worship in its constituent local meetings (4.33.a);
- b. the right ordering of meetings for church affairs within its constituent meetings (4.32);
- c. agreement with each constituent local meeting as to how responsibilities are to be fulfilled (4.34);
- d. the appointment and service of elders and overseers; the level and nature of pastoral care in the area meeting (12.06,12.16);
- e. the use of *Advices & queries* (1.05-1.07);
- f. the maintenance and revision of its official register of members (11.38) and its list of attenders and children not in membership associated with its several meetings for worship (11.39);
- g. the maintenance and revision of any published list of members, attenders and children not in membership (11.40);
- h. the preparation of the annual tabular statement, recording membership changes, marriages and deaths, which is to be forwarded to the Recording Clerk as early as possible in the following year (6.07, 11.37);
- i. the arrangements for forwarding notices of change of address (11.22-11.23) and certificates for transfer of membership (11.25-11.26);
- j. the proper custody of its records (4.39-4.45) including deeds (15.09);
- k. the care of trust property, including the appointment of trustees (15.03-15.04) and the right application of capital and income (15.07);
- l. the stewardship of financial resources and maintenance of accounts, including those of its committees and its constituent meetings, in accordance with the general rules set out in 14.20-14.23: they must be examined by an independent person (who must satisfy the conditions set out in 14.22) before the annual statement of accounts is considered by the meeting and, if approved, accepted;
- m. the provision of the relevant financial accounts and property records to the Quaker Stewardship Committee in order to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities (14.28) including annual certification to the Yearly Meeting;
- n. the advice to Friends on their outward affairs and the timely making and revision of their wills (4.22);

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- o. the supervision (16.11-16.21) and recording (16.51) of marriages according to our usage; the prompt forwarding to the Recording Clerk of the name of any newly appointed registering officer (16.10); any delegation to specific local meetings of responsibility for appointing meetings for worship for the solemnisation of marriage (16.27);
- p. the recording of deaths of members of the area meeting (11.41); the provision of advice on funerals (17.07); the appointment of Friends responsible for the arrangement of funerals (17.08); the production and revision of memoranda (17.15) to ensure that a sufficient number of Friends are familiar with the practical arrangements for funerals and memorial meetings in their area (17.14);
- q. the supervision and recording of burials (including the interment or scattering of ashes after cremation) in burial grounds belonging to the area meeting (15.17, 17.11-17.13); the supervision of the use of gravestones in its burial grounds (15.20); the care of burial grounds (15.10, 15.19);
- r. the maintenance and use of libraries in local meetings (13.41-13.42);
- s. the nomination, where appropriate, in England and Wales, of Quaker prison ministers, in accordance with 13.49-13.50;
- t. the relevance of new legislation to their activities and the compliance of their constituent meetings with the law: current concerns include matters as diverse as charity law, Criminal Records Bureau procedures for work with children, young people and vulnerable adults (4.14), data protection (4.45) and disabled access.

This list will doubtless change over time.

Area meetings will, according to particular circumstances, have other areas of responsibility (e.g. local homes for elderly people) and should always keep them under regular review.

*Reference should also be made to the following paragraphs concerning other responsibilities of area meetings: representation on Meeting for Sufferings (4.17, 7.05-7.07), on Quaker Life Representative Council (4.17, 8.13-8.14) and at the Annual Conference of Treasurers (14.16-14.17); attendance at Yearly Meeting (6.12); assistance in the amicable settlement of disputes (4.23); discernment in concern (13.05-13.07 & 13.09-13.18).*

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- 4.11 It is important that the area meeting give full and prayerful support to everyone who is appointed to serve it, whether on its own committees, or as a representative on another body, or in an individual capacity (see 3.25).

This is particularly important when the post to be filled involves heavy and perhaps lonely responsibility. The roles of registering officer (see chapter 16 *Quaker marriage procedure*) and Quaker prison minister (13.45-13.52), which both have specialist and legal aspects, are good examples, and Friends nominated should be fully aware of the responsibilities involved. Area meetings are encouraged to pay proper attention to the spiritual support and nurture of those who give what may be costly although often rewarding service. See 12.27 for advice on support groups.

### **Reorganisation: transfer of local meetings**

- 4.12 Some area meetings may consider that they are too large or too small, have geographical constraints or have insufficient resources to form a supportive and effective community. Area meetings are encouraged in these circumstances to propose changes which may result in a transfer of a local meeting from one area meeting to another, or amalgamation or division of area meetings. Any changes should stem from local needs. When area meetings are considering reorganisation it is recommended that they bear in mind the value of groupings which correspond to any relevant regional, ecumenical or other institutions. Any proposals for reorganisation shall, after agreement between the area meetings concerned, be presented to Meeting for Sufferings for endorsement. Area meetings should note that the consent of the relevant charity regulator may also be required.

### **Pastoral care and outreach**

- 4.13 Each area meeting is responsible for nurturing the spiritual life of its constituent meetings for worship and for the oversight, pastoral care and religious education of people of all ages. See also chapter 12 *Caring for one another*. It should consider regularly the opportunities available for local outreach and service.

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The potential contribution of meeting house wardens to outreach should be borne in mind, particularly when the rebuilding and reorganisation of meeting houses is being considered (see 13.34).

- 4.14 Area meetings need to consider, agree and regularly review their own meeting policy on the safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults, taking into account current relevant legislation, the requirements of their insurers, and current guidance on good practice from Quaker Life. Meetings are advised to have policies in place whether or not they currently have children, young people or vulnerable adults in their constituent local meetings.

### **Membership**

- 4.15 Area meetings are responsible for membership matters. They have the responsibility of admitting new members into the Society and of terminating membership, and the duty of keeping the appropriate records of membership. (See chapter 11 *Membership*.) They also have the authority to recognise local meetings as part of Britain Yearly Meeting (see 4.31).

### **Relationship to other meetings for church affairs**

- 4.16 An area meeting shall provide Britain Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings, and any general meeting or Quaker gathering (see 5.02) to which it belongs, with such nominations or information as may from time to time be required.
- 4.17 An area meeting is required to nominate Friends to serve on Meeting for Sufferings, the standing representative body of the whole yearly meeting (7.02). This is the main channel of communication between area meetings and Yearly Meeting, so area meeting business should give a high priority to preparation of its representatives and receiving reports from them. Another opportunity for regular involvement with the wider work of Britain Yearly Meeting is provided by the appointment of area meeting representatives to Quaker Life Representative Council (8.13). The terms of reference of these bodies

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and the duties of the area meeting representatives to provide an effective two-way channel of communication should be made clear to those being nominated. Conferences and other occasional gatherings which provide further opportunities for wider communication and fellowship will benefit from a wide representation from area meetings.

- 4.18 An area meeting may communicate formally by minute with its constituent local meetings, with any general meeting or Quaker gathering (5.02) to which it belongs (including the General Meeting for Scotland (5.03) or the Meeting of Friends in Wales (5.04-5.05) where appropriate), with Yearly Meeting (6.06.a, 6.25), with Meeting for Sufferings (7.02) and with meetings with which it does business through its representatives appointed to joint committees. The area meeting has an obligation to receive minutes from those bodies. There may occasionally be circumstances in which it will be helpful to circulate other minutes for information only.
- 4.19 In considering concerns which their members may bring before them, area meetings should exercise care to ensure that their own consideration is adequate and that in forwarding the matter to another meeting they are truly recognising a leading that the subject be considered further. Area meetings should also consider what action they themselves could take before forwarding the concern to another meeting. Area meetings must beware of evading their own responsibility for reaching a united judgment. This responsibility may involve consideration at more than one session of the area meeting. It is essential that before forwarding a concern the area meeting should consult at an early stage with the relevant standing committee or department (see 8.08-8.11 and 8.16-8.17) in order to find out what facts and experience can be offered to its consideration of a concern. (See 13.09-13.18.)
- 4.20 The relationship between area meetings, Meeting for Sufferings and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and committees is delicate and complex.

If there is sometimes tension in the relationships this is not necessarily unhealthy. It is unhealthy when a matter is shunted

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from one body to another because a group of Friends lack the spiritual energy and courage to wrestle with a matter which they know may result in uncomfortable plain speaking to a fellow member whose concern, however deeply held, is not shared by the meeting. It is equally unhealthy when any individual or meeting is preoccupied with status, with 'getting things through', with efforts to predetermine how another body shall act. We can only be delivered from these dangers by a constant relearning of the nature of true concern.

Meeting for Sufferings, 1978

### **Junior Yearly Meeting**

- 4.21 Area meetings have an important relationship with Junior Yearly Meeting, which is the largest national gathering of 16-18-year-old Friends within Britain Yearly Meeting. This gathering is arranged by Quaker Life (8.10) but is representative of, and its participants financed by, area meetings. Most young people have only one opportunity to participate. Being selected as an area meeting representative can be a formative and affirming experience, giving these young Friends an opportunity to meet others in their age group and to become more aware of their Quaker identity.

### **Advice on outward affairs**

- 4.22 Area meetings should periodically bring to the attention of members their responsibility for the right ordering of their outward affairs. Such advice on outward affairs has traditionally reminded Friends of the importance of keeping their financial affairs in good order, and of making and revising their wills in time of health. The proper acquisition and use of income, conduct in business and employment and the stewardship of money held for others have also been included, but area meetings need not feel themselves limited to these subjects. Area meetings also have discretion as to how they discharge this corporate responsibility for advising on individual conduct. Local traditions vary. Some include a regular reminder from overseers in a newsletter, while others address a special letter of counsel on

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outward affairs to all adult members. Whatever the method preferred, the purpose is the same: to remind members of the area meeting of the guidance to be found in our discipline on matters of honesty and integrity (see chapter 20) as they relate to the personal life of every Friend.

### Disputes among Friends

- 4.23 Area meetings are recommended to appoint a group of experienced and knowledgeable Friends who would be available to give general assistance in the amicable settlement of disputes. If help from outside the area meeting is needed, enquiry should be made of the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings who may suggest Friends qualified to give it. Techniques of problem-solving, mediation, counselling or meetings for clearness may be appropriate in particular instances where disputants wish to mitigate the consequences of confrontation. It should be borne in mind that Friends were among the pioneers of conflict resolution as a distinct activity and have constantly sought to promote reconciliation in the wider world.

*See also 10.21-10.24 Conflict within the meeting & 20.67-20.75 Conflict.*

### Legal action

- 4.24 Legal action by Friends, and in particular legal disputes between Friends, should if possible be avoided. However, there may arise differences which might best be resolved by obtaining a legal ruling or definition from a court of law. (See 20.67-20.75 *Conflict*.)

### Right of appeal against decisions

- 4.25 If a member is dissatisfied with a final decision of an area meeting affecting her or him (e.g. if membership has been terminated) and feels that the area meeting has acted unjustly, unreasonably, with insufficient knowledge or not in right ordering, the member may

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appeal in writing to the area meeting clerk. The nature of the appeal and name of the appellant should be kept confidential as far as possible or is desired by the appellant. The area meeting shall then appoint a small group of disinterested Friends to try to settle the matter (see 4.23). If this fails, the area meeting shall then ask a neighbouring area meeting or meetings to appoint a small group of disinterested elders, or one drawn from those exercising eldership, to act as an appeal group. The appeal group should meet with the appellant and representatives of the respondent area meeting and issue a judgement to that area meeting, as far as possible without breaking the confidentiality of the parties. The area meeting should accept the judgement of the appeal group, at which stage the decision should become as public as is needed for the matter to be acted upon.

If the appellant remains dissatisfied with the decision of the appeal group, he or she may then appeal to Meeting for Sufferings against the decision of the area meeting. On receiving such an appeal, the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings shall report this to the area meeting and shall request Meeting for Sufferings to appoint an appeal group of five Friends, who should be independent of the area meeting concerned, to make all such enquiries as seem to them desirable, from the member concerned and from others having relevant knowledge, to consider and determine whether or not the appeal should be allowed and whether any further recommendations should be made. In conducting such enquiries the healing power of worship will be helpful. The decision of the Friends so appointed shall be final and be communicated directly to the parties concerned. The appeal group shall inform Meeting for Sufferings that they have reached a decision and communicated it to the parties concerned, and Meeting for Sufferings shall record this in its minutes without breaking the confidentiality of the parties concerned. Guidelines for the conduct of an appeal group are obtainable from the Recording Clerk.

- 4.26 If an area meeting is dissatisfied with a final decision of another area meeting, which affects it, the dissatisfied area meeting may appeal to Meeting for Sufferings against such decision. The procedure on such an appeal shall be similar to that on an appeal by a member personally, but prior notice shall be given by the dissatisfied area

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meeting to the other area meeting concerned before invoking this appeal procedure.

#### Testimonies concerning deceased Friends

- 4.27 The possibility of writing a testimony concerning the life and service of a deceased Friend has been a valued part of our tradition. A testimony should not be a formal obituary or eulogy, but should record in thankfulness the power of divine grace in human life.
- 4.28 *Testimony concerning Hannah Brown (1711?-1779):*

The purpose of a testimony concerning our deceased, worthy Friends [is] intended as a memorial, that they have walked as children of the Light, and of the Day, and to excite those that remain to take diligent heed, and yield obedience to the teachings of the still small voice, that they may follow them as they followed Christ, the great captain of their salvation.

Hertford Monthly Meeting, 1780

- 4.29 It is the responsibility of the area meeting to arrange for the preparation of a testimony, but it is sometimes difficult to be clear during a session of area meeting whether a spontaneous request for one is in right ordering. It is suggested that local meetings should write a brief passage for their own records on every member who dies. The writing of a testimony by the area meeting should be undertaken on the recommendation of the local meeting or other group such as elders. If a spontaneous suggestion is made during area meeting, this should be referred to the local meeting or to a small group for advice. Meetings deciding to prepare a testimony, and particularly those Friends doing the drafting, are encouraged to consult the advice in the paper *Testimonies to the grace of God in lives - an enduring presence* available from the Recording Clerk. If the testimony is considered likely to be of benefit to a wider group of Friends or to the Society as a whole, it may be forwarded to the relevant general meeting or Quaker gathering or to Yearly Meeting (see 6.06.g & 6.25). This should not, however, be an automatic decision. Its value

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as an inspiration to other Friends is not dependent only on its relevance in a wider rather than a local context.

- 4.30 If a Friend belonged to several area meetings during her or his lifetime, it may be appropriate for more than one area meeting to contribute to a testimony. Any such meeting should feel free to take the initiative, but should be particularly sensitive to the need to consult beyond its own boundaries. The area meetings concerned should agree on which of them should take responsibility for producing the testimony.

It may be right in a few cases for more than one testimony to be written. One or more such testimonies may be from other yearly meetings, in cases where the Friend spent part of her or his life abroad.

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- 4.31 The area meeting may contain a variety of meetings for worship differing in size and practice. Any group of Friends may meet to worship at any time. The area meeting should encourage worshipping groups, as they evolve into regular meetings for worship, to adopt practical arrangements suited to their circumstances. The existence of a new local meeting or the laying down of an existing local meeting should be formally recognised by the area meeting and recorded by minute which should be sent to the Recording Clerk.
- 4.32 The membership of a local meeting consists of those on the area meeting list of members who are attached to that meeting. Meetings for church affairs should be held when most people can attend, non-members attending by permission of the clerk. Most meetings will encourage regular attenders at meeting for worship to participate in meetings for worship for church affairs on suitable occasions. Friends in membership of other meetings may be present, but should notify their presence to the clerk before the meeting begins, and, if drawn to speak, should be sensitive to the fact that it is not their own meeting. However, any Friends who have been accepted as

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sojourning members of the area meeting (11.28) are expected to share as fully as they are able in the life of their local meeting.

Local meetings are at all times subordinate to their area meeting.

Much helpful advice and experience in exercising the care of the worshipping community is found in chapter 10 *Belonging to a Quaker meeting* and in chapter 12 *Caring for one another*. All members should be familiar both with these parts of our discipline and with chapter 3 *General counsel on church affairs*.

- 4.33 Local meetings differ greatly in size. Thus the scope of work undertaken will vary but every local meeting will give due respect to Quaker values, testimonies and practice and will provide regular opportunities for public worship.

The following responsibilities need to be considered by all local meetings although some of them may best be fulfilled in conjunction with another local meeting, or through the area meeting.

- a. Make arrangements for the regular holding of public meetings for worship, which will normally be held at least once a week. Suitable premises will need to be arranged. If after careful thought, a local meeting wishes to meet less frequently then, with the agreement of its area meeting, it may do so but there should be meetings at least once each month; this should be reviewed each year. The area meeting must be kept informed of the days and times when meetings for worship are held.
- b. Use *Advices & queries* (1.05-1.07).
- c. Nurture and sustain the spiritual life of the meeting and the pastoral care of those associated with it; the welcoming of newcomers is of particular importance. Enquirers should be helped to explore and understand the Society.
- d. Take a special responsibility for the children within its care and for their parents. The continuing religious education of all, including regular attenders as well as members, should be of real concern to the meeting.
- e. Conduct all its own business and hold regular meetings for church affairs, which should be planned to involve all

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members of the meeting. These meetings should include preparation for area meeting business.

- f. Encourage, by appointment or otherwise, an attendance of local Friends at the area meeting (see 10.06); Friends should be encouraged to take a full part in the activities of their area meeting.
- g. Make sure that the financial needs of the meeting and the yearly meeting are properly understood by its members and that channels exist for giving in a convenient way. Accounts of any financial activities must be kept in accordance with the general rules set out in 14.20-14.23 and the guidance given by the area meeting; they must be examined by an independent person (who must satisfy the conditions set out in 14.22) before the annual statement of accounts is considered by the meeting and, if approved, accepted and reported to the area meeting.
- h. Prepare such statistics, returns and reports as are required.
- i. Preserve certain records (see 4.40).
- j. Monitor the relevance of new legislation to its activities, as advised by the area meeting (see 4.10.t).
- k. Consider local outreach; as a minimum the advertising of the times and places of meetings in the local press and arranging an entry in the telephone directory should be arranged in conjunction with the area meeting.
- l. Support other local meetings to carry out their responsibilities when requested and support the formation and nurture of new local worshipping groups and occasional meetings for worship.
- m. Appoint correspondents (see 8.15) to Quaker Peace & Social Witness and other bodies as appropriate.
- n. Maintain a library and encourage the reading of Quaker publications (see 13.41-13.42).
- o. Form links with other churches and faith communities in the area and where possible jointly undertake service in the community (see 9.14-9.20).
- p. Seek to exert a Christian influence in the neighbourhood both as a meeting and in co-operation with others.

4.34 Each local meeting should agree with its area meeting the duties and responsibilities which the local meeting undertakes on behalf of the area meeting. This agreement should be formally recorded as part of

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a memorandum of understanding. The local meeting should report regularly, as required, to its area meeting on the discharge of these responsibilities. In the case of smaller meetings which are not able to carry forward all the responsibilities listed above, the recorded agreement should make clear the work that they are able to do themselves and what is done in co-operation with another local meeting.

4.35 For a local meeting to carry out its duties and other activities, certain appointments will need to be made (see 3.22-3.25 *Nominations and appointments*). The meeting must at least appoint a clerk or convener and also a treasurer if it has any financial activities, or alternatively, Friends to share these responsibilities. The Recording Clerk should be informed of the names and addresses of the current holders of these offices in all local meetings.

4.36 Other appointments which may be found helpful are:

- an assistant clerk (3.12-3.20);
- a collector (13.44);
- a librarian (13.41);
- a nominations committee;
- a premises committee;
- a children's committee;
- a committee responsible for hospitality and domestic arrangements;
- doorkeepers;
- correspondents.

Whilst elders and overseers are appointed by the area meeting, much of their service will be within the framework of the local meeting (see 12.06).

Some meetings will have wardens or resident Friends (see 13.33-13.40). Our dealings with those we employ or who live on our premises need care and knowledge.

4.37 Local meetings should rely on their area meeting for the trusteeship, charitable accountability, and if necessary, charitable registration of

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their affairs, except in special circumstances which will require the agreement of the area meeting. (See 14.28, 14.30, 15.03.)

- 4.38 A very large local meeting may well unbalance an area meeting. Members of such a meeting will need to exercise considerable care with respect to what is local meeting and what is area meeting business. They will need to consider tenderly those in the smaller meetings who may feel distanced from some of the activities of the area meeting. Being too large a meeting can also cause problems within the meeting itself, with difficulties in pastoral care and in achieving a sense of community. Sometimes when a local meeting grows very large it may wish to consider starting a new meeting. Early consultation with the area meeting will be in order.

### RECORDS

- 4.39 Area and general meetings should appoint a Friend to act as a custodian of their records, or else appoint a committee for the purpose. Area meetings should take responsibility for the records of their constituent meetings, ensuring their timely transfer to the custodian of records. They are advised in particular to ensure that the records of any local meeting which has been laid down are collected together. The Library Committee of Quaker Life publishes guidance for clerks and custodians on the creation, care and custody of records (4.43).
- 4.40 It is advised that the following be preserved in Friends' ownership:
- a. minute books of yearly, general, area and local meetings;
  - b. minute books of elders and overseers and of standing committees of meetings for church affairs;
  - c. official registers of members (11.38), printed lists of members and attenders (11.40), marriage registers (16.45), registers of burials (17.12), burial ground plans (15.17), registers of properties and trusts (15.09);
  - d. such other documents as it is reasonable to expect may be needed for future reference.

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It is an essential part of the stewardship of the meeting's assets that the custodian should maintain a full catalogue of records and where they are located, whether kept in meeting house safes or strongrooms or elsewhere. It is advised that area meetings should check the accuracy and completeness of their catalogues at least triennially.

- 4.41 The attention of area and general meetings is drawn to the many advantages of depositing older records with an appropriate national or local record office or repository. Records not in current use should be deposited on loan. Such documents, deposited under suitable conditions, remain the property of the area or general meeting concerned, while benefiting from the care of professional archivists.
- 4.42 It is the responsibility of area meetings to decide which records shall be available to students, whether Friend or non-Friend, and to stipulate the conditions for their release. The Library at Friends House and many meetings make available records more than fifty years old, subject to exceptions where particular discretion is needed (e.g. overseers' minutes).
- 4.43 Meetings requiring advice or information on the handling of their records are encouraged to get in touch with the Library Committee through the Librarian at Friends House. The Library Committee maintains a central catalogue of local meeting records, and it should be notified of any change in the place where they are deposited.
- 4.44 Meetings have sometimes been approached by an outside body and offered the opportunity to put old records on microfilm. This may be primarily for the benefit of those making the offer. The area meeting is responsible for deciding whether it would also be of benefit to the meeting and is strongly advised to seek guidance from the Library Committee (4.43). The Library Committee should be kept informed of decisions made so that the relevant experience may be shared with other area meetings.

## DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- 4.45 Meetings storing information about their members and attenders on computers or other electronic devices or in manually processed paper files should be sensitive to the need to protect such information from unauthorised use and must comply with all legal requirements for data protection. Basic factual information on members such as addresses can be kept by the area meeting on the official register of members (11.38) without notification of those concerned. Such information may be passed to the yearly meeting database, except that members may then request that information other than their names be withheld.

Information on attenders and the non-member partners of members may only be held with their explicit consent. Information on children not in membership (11.39) may only be held with the explicit consent of their parent or guardian. Consent forms for inclusion in the area meeting lists should be drafted to enable such persons to opt for their information to be passed on to the yearly meeting database.

Friends should be made aware of the difficulty of maintaining perfect security of the printed lists made available to members and, frequently, to attenders, and should be given the opportunity of deleting some or all of their personal details (11.40).

If meetings record any other information on members and attenders, whether electronically or in paper-based records, for example in connection with nominations work or with applications for membership, the persons concerned must be informed that the information is held and that they may see and approve their own record.

Further advice can be obtained from the Recording Clerk (see also 8.06).