

Chapter 8

The centrally managed work of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain

INTRODUCTION

- 8.01 Britain Yearly Meeting in session is the body with ultimate authority for church affairs for Quakers in Britain (6.12). The term 'Britain Yearly Meeting' refers also to the combined membership of the seventy or so area meetings that make up the Religious Society of Friends in Britain and it is used as well in its governing document to refer to the work carried out centrally on behalf of the membership. This work is overseen by committees with membership drawn from Friends throughout Britain. Whilst much of the work of the yearly meeting takes place at general, area or local meeting level, some work is more appropriately organised centrally, and it is that which is described in this chapter.

In the governing document for the centrally held and managed policy, property, employment and work adopted by Yearly Meeting, the charitable object of Britain Yearly Meeting is 'the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain and beyond'. The full governing document and explanatory notes are obtainable on application to the Recording Clerk.

- 8.02 There are four aspects to the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting:
- a. organising and maintaining the whole of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain as responsive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit; this entails calling, briefing and running decision-making meetings with all the facilities necessary for them to work efficiently and effectively, and also conducting

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- relations with other churches and faiths and ecumenical bodies;
- b. supporting Friends in their local organisation, by providing services and advice relevant to the current demands of the Quaker community: for example such work may relate to children, elderly people, those getting married, those looking after meeting houses, and those raising funds;
- c. raising awareness and developing understanding about the basic tenets of Quaker faith and practice, such as spirituality, peace and human rights, within and without the Religious Society of Friends in Britain;
- d. putting Quaker thinking into practice in relation to the problems and needs of people at home and abroad: for example through training, conferences, work with those in positions of power, and social and development projects.

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

- 8.03 Yearly Meeting appoints trustees to act on its behalf as managing trustees of the work, assets and property held directly by Britain Yearly Meeting.

The Trustees are responsible to the Yearly Meeting for the right stewardship of its work, assets and property; as charity trustees, they are also legally defined as responsible for the general control and management of the administration of the affairs of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Although the Trustees have powers and responsibilities set out in the Britain Yearly Meeting governing document, these are grounded in terms of service. Trustees have a duty to account to the outside world for the conduct of their trust. Gathered meetings, both of the Trustees and of other bodies, provide the religious discernment that guides our actions in the world. Trustees recognise and listen carefully to the discernment of Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings and their committees and ensure that it is followed, within legal and financial constraints.

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Trustees undertake, on behalf of Yearly Meeting, legal compliance, monitoring and scrutiny functions. They also ensure that the centrally managed work is being properly governed and managed in accordance with the religious and charitable objects of Britain Yearly Meeting (see 8.01), set out in the governing document approved by Yearly Meeting and available on application to the Recording Clerk. They oversee the work of the Management Meeting (8.21) and are the employers of Britain Yearly Meeting staff (8.05).

In order to achieve this, the Trustees approve annually an operational plan and budget for the forthcoming year. They also approve the *Trustees' annual report & accounts* for the past year, which is presented for information to Meeting for Sufferings before submission to Yearly Meeting and to the charity regulators in due course.

The membership, responsibilities and duties of the Trustees are set out in detail in terms of reference to be approved and revised from time to time by Yearly Meeting. A copy is available on application to the Recording Clerk.

The Trustees are appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of the Central Nominations Committee (6.21.i) as set out in the Trustees' terms of reference. In making nominations for service as trustees, the Central Nominations Committee ensures that the Friends approached are aware of the legal responsibilities of trustees and of the legal position on eligibility (see 15.04). The clerk and assistant clerk are appointed by Yearly Meeting on the nomination of the Committee on Clerks (6.19.c).

Yearly Meeting also entrusts to the Trustees the organisation and periodic revision of the structure of the standing committees which oversee particular areas of the centrally managed work. However, it reserves to itself decisions affecting the existence and basic functions of the Trustees, and of Quaker Life Central Committee (8.10) and Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee (8.11).

The Trustees must report to Yearly Meeting any changes in the structure of standing committees through which they work (7.02); in such cases, any amendments to our church government reflect decisions already taken, and it is for Yearly Meeting in session to

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decide whether the proposed textual changes to our book of discipline accurately describe the new structure.

- 8.04 The centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting (see chapters 6 and 7) is in large part carried out by several committees responsible to Yearly Meeting through the Trustees. Although these committees are responsible to the Yearly Meeting through the Trustees, for practical reasons they are appointed by Meeting for Sufferings acting on behalf of Yearly Meeting.

These committees are of two main types: standing committees, which are established for an unlimited duration, and ad hoc committees, which may be set up for a specific purpose as occasion requires and are usually expected to complete their task by a set date. (See also 6.17 & 6.28.)

The Trustees may delegate any of their powers to a committee which includes two or more of the Trustees.

Most of the work of Britain Yearly Meeting is undertaken by standing committees, including the four central committees (8.08-8.11) which are responsible for particular areas of work. All standing committees work to terms of reference approved by the Trustees and are accountable to them. The Trustees are accountable to Yearly Meeting and the charity regulators, as described in 8.03. (Committees appointed in whole or in part by Yearly Meeting in session are described in chapter 6.)

Standing committees may delegate certain work to functional committees and other subsidiary bodies, such as programme management groups. Standing committees are responsible for appointing all such subsidiary bodies, determining their respective terms of reference and membership within the overall guidance on nominations (3.23-3.25 & 7.07).

The Trustees and the standing committees may communicate by minute with Meeting for Sufferings and Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee, and with each other. Whilst standing committees may also communicate by minute with General Meeting for Scotland, the Meeting of Friends in Wales and area meetings on matters furthering

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their purposes, they should ensure that this is done in co-ordination with Trustees and other standing committees, liaising as required.

Employment of staff

- 8.05 The Trustees employ staff in order to service the centrally managed work. Most are based at Friends House in London. The staff provide many of the resources and much of the expertise required to carry out Britain Yearly Meeting's work effectively in a manner consistent with Friends' testimonies and beliefs. Much preparatory, on-going and follow-up work falls to the staff, and they need the full support of all Friends.

The Trustees ensure that staff working for Britain Yearly Meeting and committee members are treated fairly and do not experience unjust discrimination. Staff and committee members should strive to 'answer that of God in everyone' by working as a community which fosters a spirit of toleration and mutual concern for each other. In carrying out the work of Britain Yearly Meeting, respect for truth and integrity should be paramount so that high ethical standards are maintained.

The Recording Clerk

- 8.06 The Recording Clerk acts as secretary to Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings and the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and is responsible for servicing these bodies and for ensuring that their work is carried out. As the senior member of staff employed by the Trustees, the Recording Clerk's main tasks include maintaining contact with meetings throughout the yearly meeting, leading the Management Meeting (8.21), being line manager of the general secretaries and certain senior staff, acting as 'keeper and interpreter' of the regulations laid down in our church government, and representing Britain Yearly Meeting to, and fostering good relations with, outside bodies.

The office of Recording Clerk has widened considerably since it was first established in about 1657. In those early days, the role was

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largely concerned with the sufferings of Friends, and up to 1703 included serving the Yearly Meeting as clerk. In more recent times, oversight of the management of the departments has become an important function of the Recording Clerk.

The Recording Clerk serves, for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998, as Data Compliance Officer and is responsible for ensuring that the recording and processing of data held by the Yearly Meeting conforms with the law (4.45).

Participation of staff in meetings of the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees

- 8.07 Members of the Management Meeting (8.21) and other staff attending meetings of the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees are not trustees of the centrally managed work and are not responsible for the decisions of the meeting. They are present in order to be able to provide the meeting with information about their work, and in order for them to be able to interpret and carry out the Trustees' decisions more effectively. Friends' understanding of the Quaker business method is that God may speak through anyone present.

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It is unlikely that the work of the central committees, as described here, will remain unchanged for the next generation. The existence and basic functions of Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness may not be altered except with the approval of Yearly Meeting (8.03) but the more detailed outline of the work of the committees described below may change more frequently according to the emphasis given by Meeting for Sufferings, the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the central committees.

Quaker Communications Central Committee

- 8.08 Quaker Communications Central Committee exists to support and strengthen local meetings and Quakers in Britain as a whole. It does this by helping to promote a dialogue through which the purposes

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and programmes of Britain Yearly Meeting's work are developed. It seeks to secure financial and other support to enable Quaker testimonies to be demonstrated in the world; the strength of our religious society rests on the quality of our shared understanding and the degree to which we are prepared in discussion, voluntary action and financial contribution to commit our support to common purposes. It is accountable to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees.

Quaker Communications works to increase and monitor income from meetings, Friends, other individuals and grant giving bodies, in the form of contributions, legacies and grants. It uses its marketing expertise to contribute to the effective planning of income-earning activities, including publishing and conference provision. It sponsors work on legacy development (14.09-14.10) and, on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting, it makes proposals to appropriate bodies who might wish to provide grant aid to support approved initiatives. The committee oversees the arrangements for the Annual Conference of Treasurers (see 14.16-14.17) and provides services including the annual schedule (14.08) to assist local treasurers and collectors.

Quaker Communications works to improve information sharing amongst Friends. Its services include providing printed and audio-visual materials and exhibition materials, applying information technology, and arranging conferences, study visits and gatherings. It also liaises with the press and electronic media on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting.

Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee

- 8.09 Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee is accountable to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees for the effective stewardship of finance and property for Britain Yearly Meeting's work. Its financial service involves responsibility to the Trustees for the Yearly Meeting Funds (see 14.12-14.15) and any associated funds, administration of the Meeting Houses Funds (15.15), receipt and oversight of any special funds given to Britain Yearly Meeting, and advice on financial and investment policy. The clerk of the committee (7.08) is appointed directly by Meeting for Sufferings and has a role as Yearly

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Meeting Treasurer in relation to the centrally managed work as a whole.

The committee is responsible to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees for preparing the accounts of the yearly meeting (8.03) and its associated funds (see also chapter 14 *Finance*). It also advises the Trustees on financial resource planning, for which it prepares forecasts and guidelines. Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee is responsible to the Trustees for the management of the property owned and used by Britain Yearly Meeting and provides advice to local meetings.

For Friends Trusts Limited see 8.18 and 15.02.

Quaker Life Central Committee

- 8.10 Quaker Life Central Committee works with Friends in their meetings and with other local and national committees to help deepen experience of God's grace and its consequent expression in all our lives and in our meetings. It seeks to nurture the worshipping community of Quakers in Britain, developing it into an inclusive community.

Its purpose is to strengthen and sustain the fabric of Quaker life by offering programmes and opportunities that will empower Friends, individually and in their meetings, to deepen their spiritual lives and attract new people to their meetings. The committee carries out its work by support, training, developing skills, and sharing experience and good practice. It uses local and regional networks, publications and other communications, and the opportunities available through co-operation within the Christian church and with other faith groups.

The three main areas for which Quaker Life Central Committee is accountable to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees are: spiritual development, religious learning and pastoral care; support for the right holding of meetings for worship and for church affairs; membership matters and outreach. The committee works closely

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with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, and through Charney Manor and Swarthmoor Hall, in many of these areas.

The committee works together with and for those taking special responsibilities such as clerks, wardens, librarians, registering officers, elders and overseers. It also supports those involved with nominations, work with children and young people, relations with other churches and outreach to those who may be interested in Quakers in Britain.

As part of its work with young people, the committee is responsible for the holding of Junior Yearly Meeting (4.21).

The Library Committee is a functional committee of Quaker Life Central Committee but may report directly to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees when appropriate.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee

- 8.11 Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee works for Britain Yearly Meeting to translate our faith into action. As Quakers we are impelled by our faith to make our lives an active witness for peace and justice. Our historic testimonies to equality, justice, peace, simplicity and truth challenge us to alleviate suffering and seek positive social change.

The committee aims to ensure that its work is clearly rooted in Quaker values, expresses Quaker testimonies and builds upon Quaker experience. It works to build the daily experiences and spiritual leadings of Friends in their meetings into our corporate work. With this foundation the committee seeks to support Friends individually in their lives, jointly in their meetings and in Britain Yearly Meeting, to witness on behalf of Quakers in the world. Our work should be primarily directed to areas where our Quaker witness can be best done corporately and where it has a particular contribution to make.

The committee is responsible to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees for promoting a committed and rigorous social and political

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engagement for the building of a just and peaceful world. The committee tries to address the causes of violence, locally, nationally and globally, by engaging in nonviolent peacemaking in areas affected by armed conflict, working for a culture of peace and justice based on nonviolent change. It works towards a society where diversity is appreciated and all people can fulfil their potential for fullness of life in harmony with others. It promotes social justice, the reduction of prejudice and the equal treatment of all people, and works against unjust systems. The committee also seeks to promote changes that will help us to live responsibly and in harmony with all life and the Earth itself.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee works with individual Friends and meetings to make available advice, education and information as Friends seek to respond to their leadings.

The committee engages in dialogue locally, nationally, internationally and globally, to witness to Quaker values and testimonies; and to express the views of Quakers in Britain to governments, intergovernmental bodies and other political institutions. The committee seeks to promote truthfulness, integrity, openness and accountability in social and political institutions. Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee works with other Quaker bodies nationally and internationally to share experience and expertise. It works with ecumenical and interfaith groups, and with other churches and faiths at home and abroad, to advance shared concerns.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee seeks to express corporately our experience that the Holy Spirit moves people to serve and learn from their fellow human beings and to promote peace and social justice.

Constitutions of central committees

- 8.12 Within the limits set out in 7.03, each central committee is accountable to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees for formulating and presenting policy for its area of work in accordance with the long term framework approved by Meeting for Sufferings. They

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determine priorities for, monitor, and evaluate the work within their departments' areas of responsibility. Each central committee is also responsible for:

establishing functional committees and working groups as required and reviewing their work (8.04);
establishing an effective nominations committee, working closely with the Central Nominations Committee (6.21) as appropriate;
keeping the Trustees (and through them, Meeting for Sufferings) informed about significant matters arising from its area of responsibility;
considering any matters that Meeting for Sufferings or the Trustees refer to it, either by consulting with an appropriate representative council, if relevant, or through urgent attention and action. (See also 8.21.)

Quaker Communications, Quaker Finance & Property, Quaker Life and Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committees work to terms of reference approved by the Trustees. Copies of all terms of reference may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk. There are normally between ten and twenty members serving on each committee, appointed on a rolling triennial basis, with any re-appointment subject to a maximum service of three consecutive terms.

Representative councils

- 8.13 Quaker Life Central Committee has a representative council which provides a two-way channel of communication with Friends in their meetings, the main purposes being educational, inspirational and consultative.

The Annual Conference of Treasurers (14.16-14.17) acts in a similar way to a representative council in relation to Quaker Communications and Quaker Finance & Property Central Committees.

The role of the representative council member is also one of co-ordination and communication, in order to enhance links between

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local meetings, area meetings and the central committee. As detailed discussion of policy and review of working practices are often carried out by central committees in the light of feedback obtained by the representative councils, the role of council members is vital. They should:

- a. attend (or arrange for their deputy to attend) each meeting of the representative council – area meetings will pay participation fees and reasonable travel expenses;
- b. bring to the council news of activities or needs at local level in order to keep the central work relevant and appropriate, contributing to the discernment of priorities;
- c. keep their local meetings informed about the breadth and depth of work undertaken centrally and in so doing support the fundraising effort necessary to sustain this work;
- d. be in touch with any local members of the central committee;
- e. make regular reports to area meetings, whether in full session or in special interest groups or through written reports and newsletters.

8.14 Representative council membership comprises:

- a. the appointed representative, or appointed deputy, of each area meeting within Britain Yearly Meeting;
- b. two representatives of Young Friends General Meeting;
- c. the members of the central committee;
- d. the clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting and the clerk of Meeting for Sufferings ex officio;
- e. up to ten co-opted members.

The membership is reviewed triennially.

The Quaker Peace & Social Witness meeting correspondents

8.15 Local meeting correspondents (4.33.m) receive and distribute news of the work of Britain Yearly Meeting by keeping in touch with Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee. It is equally important that correspondents send local news to Friends and

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others elsewhere through these central channels: communication is a two-way process.

Correspondents will receive regular mailings. Quaker Communications will provide advice on how to select and present relevant information effectively. The correspondent should agree a working method with the local meeting clerk.

The local meeting clerk or convener should send the name of the correspondent, upon appointment, to Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee.

OTHER STANDING COMMITTEES

Other standing committees of Meeting for Sufferings are indicated below. Terms of reference for each may be obtained on application to the Recording Clerk.

Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations

- 8.16 Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations is responsible for keeping Quakers in Britain informed of the various movements towards co-operation within the Christian church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue. Its work and constitution are described in 9.13.

Quaker World Relations Committee

- 8.17 Quaker World Relations Committee maintains contact with other yearly meetings and with Friends World Committee for Consultation and its Europe & Middle East Section to which Britain Yearly Meeting is affiliated. Its work and constitution are described in 9.06.

BODIES WHOSE TRUSTEES ARE APPOINTED DIRECTLY BY MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS

Friends Trusts Limited

- 8.18 Friends Trusts Limited is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee which acts as custodian trustee of property and investments held on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting and the area meetings of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain and its component parts. Its work and constitution are described in 15.02.

Quaker Housing Trust Limited

- 8.19 Quaker Housing Trust Limited was formed in 1967 in response to Friends' concern about the provision of adequate and appropriate housing. The trust makes grants and loans, and offers advice to charitable organisations providing accommodation, particularly to vulnerable people. Independent of the Britain Yearly Meeting Funds, it is a channel whereby Friends may give or lend money for such provision. It is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.

Quaker Housing Trust Limited has between seven and twelve trustees appointed for terms of three years by Meeting for Sufferings, names having been submitted by the Central Nominations Committee, to form its council of management.

THE WORK OF COMMITTEES AND STAFF

- 8.20 It is the role of the standing committees, particularly the central committees, to use their leadings and discernment to advise the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings on policies and priorities for their work. In so doing they should draw

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on the experience, knowledge and concerns of area meetings and where appropriate, representative councils so that local Friends are involved in the process.

Committees need to be aware of the different roles they may play in responding to items on their agendas. Central committees determine policies and priorities for their areas of responsibility within the limits described in 7.03. Their role is to determine the work to be done and ensure that it is manageable without attempting to do it themselves. Those who carry out the work may be functional committees, working groups, volunteers or staff, or combinations of these. Central committees primarily delegate work to staff, whose responsibility is to undertake the work under the co-ordination of the Management Meeting. Other standing committees, functional committees, ad hoc committees and working groups may do more of their own work without much direct staff involvement. Committees that do undertake work themselves need to ensure it is done in partnership with staff, who have the responsibility to co-ordinate its management.

The close working partnership between staff and committee members brings a wide range of talents and experience to bear on our work. Committee members need to remain free of routine administrative tasks if they are to have the time to exercise their important decision-making functions. However, committee members also need to be aware of how their decisions might affect, unsettle or fulfil the staff members involved. In turn, members of staff have to be aware of the delicate tension of being in a position of knowledge and ensuring that their committees benefit from their experience and preparation whilst being left in a position to make consequent decisions freely.

The Management Meeting

- 8.21 The Management Meeting is responsible for co-ordinating the management and overseeing the implementation of the work of Britain Yearly Meeting. It is accountable to the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees, whom it advises on practical and technical aspects of the work and to whom it reports regularly and submits its

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minutes. The Management Meeting is responsible for the cohesion and consistency of the management of the centrally managed work, through the co-ordination of the work of individual managers, working to the vision and policies discerned by Meeting for Sufferings and following the operational plan agreed by the Trustees.

The meeting is composed of the Recording Clerk and other members of the senior staff designated by the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees on the recommendation of the Recording Clerk. It meets as required under the leadership of the Recording Clerk (8.06). Members are collectively responsible for all its decisions, acting for Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole as well as the particular area for which they are responsible.

CONCLUSION

- 8.22 Each committee and department has arisen and developed in response to a particular need. Each generation of Friends has been faced with a structure in some respects untidy, and we may be thankful for the clear-minded among us who help us, from time to time, to set our house in better order. But order without life does not work and our continual task is to ensure that our structures are in harmony with the changing tides of life in Britain Yearly Meeting.

It is neither possible nor desirable for every Friend to take a detailed interest in the work of every committee. We are, however, called to a broad sympathy with, and understanding of, the extent of the work entrusted to the committees under the guidance of Meeting for Sufferings in the name of the whole yearly meeting.

- 8.23 The committees whose work has been described were all set up to carry through what Yearly Meeting or Meeting for Sufferings has considered important service which Friends should undertake. It is imperative, therefore, if they are to continue to be sensitive to the concern of the yearly meeting, that there shall be a living and two-way communication between them and local meetings. It is sometimes complained that committees issue statements or initiate policies and work of which local meetings remain largely ignorant or see as some far-distant event, little affecting them. If the complaint

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is even in part justified, what remedy is open to us? First, let us set our minds to see the committees not as some distant 'they' with documents emanating from an impersonal 'Friends House'. It is we who compose the committees and the document we dislike was, like as not, drafted by Friends in meetings not far from our own.

People are usually preferable to paper, though admittedly some Friends are more effective than others in transmitting experience in a concise and lively way. Friends accepting service on committees, whether by local nomination or not, might usefully share with their area meeting the interests and concerns which are claiming their committee's attention. And, since many Friends are diffident to a fault, clerks might seek them out, looking not to mere reporting but to the sensitive sharing of experience.

If committees are to be responsive to changing concern, they must be aware of local judgment, which in turn must be based upon knowledge. It is essential, therefore, that meetings should from time to time review the effectiveness of the ways in which they keep themselves informed of the activities of committees.

Our committees do not live to themselves. Their appointment by and reporting through the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to Yearly Meeting or Meeting for Sufferings reflect their responsibility. As the representatives of area meetings on Meeting for Sufferings attempt a disciplined understanding of the total work and witness of the yearly meeting, so the individual pieces of work of different committees will be seen in a right perspective.