

Annual Treasurers' Conference - Swanwick

17 – 19 June 2016

Central England Quakers' approach to Finance Administration

Central England Quakers – the largest Area Meeting in Britain – is made up of 18 individual Local Meetings, 9 “Branches” (projects or committees with bank accounts) and around 20 centrally-managed funds.

Each Local Meeting and Branch has a Treasurer and an Examiner.

CEQ Finances are managed centrally by a team of volunteer Treasurers, each responsible for a central (AM) fund or other aspect of AM financial administration. This team forms the central “Trustees Finance Committee” and the Clerk to the Committee carries the title of Area Meeting Treasurer, though in practice this role is shared across the team members.

In 2008, due to the ever-increasing administration burden placed on the volunteer central Treasurer team, a decision was made to engage the services of an independent qualified management accountant, Roger Freeman, as Finance Administrator (FA), paid at an agreed hourly rate. The FA is an ex-officio member of the Trustees Finance Committee, and attends committee meetings (approximately 5 per year).

In 2012 Roger Freeman retired, and the current FA, Wendy Wolfendale, was appointed (on the same, self-employed, basis). Some time after her appointment Wendy moved away from the Midlands to Wales, and we have demonstrated that it is perfectly feasible for a FA to work remotely, communicating via email and post, with only occasional face-to-face contact (e.g. for Finance Committee meetings).

The role undertaken by the FA has grown over the years, but currently includes responsibility for:-

- Day to day transactions, payment of invoices, (some) banking, book-keeping
- Preparation of quarterly management accounts for central AM funds
- Annual (year-end) consolidation – in CEQ's case this involves over 40 individual funds, with highly complex “intra-CEQ” transfers that have to be balanced and eliminated in the consolidation.
- VAT returns
- Salary administration, payroll and pensions (there are some 25 CEQ employees working for Branches or as wardens/meeting house managers/cleaners for Local Meetings)
- Liaison with the auditor re year-end accounts, including all data transfer
- Ad-hoc consultancy for Local Meetings/Branches regarding the development of local accounting systems or preparation of year-end accounts, and in a few cases examination of accounts. *Note that this consultancy work is recharged by Trustees to the LMs/Branches concerned.*

In addition to performing these defined tasks the FA has contributed significantly to the streamlining of internal systems, and improvements to the quality and reliability of reporting. One example is the ongoing development of year-end “proforma” reporting packs and templates for LMs/Branches, and associated guidance notes, which have been improved considerably over the last 4 years.

A further benefit to the Area Meeting is that the FA has a unique “overview” of CEQ financial systems and funds, and can provide back up to the Treasurer team when individual members are absent.

Care has been taken to provide effective line-management, and to avoid the difficulties associated with working for a team of volunteers – e.g. providing clear and consistent instructions, and trying to avoid major workload peaks and troughs.

The role currently requires an average of ca. 2 days per week. In 2015 the breakdown of hours was:-

General administration:	270	(43%)
Consolidation	170	(27%)
Payroll administration	121	(19%)
LM/Branch support	<u>71</u>	(11%)
Total	632	

Conclusions: having access to external expertise (and a reduction in volunteer workload of around 2 days per week) has benefitted both the CEQ central team and the officers of the Local Meetings and Branches. Treasurers feel less pressured to undertake the year-end procedures alone. One or two Local Meetings have elected to hand over the year-end SOFA preparation to the Finance Administrator and thereby retain or appoint a Treasurer who is uncomfortable with this “technical” element of the role. Quarterly Management Accounts for the central funds, which were first introduced when a FA was appointed, have assisted greatly with the planning and management of the AM finances.

Feedback from the FA – personal experience: *Wendy reports “speaking as a Company Accountant who has headed up teams of accounts staff in multi-million turnover companies, been heavily involved in turn-around projects and also set up and run my own business with a team of staff and a 6 figure turnover, I can honestly say that working with CEQ has been a **refreshing and interesting challenge**.”*

There have been some changes in my role over the 4 years I have worked with CEQ, but these have not been unwelcome. I feel I hold a valued position within the organisation, and that my opinions are given due consideration.

The workload can be sporadic and most especially with regard to the consolidation process, quarter ends and monthly salary payments. But this is manageable. It is not a Monday to Friday role, 9 to 5, but I think most people working from home accept this anyway.

I have learnt a great deal and the experience has given, and is giving, me the opportunity to use my years of experience in a new way, and I have relished all the challenges”.

Wendy Wolfendale can be contacted on: wendy@foxwood.biz

James Bradbury, CEQ Trustee & Property Treasurer, June 2016