

Britain Yearly Meeting Committee Handbook

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Introduction

Welcome

This handbook is for anyone serving or about to serve on any of the national committees that are responsible for the centrally managed work of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). Whatever your background, this handbook should have something to offer. We hope it will be an aid to understanding how the central work operates, a source of reference, and a tool for solving problems. It assumes that you are already familiar with the fundamentals of Quaker business meetings and practice at a local level and as described in *Quaker faith & practice* chapters 3 and 13.

Our national structures are the means by which we discern and test the concerns of the Society in Britain and carry out the practical work that flows from these concerns. For the system to function well everyone involved needs a high level of trust, cooperation and understanding. Through this enterprise we strive to be faithful to our corporate understanding of the will of God. The partnership between committees and staff is like a highly structured, respectful, purposeful and effective conversation. The principles and conventions of this have evolved through successive generations of nominating and appointing committees and employing staff.

We have not attempted to set out the philosophy or theology that underpins the governance of the central work. Chapter 2, 'The broad role and function of committees', gives an indication of spiritual and community elements that are the bedrock of successful national committee work. Chapter 3, 'Governance', sketches the structure within which all committees operate and the responsibilities of each.

Here you will find material on the general principles involved in serving on national committees and on good practice. There is not comprehensive coverage of all operational procedures. However, there is a considerable amount of detail in some cases where there are specific and focused policies (for example, whistleblowing or expenses claims), or where previous users have said that they particularly valued more detailed advice.

We suggest that, initially, you quickly review the whole of the handbook. This will give you an idea of its scope and layout and an indication of the chapters that are most relevant to your particular service and interests.

In all cases where the handbook does not provide the information or inspiration that you need, whether the issue be great or small, please ask your committee secretary or clerk.

This handbook is also available on the web, in large print and other accessible formats. All references to *Quaker faith & practice* (Qf&p) are to the fifth edition, published in December 2013 and since updated online at qfp.quaker.org.uk. The handbook and further resources referred to in the text are available online at www.quaker.org.uk/committees. If you are unable to access them online, please ask your committee secretary to assist you.

We hope you enjoy your service on central committees and that this handbook, in some small measure, supports you in this.

Chapter 1

Being a member of a national committee

“Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Isaac Penington, 1667
Quaker faith & practice 10.01

1.1 Being a new member

Your committee will have an induction process for all new members. This will help you find out about the work, your fellow committee members and the staff involved. Paperwork should include, at the minimum, committee terms of reference, relevant minutes, ‘gold’ papers (including policy papers), accounts of current and recent projects, committee members’ contact list and biographies, Friends House staff contacts, *Our faith in the future*, and the current Operational Plan.

Your committee may have its own website with access to relevant documents and discussion areas (QGroups). If so, you should receive log-in details for this.

If you have questions about any of this material, ask. Rather than keep troubling the clerk, many committees ask seasoned members to act as mentors to new members.

Get to know your responsibilities, whether these are for work, staff or property. Ask the clerk if occasions can be arranged for you to see them at first hand.

Don’t expect to be up to speed on all aspects of your responsibilities at once. Discuss with the clerk if you think you need training to make your service more effective. Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) runs a course each year on equipping for service on BYM committees. For specific skills, it may be possible to arrange training with another provider in the voluntary and charity sector.

1.2 Playing a full part

Prepare thoroughly for the meeting. You should receive the paperwork in good time; let the clerk know if this does not happen. Set aside time to go through it thoroughly, allowing sufficient time before the meeting to follow up anything that isn’t clear with the clerk, fellow members or staff as appropriate. Don’t be afraid that this is wasting their time – it’s wasting everyone’s time if you are not fully prepared. Allow time for prayer.

Bring your whole self to the meeting, both your experience as a local Friend and your own work and life experience. A wide range of views and experience is valuable. Committee members will have opinions and should express them. Through testing these opinions together, God’s way forward for us will become clear. Be aware of any personal agenda you have in relation to the work, and ensure it does not hinder your discernment. (See 5.2 for conflict of interest.)

Take your share of responsibility for the conduct of the meeting. Members need to adopt the agenda and then assist the clerk to carry it through efficiently. Bear in mind *Advices & queries* 13 on vocal ministry, which applies equally to vocal ministry in committees. Uphold the clerk during minute-writing. (See 6.6.5 for standing aside from the minute.)

Be courageous when taking decisions. It is no benefit to the yearly meeting if its committees duck or

fudge difficult decisions. Any group of people tends to have a built-in conservatism, so be alert to this and help the committee over the hurdle of inaction. Check to ensure that the minute communicates the decision clearly and firmly to those who may not have heard the preceding discussion but need to carry it out.

Take your share of responsibility for the atmosphere in which the committee works. Committees do not usually appoint overseers. If members consciously practise their oversight skills, a committee's work improves. These might include: asking others to uphold the clerk during minute-writing; suggesting a period of worship when things go awry; taking care of someone who is upset; volunteering to mentor new members; spotting and suggesting appropriate uses for the skills of fellow members; giving spoken ministry during the opening and closing periods of silent worship. Expect to stay for the whole meeting.

There may be times when you are unable to attend a meeting physically. An alternative to consider is remote conferencing, where you can connect to the meeting over the internet using Skype. This will require an internet connection and a webcam or headset. It may be possible to borrow equipment such as a headset. If you need this, please ask your committee secretary. If you are unsure of how to operate the equipment, try to find a member of your meeting who might be willing to show you on their equipment.

If you are unable to attend the meeting, let the clerk know in good time. You may raise points in writing if you wish, though accepting of course that you will not be there for the discernment process. It is understandable that Friends may be unable to attend the occasional meeting, but you should obviously aim to attend most. If you are not able to do so, you should discuss your reasons with the clerk. It may be that you will need to reconsider your membership of the committee.

1.3 Committee life between meetings

Much of a committee's work takes place between meetings, in subcommittees or working groups. This work needs to be shared fairly, but consider your workload carefully: it is in no one's interests for you to over-commit.

Friends need to be alert to advances in technology and to consider their appropriate use within our business method. Email has proved its usefulness for taking rapid soundings of opinion; when combined with recording text changes it can facilitate detailed working on a paper. However, it cannot and should not replace decisions made in a gathered meeting for worship. Friends need to come to an understanding of how a particular committee will use email, so as not to exclude those who either are without it or prefer to limit its use. Some committees or working groups use telephone conferencing on occasion to save having to meet: this can be very useful but should not normally take place before members have met and got to know one another.

New online facilities will be available as technology changes and you should be informed of the facilities your committee uses, e.g. QGroups.

1.4 Being alert to possible problems

Your service on your committee should be enjoyable and fulfilling. Speak up, to the clerk in the first instance, if you are finding it stressful or are unsure about your service.

The clerk is responsible for preparing the agenda. This can be an important tool in determining a committee's way of working. You may feel that significant areas of work are not being adequately addressed. It is your responsibility to mention the problem and, if possible, suggest a remedy. Chapter 6 provides further information on the role of the clerk.

Like any group, a Quaker committee can fall prey to stereotyping. Some members may make more palatable contributions than others. Some may habitually take on a more cautious role, and so on. It is

important to resist such stereotyping both in oneself and in one's reactions to fellow members. Elders, if appointed, may have more time than a hard-pressed clerk to engage with members about maximising their effectiveness.

There are several models for the relationship between staff and committees within BYM's central work. None of them are fool-proof. See chapter 4 for more on this crucial aspect of a committee's work.

1.5 Being as outward-facing as possible

Take the opportunity of your service to tell local Friends about the work of your committee and its place in BYM's work programme. Committee members are a vital link in the communication chain between local Friends and the centrally managed work. As a committee member, you become an ambassador for the work, not only locally in your meeting and its area meeting, but also to other committees who may not always appreciate what your committee does. Be clear in your mind about the level of confidentiality appropriate for your committee's work. There are likely to be different degrees of confidentiality. Personnel and budgetary matters require complete confidentiality, while some minutes need to go to a parent body before they are made public.

Friends keen to communicate about their work, digitally or in print, should discuss this with the relevant staff outside of committee time. Committees should refer to the Communications Strategy before making specific communications requests.

1.5.1 Speaking out in the world

Friends are encouraged to express their Quaker faith, values and work when opportunities arise. While contact with all forms of media is welcomed, proper preparation is vital. Well considered messages and clarity about whose behalf you are speaking on will maximise the opportunity and avoid pitfalls. Friends are asked to familiarise themselves with *Speaking out as Quakers: advice for meetings* and to seek professional advice from the BYM Advocacy & Public Relationships staff team.

1.6 Claiming expenses

Please claim the expenses you incur in attending your committee meetings and carrying out its work. Your claims should include expenses for any work that you do on behalf of the committee other than when it is in session. Please claim the costs of telephoning, photocopying, postage, travel, etc. BYM needs to have a realistic idea of what its committee structure costs, for planning and monitoring. You normally claim expenses in arrears because it is then clear what the actual expenditure has been. However, this practice can cause cash flow problems. If this is a difficulty for you, please ask your committee secretary to arrange for an advance payment to cover the expenses you are likely to incur.

Outside normal committee meetings, please agree expenses in advance with the clerk and secretary. This might include training you wish to receive, or visits to other bodies and events. If another committee or event invites you to represent your committee, the inviting body normally pays expenses. Send the claim to them unless the inviting body has made it clear that it is a paying event.

With your committee papers, you will receive a claim form for your expenses. If you receive papers by email, the claim form will be available at the meeting or by email from the secretary. We will ask for your bank details at the beginning of your service and pay expenses by bank transfer. If you don't have a bank account please ask your committee secretary how to proceed. Our auditors require expenses claims to have receipts attached. Please try to do this on every occasion. There will be some instances when it is not possible to get a receipt, but these should be the exception.

If you feel strongly that you wish to give back all or part of the expenses you claim to the Society, please do that as a separate donation. If you are able to Gift Aid the donation, BYM ends up better off. Please send donations to the Quaker Communication & Services Department at Friends House (or through your

committee secretary). You may also send them through your local meeting if that is where your Gift Aid declaration lies. For centrally managed work, make cheques out to Britain Yearly Meeting.

1.7 Planning travel and accommodation

Our responsibility for the environment is a major concern for the Society in Britain. In planning how you travel to carry out your committee work, consider the environmental impact. But a balance has to be struck. Occasionally a less environmentally friendly way of travel may be the only realistic option. BYM does not wish to exclude from service those for whom air travel is the only practical way of being on a committee.

You should also consider the cost of the arrangements you make. Booking train tickets in advance can often save money, as can careful choice of any required overnight accommodation. Money saved on expenses means more money to spend on the work of your committee.

Avoid disadvantaging yourself or your committee by the travel and accommodation choices you make. For instance, saving money by travelling on an overnight coach is not helpful if you are then too tired to take a full part in your committee. If you have to stay overnight to be at the committee in good time the next morning, please do so. Remember that having to travel on a particular train can be problematic if a meeting overruns.

If you use your own transport you can claim for cycle, motorcycle and car travel. The current rates are available from your committee secretary.

1.8 Concluding your service

Most committees now have rolling periods of service, which means that each year some Friends will cease to serve. Although this is a regular occurrence, it still needs to be noted.

As a retiring committee member, you should reflect on the things you have learned. Pass on to the clerk things that may help the committee's future work and the induction of new members. This may take the form of an 'exit' interview with the clerk. Conversely, it may be helpful to discuss what you have learned and what skills you have developed. This is especially so if this has been your first experience of belonging to a national committee, or if you are still building your working career. There may be useful additions to your CV, and you could ask your clerk to act as a future referee.

Consider how other colleagues retiring from the committee may give further service, perhaps on another committee. Encourage Friends whom you feel may have further service to offer on a national committee to fill in a Quaker service information form (QSIF).

Expect to suffer withdrawal symptoms when you give up regular contact with work that means a lot to you and with which you have been closely involved. Make appropriate preparations to fill the gap or else to continue your involvement through other means.

1.9 Further information and references

The following documents are available online at www.quaker.org.uk/committees or from your committee secretary:

1. *Our faith in the future*
2. Britain Yearly Meeting Communications Strategy
3. *Speaking out as Quakers: advice for meetings*
4. Guidance on public statements – Qf&p 3.27 and 3.28 (revised paragraphs are online at qfp.quaker.org.uk)
5. Quaker service information form (QSIF).

Chapter 2

The broad role and function of committees

“We are a small church with the pretensions to change the world. But first we have to let God change us – to empower us to be better Friends, and more active in our own work. We should not be creating structures to work for us, but empowering each other to do the work laid on each of us. However we plan... the Spirit is unchanging and will always lead us... All is interconnected, worship with action, wisdom with love.”

Meeting for Sufferings, 1992
Quaker faith & practice 29.02

2.1 Quaker committees at Britain Yearly Meeting level

Beyond the practical details of their names and areas of work, Quaker faith & practice (Qf&p) has remarkably little to say about Quaker committees at Britain Yearly Meeting level. All the good advice in chapter 3 on meetings for church affairs applies to these committees just as well as to area and local meetings. What little else there is concentrates on the danger of over-commitment:

“...an excess of religious and social busyness... a round of committees and conferences and journeyings...” (Caroline Graveson, *Qf&p* 21.22)

“...pulled and hauled breathlessly along by an over-burdened programme of good committees and good undertakings.” (Thomas Kelly, *Qf&p* 20.36)

The subliminal message is, perhaps, that service on Quaker committees at Britain Yearly Meeting level is not for all.

If so, this handbook needs to reverse such an impression. Quaker committees are places where, for a period, each Friend has the exciting chance to shape, manage and evaluate those aspects of Quaker faith in action in which we ourselves are most knowledgeable or about which we feel particularly strongly, learning from and informing others. Better still, we have a chance to work with others, both fellow committee members and staff, who share our commitment. We hope the handbook captures this sense of excitement.

2.2 Worship

Worship at a committee meeting is different from public worship. It is more focused, more habitual – many would say more enjoyable. Time formally set aside for worship varies according to the committee and its manner of meeting, but more is definitely better. Most committees find that shortening periods of worship, to give more time to the business, is counter-productive.

Worship at the start of a meeting offers a valuable opportunity to hold in mind those prevented from attending. At the end it allows us to turn minds outward to supporting the work agreed for the future. Worship during business can be particularly helpful if the committee is having difficulty finding its way.

Committees should consider whether they wish to appoint elders. Practice currently varies. Worship is such an important part of a committee's life that it may be helpful if some Friends take particular responsibility for it. Elders can also relieve the clerk and staff member of responsibility for practical arrangements. (For a possible role for overseers, see 1.2.)

2.3 Discernment in an organisational context

The core work of a committee is discernment: should a piece of work be taken up?; what proportion of resources should be allocated to it?; is it achieving its aims and objectives?; and at what point should it be laid down? This requires the same skills as Friends will have developed in their local and area meetings for church affairs. (See *Quaker faith & practice* chapters 3 and 13 for general advice.)

A successful process of discernment is likely to involve a balance of expertise and groundedness. A committee needs to try to hold the whole picture in its mind: what is the need the work is trying to meet?; have possible partners been consulted?; what are the administrative, financial, and legal implications? You may be one of the Friends providing the answers; you may be one of the Friends asking the questions. Don't worry. The committee as a whole is doing its work.

It is also essential to understand the organisational context of BYM in which any committee reaches its decisions. Friends have not, perhaps, studied this aspect of the process of decision-making as well as the process of discernment itself. A 2006 report, 'Making decisions in Meeting for Sufferings', identified four areas where problems can arise:

Structural issues: Where the relationships and accountability between central committees, BYM Trustees, Meeting for Sufferings and other committees are not well understood. It can sometimes be unclear which committee is actually responsible for taking a decision. Terms of reference for committees should make clear the extent of each committee's responsibilities. How far has a parent committee, Trustees or Sufferings delegated powers? At what point must the committee refer matters on? The committee should communicate required changes to the body responsible for it. This may be BYM Trustees, Yearly Meeting or the appointing body. (See also the diagram on the centre pages of this handbook.)

Process issues: Agreeing on the agenda is an important preliminary to any Quaker business meeting. The order of the agenda items can contribute to effective decision-making. The content and structure of the agenda is the responsibility of the meeting, and a proposed agenda should never be rubber-stamped. The allocation of time to an important issue can affect the outcome, and limited time may lead to a decision being taken by default.

Quaker business method: Our business meetings are meetings for worship for business affairs in which our contributions are ministry. We agree our minutes as a true record, and all present unite with the agreed minute. Failure to adhere truly to this perspective can result in difficulties. We must acknowledge the corporate nature of our minute-writing. The responsibility for the clarity and lack of ambiguity of our minutes rests with us all. We must never use ambiguity to mask dissent or express feigned unity, especially where we forward the minute to other committees for action or further discernment.

Provision of information: The quality of advice and the efficiency and accuracy of information-flow are all important for ensuring a smooth and productive flow of effectively discerned decisions throughout the yearly meeting. Information presented on the day of a decision should not be too dense for assimilation within the time available, or too lacking in detail for effective consideration.

When a parent committee receives a recommendation from a subcommittee or working group, it is sometimes suggested that it should not re-do the work by engaging in its own exercise of discernment. Yet, without the opportunity for exercising its own discernment, how could a Quaker committee come to a decision at all?

The Quaker business method specifies that decisions cannot be taken if agreement cannot be reached.

Many decisions, though, are time-specific, and failure to reach a decision still means that a decision has been taken by default. Friends need to be alert to this when drawing up and agreeing agendas.

2.4 The committee's common life

In the ongoing life of a committee, its history is important. This is because to have a shared history is to have a common memory and a corporate identity. Many of our committees have a strong sense of historical achievement and shared life, some going back to the earliest days of the Society.

Try to ensure that your committee has ways of accessing its own history. This may be through its 'gold' minutes (key reference minutes and papers, previously printed on gold paper), its past publications, or through keeping a network of past members who are available to help with its wider work. In times of discouragement, be ready to remind the committee of its past achievements.

Most committees find that residential meetings are a cost-effective way to build up their common life. People can relax better when freed from travel constraints. Consider setting aside a time in each meeting when Friends can share and listen to each other and catch up with each others' lives.

2.5 The committee and the yearly meeting

However discerning, decisive and historic your committee, it is but a part of the wider yearly meeting. Make sure you understand how your committee's work fits into the whole. Stay alert to the yearly meeting's changing priorities, as indicated in *Our faith in the future* and interpreted by BYM Trustees in the Operational Plan.

The yearly meeting is trying to effect a shift of emphasis in its central work. Instead of staff, supported by committees, undertaking work on behalf of Friends, the aim is to achieve a balance between work done with and work done on behalf of Friends locally, with support from staff as appropriate. Finding the right balance at any given time will entail a shift in the ways of working for national committees, in ways we cannot yet fully anticipate.

A committee does not own its own work, and there may well come a time when the yearly meeting decides to take it back, or continue it in some other form. Be ready to let go.

2.6 Further information and references

The following documents are available online at www.quaker.org.uk/committees or from your committee secretary:

1. *Our faith in the future*
2. Britain Yearly Meeting Operational Plan
3. *Quakers in Britain: a short guide to our structures*
4. Directory of services (also available from your meeting library).
5. *Making good decisions* (appendix 2 of 'Making decisions in Meeting for Sufferings: a report by the Meeting for Sufferings Committee Working Group on the Decision-Making Process of Meeting for Sufferings, 2006').

Also available from your committee secretary:

6. Your committee's terms of reference
7. Your committee's 'gold' papers: ask for these if you aren't given them.

Chapter 3

Governance

3.1 Introduction

The structure and pattern of relationships that we use to link together all elements of our work can be described as our governance. If what we do as Quakers is to be holistic rather than fragmented, then these structures and relationships need to work efficiently and effectively.

The governance arrangements that we have made to test our concerns, to generate our policies and to oversee and manage our business and resources are an attempt to reflect our current understanding of the original organisational insights of the Society. These were based on the experience of a people “gathered, guided and ordered by God”. What we have now is ‘gospel order’: the pattern of governance for our Society where we are all accountable both to God and to each other (see 3.10). In some areas we are also accountable to secular regulators, such as the Charity Commission and Companies House.

It will help you to be an effective committee member if you have a general understanding of the broad context of governance in which you are working. It is not necessary to have a detailed knowledge. If you are encountering our central and national structures for the first time, they can appear complex and daunting. The trick is not to feel that you necessarily have to understand everything all at once.

Our governance arrangements have four essentially interrelated parts:

Yearly Meeting and its committees

Meeting for Sufferings

Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and the central and other standing committees

Management Meeting.

3.2 Yearly Meeting

Yearly Meeting in session is the final constitutional authority for our Society in England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. All Quaker committees are ultimately responsible to Yearly Meeting, although the line by which the accountability is held will vary.

Yearly Meeting appoints a number of bodies and committees directly. The most important in terms of the centrally managed work are Meeting for Sufferings and Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees. These two bodies are dealt with separately below.

Of the directly appointed committees, some are active solely or mainly while Yearly Meeting is in session and they are not listed here. Some committees appointed by Yearly Meeting work throughout the year.

Agenda Committee works closely with Meeting for Sufferings, Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees and with standing and other committees. It is responsible for deciding the agenda for Yearly Meeting and for preparing for and promoting the right holding of that event. It also works with the planning groups for residential gatherings, which report to it.

Committee on Clerks is responsible for nominating the clerks and assistant clerks of Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings, BYM Trustees, and the BYM Treasurer.

Central Nominations Committee is responsible for bringing forward the names of Friends to serve for most of the appointments made by Yearly Meeting and by Meeting for Sufferings.

Quaker Stewardship Committee supports local and area meetings in their stewardship of finance and property, advises on charitable status, and is charged with certifying to Yearly Meeting in session that every part of Britain Yearly Meeting is producing proper financial accounts and property records.

3.3 Meeting for Sufferings

“Yearly Meeting delegates to Meeting for Sufferings... in the intervals between Yearly Meetings, deliberation, discernment and the oversight of our corporate religious life” (*Qf&p* 6.28). Its key function in respect of central work is that it is “a crucible for sharing and testing all the witness that is going on throughout the Yearly Meeting and a bridge between local meetings and central work” (from minute 20 of Yearly Meeting 2006).

The work of Meeting for Sufferings is informed by minutes from area meetings and advice from central and other standing committees. It discerns the major and long-term priorities for the Society in Britain as a whole. Its discernment is embodied in a long-term framework. The framework sets the policy directions for Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees to follow. The current framework is the document *Our faith in the future*, adopted by Meeting for Sufferings in September 2015.

Meeting for Sufferings has its own handbook, which gives detailed information about its work and procedures.

3.4 Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees (BYM Trustees)

Britain Yearly Meeting is a charity registered with the Charity Commission and as such is obliged to have trustees. For practical purposes the number is normally small, in BYM’s case 12 to 15. All trustees are members of the Society and are appointed by Yearly Meeting within the normal triennial terms of service. The trustees are legally responsible for the centrally held and managed policies, property, employment and work of Britain Yearly Meeting. As guardians of the assets of the yearly meeting they are responsible for ensuring that they are properly used for the religious and charitable purposes for which they have been given. Trustees also have overall responsibility for the financial probity of the conduct of the business of Britain Yearly Meeting, including appropriate systems of control, financial and otherwise. The composition, powers, responsibilities of, and constraints on, BYM Trustees as defined by charity law are set out in BYM’s governing document. As well as containing required governance practices common to secular charities, it also recognises our decision-making processes as described in *Quaker faith & practice*.

Each year BYM Trustees, advised by the central and other standing committees and by Management Meeting, adopt an Operational Plan and budget. This determines how the priorities for the work of the long-term framework, including that of the Trustees themselves, will be carried out within the central resources available. In this respect, the Trustees have a responsibility to plan ahead, assessing future risks and having measures in place to minimise their potential impact. Trustees regularly inform Meeting for Sufferings of the work they are undertaking and consult on major issues, especially on important questions of principle, and have regard for its guidance. They carry the final responsibility in law, however, for the direction, efficiency, effectiveness and legality of the centrally managed work. It is important to note that Trustees could be personally liable for what the law would regard as misuse of the charity’s assets. (For further details see *Qf&p* 6.28, 7.03 and 8.16–8.19.)

Yearly Meeting in session and Meeting for Sufferings discern the work to be done. The Trustees serve the yearly meeting by ensuring that resources for this work are both available and efficiently applied for. They oversee the operational side of the yearly meeting’s activities, ensure that sufficient income is generated, plan for the future, clarify and rationalise the linkages and accountability between the work of committees at different levels and across the yearly meeting. Given this role, it is inevitable that at times they may use a business-oriented language. But this should not disguise the spiritual discernment and consciousness of our Quaker traditions. This lies behind the stewardship functions of those Friends who carry this responsibility.

3.5 Management Meeting

Management Meeting comprises the senior staff of Britain Yearly Meeting under the leadership of the Recording Clerk. It is accountable to BYM Trustees, whom it advises on technical and practical aspects of the work and to whom it reports regularly. It is informed by the vision discerned by Meeting for Sufferings and follows the Operational Plan. It is responsible for the coordination, management and implementation of all the work BYM Trustees and its committees decide should be carried out centrally. It provides the expert, professional and technical support that the yearly meeting's governance structure requires in order for it to operate.

3.6 The Recording Clerk

The Recording Clerk acts as secretary to Yearly Meeting, Meeting for Sufferings (through the Deputy Recording Clerk), BYM Trustees and certain other groups. The Recording Clerk 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 has a number of main tasks. They maintain contact with meetings throughout the yearly meeting. They act as “keeper and interpreter” of the regulations laid down in our church government. They represent Britain Yearly Meeting to, and foster good relations with, outside bodies. They lead Management Meeting and act as line manager of the senior staff.

3.7 Standing, including central, committees

Linked and essential to these four elements of governance are the standing committees. Standing committees are those set up for an unlimited duration to carry out specific elements of the centrally managed work. They are responsible to BYM Trustees on behalf of Yearly Meeting. Each standing committee has its own terms of reference that set out its exact function and the limits of its responsibility. Keeping these terms of reference up to date is the responsibility of BYM Trustees.

Two of the standing committees are designated as central committees. Central committees are responsible for formulating and presenting policy for their specialist areas of work in accordance with *Our faith in the future*. They determine priorities for the work, monitor and evaluate its effectiveness, and report regularly to BYM Trustees. All of the standing and central and other standing committees also have an active and strong relationship with Meeting for Sufferings, consulting and advising on issues of major interest.

The standing committees (including the central committees) are listed below with a brief note of their function:

- **Quaker Life Central Committee** works to deepen the experience of God's grace and its consequent expression in our lives and in all our meetings, and to enlarge the worshipping Quaker community in Britain.
- **Quaker Peace & Social Witness Central Committee** promotes and undertakes action for peace and social justice in line with our testimonies.
- **Quaker Committee for Christian & Interfaith Relations** is responsible for keeping Quakers in Britain informed of the various movements towards cooperation within the Christian Church and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.
- **Quaker World Relations Committee** acts as the main link with other yearly meetings and other Friends' groupings worldwide, particularly Friends World Committee for Consultation and its Europe & Middle East Section.

The committees listed here from time to time set up **functional committees, subcommittees, networks, or working groups** to carry out specific areas of work or to undertake particular projects.

3.8 Finance and budgeting

The overall responsibility for financial probity in relation to centrally managed work and resources, and for setting realistic budgets, belongs to BYM Trustees. They are advised in this responsibility by Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee (comprising two trustees and five other Friends) and by the General Secretary of the Quaker Finance & Property Department. Based on information from the central committees, any decisions from Yearly Meeting, and guided by the long-term framework agreed by Meeting for Sufferings, staff produce a draft annual operational plan and budget for the year ahead for the central work. This is examined by Quaker Finance & Property Central Committee, along with multi-year financial projections, and, if agreed, the budget is then recommended to BYM Trustees for approval. It is then presented to Meeting for Sufferings for information. BYM Trustees also take account of longer-term issues and likely future needs in their stewardship of the yearly meeting's physical and financial assets.

Each committee is required to ensure that it works within its allocated budget, and Trustees receive regular updates throughout each year of expenditure against budget, and of the pattern of incoming resources.

3.8.1 Friends House (London) Hospitality Ltd

It is common for large charities to set up a wholly owned subsidiary trading company to deal with non-primary purpose trading. Oxfam has its bookshops, for example. Friends House (London) Hospitality Ltd is a trading subsidiary of Britain Yearly Meeting. It manages the maintenance of Friends House and the hiring of rooms, and runs the Quaker Centre and the Restaurant. It pays rent and other charges for the use of the assets of BYM and donates its profits, net of any working capital withheld, as Gift Aid to the parent charity. The Directors are members of the Society, two of whom are Trustees, and all are appointed by BYM Trustees. The company is responsible for the marketing of Friends House for those times when the premises are not in use by Quakers. It also has responsibility for the management of Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria. Its annual report is presented to BYM Trustees.

3.9 Communication

Key to the successful working of our governance is the building of effective communication between the various groups engaged in our central work. All communication, formal and informal, that will build trust and understanding is to be welcomed. All the committees involved in the central work are encouraged to work cooperatively where that is relevant, and to account appropriately for the work they are carrying out. Committees communicate formally by minute. Minutes are often helpfully accompanied by a supporting report or background information. The clerks of central and standing committees, of BYM Trustees, of Meeting for Sufferings and of Yearly Meeting meet regularly to share news, discuss issues arising, and plan agendas.

3.10 Further information and references

The following documents are available online at www.quaker.org.uk/committees or from your committee secretary:

1. *Our faith in the future*
2. *Quakers in Britain: a short guide to our structures*
3. Governing document of Britain Yearly Meeting
4. *Quaker faith & practice* gives more detail on the governance of Britain Yearly Meeting. Ensure you use the fifth edition and check the online version (at qfp.quaker.org.uk) for any subsequent amendments:

Yearly Meeting: chapter 6

Meeting for Sufferings: chapter 7

BYM Trustees and central and other standing committees: chapters 8 and 9

Quaker Stewardship Committee: 14.36–14.42.

A diagram representing the relationships of the various committees making up the structure of governance for the central work can be found on the following page of this handbook.

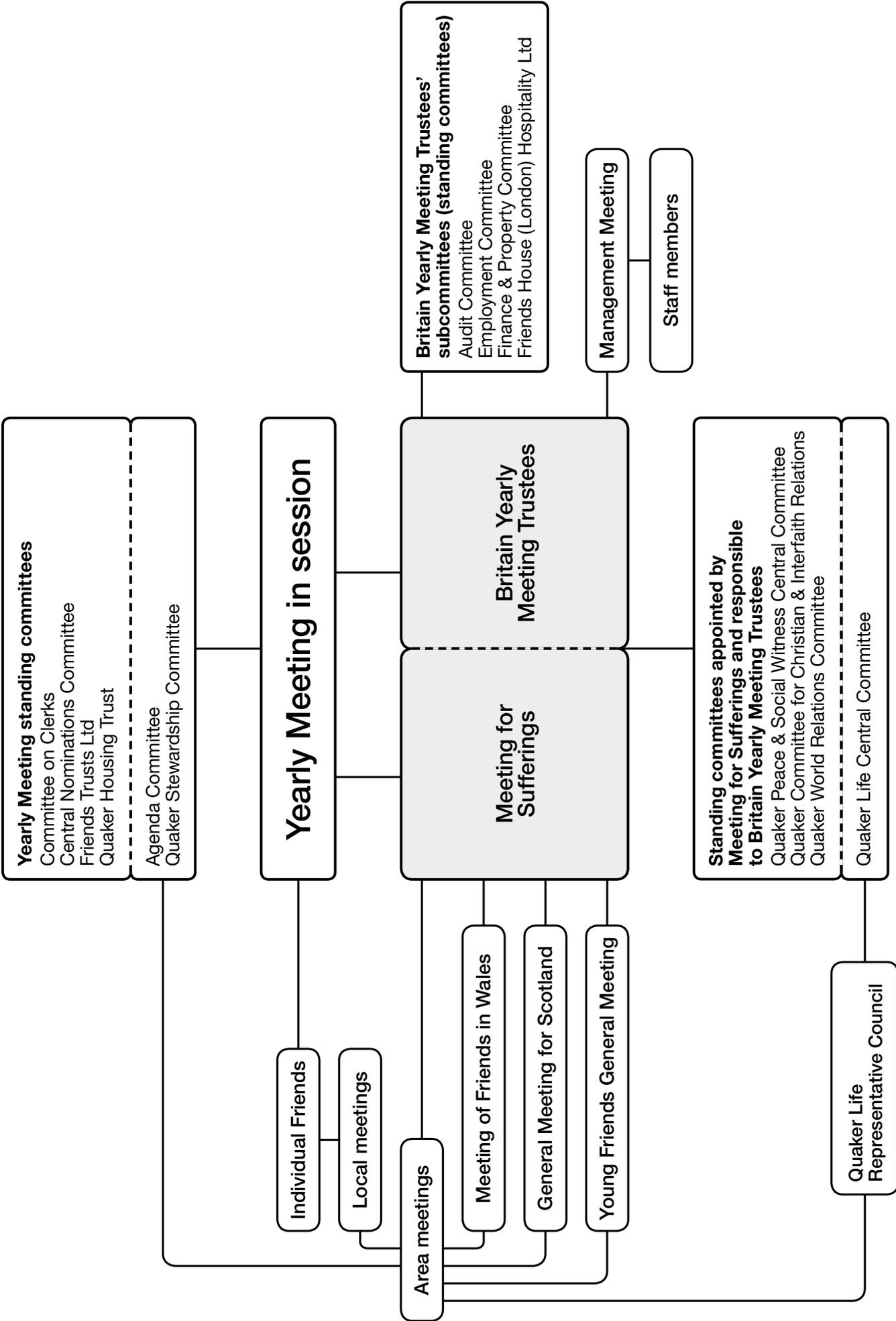
5. For more on gospel order see the following:

Quaker faith & practice – the introduction to chapter 19 and 19.49–19.58

Bleeke, Annis (2002) 'Gospel Order' in *Documents in advance of Britain Yearly Meeting 2002*

Cronk, Sandra (1991) *Gospel Order: A Quaker understanding of faithful church community*.

Pendle Hill Pamphlet 297. Wallingford (PA): Pendle Hill. Available from the Quaker Centre Bookshop at Friends House, London.



Chapter 4

The relationship between committees and staff

“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 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 leaving committees in a position to make consequent decisions freely.”

Quaker faith & practice 8.22

4.1 Introduction

Each committee has its own distinctive culture, formed by its history, its current task and the character of its members. This culture in turn shapes the way in which staff relate to it. There is no single ‘correct’ model for the interaction of committee and staff. In some cases, committee members themselves undertake most of the work, with a staff member providing appropriate support. In others, the committee will set priorities that the staff member implements. In others again, the committee may relate to a large number of staff in a variety of ways and for different purposes.

As committees differ, so the roles, experience and gifts of the staff who relate to them likewise differ one from another. Some staff may have served a committee for many years and through many phases of its life and will have an ‘institutional memory’ that stretches back over time. Others will be less experienced. Some will interact only occasionally with the committee while others will be the primary staff contact. Some will be members of the Society. Others will have been drawn to work for Britain Yearly Meeting through sympathy with our values or the quality of our work.

The relationship may be described as a highly structured and respectful conversation, the character and conventions of which have evolved through successive generations of nominating and appointing committees and employing of staff. This ‘conversation’ has developed in and been affected by the development of Quakerism itself, and by changes in employment and voluntary service in wider society. Although committees can expect high standards of professionalism and appropriate accountability from staff, what characterises the relationship is that same passion for the work that draws Friends into committee service and others to work for the Society.

What is needed between committees and staff across the central work of Britain Yearly Meeting is a commitment to build sound working relationships that operate most effectively when each partner, clerk and secretary, committee member and staff member, is clear about their roles and has trust and confidence in the other. It is to help foster that effectiveness and mutual trust that this section of the handbook sets out some of the things that committee members can expect of staff.

4.2 Welcoming new members

It is the secretary’s responsibility to introduce a new member to the life of the department. Newly appointed members should have an early opportunity to meet the staff who undertake the work. This will supplement the mentoring offered by experienced committee members and give a human face to the formal induction information.

In some committees, members are linked to specific work programmes and the staff who carry them out. It is important that new members have an overall vision of the work, its breadth as well as its depth.

Committees take the induction of new members seriously and will be attentive to it over a period of time, giving background information as specific items arise. It is the secretary's task to ensure that new members have previous minutes, the 'gold' papers, members' contact details, a list of departmental staff, and a description of work programmes where appropriate.

4.3 Preparing for a committee meeting

Committee members should expect to receive the draft agendas and preparatory papers well in advance of the meeting to allow time for proper preparation. For committees with heavy agendas this may best be achieved through two mailings, the second of which should arrive one week before the meeting. The standard of papers produced is the responsibility of the secretary. (Preparation of the agenda is described at 6.5.)

It is the secretary's responsibility to ensure that the format and presentation of papers is consistent with agreed practice to enable Friends with disabilities to read them. If you have any needs that are not met you should speak directly to the secretary. This will always be helpful in building up knowledge not only to enable your full participation but for the committee's life.

Committee members should feel able to contact the secretary in advance of the meeting to air any questions or to ask for clarification arising from the agenda and accompanying papers. If one Friend is puzzled it is likely others will be. If answering your question is likely to need a significant commitment of staff time it may be better to speak first to the committee clerk.

4.4 During the meeting

It is vital to its effectiveness that the committee has all the relevant facts and options before it to guide its discernment and help it arrive at a decision. In most cases these will have been set out within the preparatory papers.

Part of the role of committee members will be to test out proposals brought by staff. Vigorous and well-prepared testing of proposals is itself a sign of the value placed on the work done by staff. It is important to distinguish between respect for work done and easy collusion. Asking difficult and searching questions is a key part of the discernment process. A poorly thought-out proposal, poorly scrutinised, will not lead to good work.

If the committee has a large area of responsibility it will engage with several members of staff in the course of its work. The committee's secretary remains its primary contact with the department. While it is good to build the relationship with other staff, in order to be informed and supportive, it is important not to confuse the task of overseeing the work with line management. If there are difficulties or disappointments in relating to staff, the issue should be raised in the first instance with the line manager.

4.5 After the meeting

Members can expect printed minutes of the meeting to be sent promptly. They should also receive payment for all expenses incurred. (See 1.6.)

4.6 Further information and references

The following document is available online at www.quaker.org.uk/committees or from your committee secretary:

Trustees, committee members and individual Friends: guidance on contact with staff – Management Meeting 21/3/06.

Chapter 5

Some specific issues

Many of the Friends with experience of work at Britain Yearly Meeting level whom we consulted on the content of this handbook told us they thought it would be useful to have distinct sections setting out policy on a number of specific issues that might be encountered during service on a national committee. Here they are.

5.1 The employment of committee members

Integrity is essential to what we believe as Quakers and to who we are. It is essential therefore that the appointment of any Friend to paid work within the Society is made with scrupulous fairness and transparency and that this is seen to be the case.

It will sometimes happen that a committee member will be an appropriate person to take on a specific piece of paid work for Britain Yearly Meeting. A committee member may be aware of a particular project as a result of the work of the committee on which they serve; they may see work advertised in *The Friend* or elsewhere, or rarely, they may be approached to apply to undertake a particular task because they have unique or exceptional experience.

In all cases where a committee member is appointed to work as a consultant or on a freelance basis for the Society in Britain, it must be clear that they have received no unfair or improper advantage. The work must have been properly identified and described through Britain Yearly Meeting's normal procedures. This will produce a brief for the work and a contract of engagement. Advertisements through relevant publications and other channels should invite tenders or expressions of interest.

If a member of a committee is being considered for a consultancy connected with that committee's work, they should withdraw from any meeting where any aspect of the work or appointment is being discussed. If appointed, they should withdraw from membership of the committee until at least one year after the completion of the work in question.

Where a committee member is intending to apply for a position as a member of Britain Yearly Meeting's staff, they should withdraw from any meeting where any aspect of the post or its appointment procedure is being discussed. Having submitted an application, they should then stand aside from their committee until the outcome of their application is known.

If appointed they will need to resign from their committee. They will be ineligible to serve on any national committee of Britain Yearly Meeting for at least one year after their employment ends.

5.2 Conflict of interest

Given the number of Quaker committees and organisations, it is likely that some Friends will be active in more than one. Therefore, a conflict of interest may arise. For example, it may be considered unacceptable for a Friend to be a member of both a spending committee and a committee that authorises or allocates funds to the spending committee. Generally, our nominations process will seek to avoid such difficulties. However, there are other circumstances where a conflict of interest might arise.

As Quakers, our practice is to trust each individual and each committee to act responsibly. To help avoid conflict of interest being a problem, you are asked to consider whether you might have a personal interest in any matter that is being discussed in committee. For instance, you might have a connection through family or friends, through an employment relationship, through membership of another committee or organisation, or you might feel you benefit personally in some way.

If you think you may have a conflict of interest, please declare this to the clerk of your committee, asking the committee to decide whether you should leave the meeting while the relevant item of business is discussed. The matter should be minuted.

If the committee or clerk is uncertain about any aspect of dealing with conflict of interest, the Recording Clerk should be consulted.

5.3 Confidentiality and data protection

5.3.1 Confidentiality

As Quakers, we wish to be clear and transparent in the work that we do, in the methods we use, and in the recording and reporting of our decisions. In general, committee members should feel free to discuss the business that has been conducted by their committees with their local and area meetings and with individual Friends and attenders. There will be a few occasions when an item of business needs to be kept confidential. The committee clerk will make this clear. (See also 6.6.6.)

Committee minutes are circulated routinely to its members and parent body and others requiring to know or take action from the minutes. Where a minute concerns an item of business that needs to be kept confidential, the relevant minute will be clearly marked and it will be omitted from the minutes that are circulated beyond committee members and the parent body.

Britain Yearly Meeting's general policy on the availability of minutes is to make them available. Some are now placed routinely on the Britain Yearly Meeting website. Papers, unless confidential or relating to work in progress, may be made available in the same manner. The last item on a committee agenda may be deciding which papers should be made available more widely.

If you have any doubt as to whether particular items of committee business can be properly shared, please contact your committee clerk or secretary for guidance.

5.3.2 Data protection

The records of all the central and standing committees are covered by the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. Committee members need to be familiar with Britain Yearly Meeting's policy on data safety and information security, which was agreed by Meeting for Sufferings in July 2003 (minute 5). The essentials of this policy are that:

- all personal information should be held securely
- information should be used only for the purpose for which it was collected
- information should not be held for any longer than necessary and should then be safely disposed of
- any individual about whom information is held has a right to know about it and to have access to it.

The Britain Yearly Meeting Data Safety Group oversees our data protection policy and your committee will regularly be reminded to adhere to the BYM data protection policy. As an individual committee member, your responsibility is to be aware of the essential requirements of the policy when handling, using or distributing any kind of personal information. If you have any concerns that what you are doing may be in breach of Britain Yearly Meeting's data protection policy, please seek advice from your committee clerk or secretary.

5.4 Conflicts and grievances, including harassment

Where your problem, complaint or grievance concerns an individual, in the first instance try to resolve it by speaking directly to the individual concerned. If this is not possible or you feel unable to do it, speak to your committee clerk. If your difficulty concerns the committee clerk, seek advice from your committee secretary or committee elder.

The issue that concerns you may not directly involve one individual. It may be one of procedure or process. The route to resolution remains the same. Speak to the committee clerk or committee secretary in the first instance. If you are dissatisfied or troubled and consider the matter to be significant and serious, ask to speak to the Recording Clerk or Deputy Recording Clerk.

If you remain dissatisfied, put your complaint or grievance in writing, following the BYM complaints procedure.

5.4.1 Harassment

“Guided by the Light of God within us and recognising that of God in others, we can all learn to value our differences in age, sex, physique, race and culture. This enables mutual respect and self-respect to develop, and it becomes possible for everyone to love one another as God loves us.”

Quaker faith & practice 23.33

The Equality Act 2010 defines harassment as “unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual”. The relevant protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

If you experience harassment, or are accused of it, use the procedure described in the first paragraph of this section.

5.5 Whistleblowing

It is to be hoped that problems or failures occurring in the context of the governance and execution of the centrally managed work can be resolved either through informal discussion or the more formal processes outlined in this section of the handbook.

In the unlikely event that these processes fail, there is a process of last resort. You should only use this process if:

- a) you have exhausted all other procedures within your committee, and through the secretary and/or their line manager and the Recording Clerk
- b) the issue involved concerns a matter of significance for the whole of Britain Yearly Meeting or the wider community
- c) the matter involved concerns serious malpractice or wrongdoing, e.g. a criminal offence, a serious abuse of charitable status, a miscarriage of justice, a serious health and safety risk, etc.

If, after careful thought, you consider that the matter meets these criteria, you should follow the Britain Yearly Meeting whistleblowing procedure.

5.6 Volunteer policy

Britain Yearly Meeting has a volunteering policy that applies to all those who are working alongside staff in Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall, undertaking specific tasks or pieces of work. Although many of the principles of the policy are relevant to the service of members of national committees, the policy is not directly applicable. Members of national committees are seen as giving religious service as part of a worshipping community, not as volunteer workers.

5.7 Further information and references

The following are available online at www.quaker.org.uk/committees or from your committee secretary:

1. 'Managing conflicts of interest'. BYM Trustees paper T07/03/3
2. Britain Yearly Meeting policy on data safety and information security
3. Britain Yearly Meeting complaints procedure
4. Britain Yearly Meeting whistleblowing procedure.

Chapter 6

Clerking a national committee

6.1 Introduction

This section is particularly for clerks, co-clerks and assistant clerks but is likely to be of interest to all members of national committees. An understanding of the issues facing a committee clerk, the context in which they are working and the things they need to achieve can often enhance and support the full involvement of each individual member of a committee.

The fundamental responsibilities of clerking any Quaker meeting for worship for business / meeting for church affairs are the same: “The clerk bears the final responsibility for preparing the business, conducting the meeting and drafting the minutes” (*Qf&p* 3.12). As if this were not enough, more is expected: “The clerk needs to have a spiritual capacity for discernment and sensitivity to the meeting” (*ibid*). This sounds like a tall order, and indeed it is, but you have been chosen because you are seen as having these qualities.

There is much useful advice about clerkship in chapter 3 of *Quaker faith & practice*. You may find it helpful to revisit this. This chapter aims to build on that advice. There are other publications and courses that you may find helpful and supportive. These are listed at the end of the chapter.

6.2 The overall context

As clerk, it is important that you have a good knowledge of your committee’s terms of reference, of the overall context of the work and of how it relates to the work of Britain Yearly Meeting through *Our faith in the future* and the current Operational Plan. Your committee secretary will assist and support you in this. If you are able to attend Meeting for Sufferings, this will be helpful in painting the bigger picture. Being aware of the history of your committee and of the key policy decisions within which it works will support you in your work. An archive of past committee minutes and a collection of ‘gold’ policy papers should be available for you to consult. Bear in mind that in addition to the primary task of discerning the work, your committee also has a responsibility to monitor and evaluate the work, to report on it annually, and to bring to the notice of BYM Trustees major successes, difficulties and failures.

6.2.1 The programme of meetings and of work

It is essential to prepare a calendar of work for the year, to help plan the use of committee time. Your secretary may be able to help with this. In doing so, remember to allow space for issues and work unforeseen at the time of planning.

A second key task is to establish a pattern of meetings that is appropriate to the demands of the business and the availability of both staff and committee members. This is not easy. Committee members may be retired, in full- or part-time employment, in full- or part-time education, or have caring responsibilities or any number of other demands on their time. It is not helpful for a committee to become too set in its ways. If a committee appears to have a rigid and unchanging and unchangeable pattern of meetings, this can deter potential new members who might assume they will be unable to serve solely because of time constraints. However, it is rare to be able to produce a timetable that will suit everyone and everything, so be prepared to accept a version that is ‘good enough’. The BYM Events & Committee Services staff team will prepare a committee calendar to manage workflow.

6.2.2 Handing over

Arrange with your predecessor a formal handover of the ongoing work. This is well worth doing even if you were previously the assistant clerk. It helps to ensure that items are not missed and it gives you an opportunity to refresh your understanding of the overall scope of the work. Take time to meet with your secretary to arrange who will do what.

6.3 Relationships

Much of what we do and achieve as Quakers depends on our establishing good relationships. Clerking a committee is no exception.

6.3.1 Partnership with the committee secretary

As clerk of a central or other national committee, you will work closely with the secretary of the committee, and the quality of this relationship will be key to the quality of the work that is achieved. In honing this relationship you may find it helpful to:

- ask your predecessor how the working relationship was structured and consider whether it will work for you or whether you will need changes
- ask the committee secretary if they have suggestions for how the working arrangements might be improved.

If you are a new clerk, or an established clerk beginning afresh with a new member of staff, it is important to take time to get to know one another and to negotiate what each needs. If your committee has a co-clerk or an assistant clerk this will be very helpful to you as a new clerk in managing the transition. But note there will seldom be such support for the new staff person. As an experienced clerk you can have an important mentoring role for a new staff member.

A well-established partnership that has found an effective and comfortable way of working creates proper space for the committee and allows new members both to grow into the work and to bring their distinctive contribution to bear.

There are a number of different models for the relationship of secretary and clerk, and many different ways of dividing up the work. The key is not the precise model you adopt, but that all those at the table – clerk, co-clerk (if there is one), assistant clerk and secretary – are all consulted and are all comfortable with the chosen model. Discuss with the committee secretary and with your co-clerk and assistant clerk how and when you can be contacted between meetings and how you will communicate.

Contact between meetings between clerk and secretary, either in person or by phone, is vital in building the relationship, keeping in touch with the wider context of the work, and ensuring that what you expect of the secretary is being done.

As clerk you can expect the secretary to identify matters which lie beyond the immediate concerns of the committee but which set the context of its work. Thus the impact of, say, *Our faith in the future*, changes in corporate procedure, or insights from other committees will all have an important bearing on the committee's work.

The knowledge possessed by staff is only useful if it is deployed for the committee in an appropriate way and at the right time. That knowledge should be supportive of the clerk's authority and helpful to the committee's work. There should be no surprises at the meeting! If urgent matters arise that were not part of the envisaged agenda there should be careful consideration of their impact on the meeting. The final decision is yours as clerk.

Discuss with your staff secretary how you will work together in the meeting. You will need to decide between yourselves how the staff member can contribute advice and information to you and to the meeting in the way that is most helpful. If a staff member's knowledge and expertise is not fully utilised, this can mean wasted work by the committee or decisions that are inappropriate because they are arrived at without a full understanding of the facts. On the other hand, if a staff member's profile is too high in committee, this can inhibit less experienced or naturally reticent members from making their full contribution.

As clerk you can look to the secretary to give guidance on matters of church governance and right ordering. The relationship with other committees, and with Meeting for Sufferings and BYM Trustees, is an important part of the setting of your committee's work. Recognise, however, that staff will vary in confidence and capacity. If you are an experienced clerk, with personal experience of service on other committees or on Meeting for Sufferings, you may have all the knowledge you need. It will then be helpful to a less experienced staff member to learn from you. If possible, it will be helpful for the staff member to be able to consult more experienced colleagues in advance of the meeting.

Occasionally, a committee may experience difficulties in its relationship with the secretary. If the difficulty is such that it interrupts the work of the committee it must be addressed. As clerk, you should begin the process by discussing the problem with the staff member. Often this will be all that is required. If the problem persists, you should speak to the staff member's line manager. In dealing with issues of this sort you should be aware of the complaints procedure policy set out at 5.4. The clerk is not a line manager of staff, and it may be helpful to draw up a written role agreement for the tasks expected of clerk(s), secretary and other significant role-holders in the committee. Such an agreement could clarify the administrative arrangements and expectations. If the secretary is not a member of Management Meeting, this agreement should come through the staff member's line manager.

6.3.2 Relationship with the committee and its members

As clerk, it is important that you have the best possible relationship with your committee and that the members of the committee have a good relationship with each other. You can do a good deal to assist this. Ensure that your committee has an induction process for every new member. The exact content and plan will vary from committee to committee but the essentials are:

- an understanding of the committee's terms of reference
- a copy of this handbook
- a set of 'gold' policy papers, including data protection, expenses and other policies
- an opportunity to talk to an established member of the committee about the work and the process used to progress it
- a nominated committee member who will answer questions and give advice between meetings.

Try to ensure that everyone is aware of the gifts, insights, skills and knowledge of all members. Encourage all to contribute. It may help members to relate better to each other and to the subject in hand if the style and format of meetings are varied and there are opportunities to work in small groups.

6.3.3 Standing aside from the table

Occasionally, you will have to report to the committee on an item at length or you may feel that you have experience that could be crucial to the business under discussion. Under these circumstances you should stand aside from the table and function as any other member of the committee, asking the assistant clerk to clerk the item. You should do this only after careful thought and in specific circumstances. It is not helpful to the discernment of the committee if the clerk can be expected to step out of role or to take a particular view on matters under discussion.

6.3.4 Dealing with difficulty

“Our contributions should be made and accepted as ministry. It is important to accept dissent as part of the search for truth.”

It is not unknown for committees to have a member whose behaviour may be 'difficult'. We all perceive difficulty differently. As clerk, you have a duty to be sure that what seems to be 'difficult' behaviour is

not simply ‘inconvenient’ behaviour by which a Friend is probing decisions or process that everyone else is content to accept. If the problem is limited to one meeting it can be absorbed, but if there is a recurring problem you should speak to the member concerned to try to discover the cause, which might be personal, or could be uncertainty or unhappiness with their role within the committee. Being firm over behaviour should not be seen as ‘unquakerly’. Firm direction from the clerk is almost always helpful and often essential to make the best use of the time available.

6.3.5 Relating to other parts of the central structure

Good relationships between the various elements of our central structure are key to developing coherent corporate work. Consider how you can facilitate communication, both formal and informal, between your committee and the rest of the central structure, and also how you can encourage trust in and understanding of the work of other committees and departments.

At some stage, you will be contacted by Central Nominations Committee (or another appropriate nominations committee). A small group of members will wish to meet with you to consult about nominations of new members for your committee. It is very helpful to the nominations committee if you can give some thought in advance as to what your committee needs.

6.4 Processing the work

6.4.1 Dividing up the work

The work of national committees is often heavy and complex. Clear arrangements for the processing and implementation of the work are essential to support the discussion and discernment that happens in committee itself. If you have an assistant clerk, work out with them how you will divide the work inside and outside the meetings. Some committees find co-clerkship useful. Be clear about how these arrangements relate to the working links with the committee secretary. Consider carefully what tasks are rightly and most effectively done by the clerk, other committee members and staff.

6.4.2 Between meetings

Sometimes matters will arise that appear to require a decision between meetings. All committees should have an agreed ‘between meetings’ procedure. Your committee secretary should be able to provide models for such a procedure.

As a minimum, this should include:

- the criteria for establishing whether an item of business needs a decision between meetings
- which issues are delegated to the discretion of the clerks and/or the committee secretary
- the circumstances in which individual members of the committee should be consulted
- the circumstances in which a special or ‘emergency’ meeting of the whole committee would be justified.

Tell committee members what has been done as soon as possible after the event, and minute any such decisions at the next formal committee meeting.

6.4.3 Reporting

Many committees find that having a clerk’s report on the agenda is a useful way of communicating what has happened since the last meeting. Other committees receive regular reports on the work of the department or staff.

6.4.4 Follow-up and review

You will need to have a system for making sure that minutes requiring action are followed through and for checking on the progress of ongoing work. In addition, committees need periodically to review

their processes and those of their subcommittees and groups to check if they are fulfilling their terms of reference and operating efficiently and effectively. These are all matters to discuss with the committee secretary.

6.4.5 Quorums and staying the course

There is no concept of a quorum in Quaker meetings, and if a meeting is held in right ordering there should be no question that its decisions are valid. However, as clerk you will need to exercise some discretion when a meeting has very few people present. The governing document for Britain Yearly Meeting says of Trustees, “An effective working strength of the trustee body, normally represented by at least half of the trustees for the time being, should be present for decisions to be made in right ordering”.

It is very helpful if members of the committee stay for the whole meeting rather than leaving early. This avoids decisions at the end of the agenda being taken by fewer people. Friends should be encouraged to make, where possible, transport arrangements that allow them to stay for the whole of a meeting, even if it runs a few minutes over the appointed finish time.

As clerk, you can encourage this discipline by allowing a realistic amount of time for the business in hand and being punctilious about starting on time and, as far as possible, finishing on time.

6.5 Setting the agenda

The agenda is a powerful tool: it has a significant effect on the validity and effectiveness of a committee’s work.

Be clear about how and when you will work with the committee secretary to draft the agenda for the next meeting. Agree with the co-clerk and/or assistant clerk what their input into the process will be.

Be clear about how and why items reach the agenda. There will be a number of established routes for this, e.g. items from subcommittees, minutes from other committees, reviews of ongoing work, new initiatives. Decide whether it might be appropriate for individual members of your committee to contribute items to the agenda and, if so, how that should be done.

Give some thought to the deadline for finalising the agenda. Too close to the committee date there may be insufficient time for careful preparation of all the necessary supporting papers, and committee members may not have the time to prepare for the business as well as they would wish. Too distant from the committee date there may be less opportunity to include new and emerging business.

It is of course desirable to listen to, and act upon, advice when preparing the agenda. However, what is sent out is your responsibility, so be sure you ‘own’ and support it.

At the start of the meeting the agenda should be offered for adoption. Be open to making changes if significant reason is given. On the other hand, be resistant to making changes simply because a particular member of the committee is being vociferous about an alternative approach. You will, after all, have spent time, energy and thought in presenting the agenda in the way you have. Once adopted, the agenda becomes the committee’s corporate responsibility.

Besides determining the content of a meeting, the agenda should also make clear what the committee is expected to do in relation to the items presented to it. This will help you keep Friends to the task in hand and will help committee members think purposefully about each item in advance. The kinds of category you might want to consider are: for decision; for discussion; for information; for noting; to receive (used for recording the receipt of minutes in advance of taking action on them); for the record; to comment; to appoint.

The timing of the meeting is the clerk’s responsibility. It may be helpful to give suggested timings for individual items of business in advance.

When constructing the agenda, and when writing draft minutes in preparation, think through the communications implications of all items of business. Who needs to know? How are we going to tell people? What are the opportunities to share this work with Friends and more broadly? How are we going to take soundings?

In preparing papers or reports, ask those writing them to include sections on the communications implications of the work, as appropriate.

6.6 Making a minute

Our minutes record our decisions, and such records must be truthful. Ensure that they are accurate and suitably clear for future action. Remember that clarity and lack of ambiguity are consistent with a truthful record. We are all responsible for listening to, and truly hearing, the minute. Is it a faithful record of our intentions?

Good practice in Quaker minute-writing is good practice wherever it takes place. However, there are some aspects of minute-writing that are of particular significance in relation to national committees.

6.6.1 Policies and programmes

In preparing the agenda, you will already have made it clear what is expected of the committee in relation to any particular item. The minute will need to reflect this. There is often a balance to be struck. Minutes that primarily initiate programmes of work or establish policies will need to express what action is required with clarity and economy and to give this primacy within the minute. However, there will also need to be an introductory section to make the context clear to those who were not at the meeting and who will be receiving the minute for information or for action. In some circumstances, it may also be helpful, even essential, to include reference to the considerations that caused the committee to come to the decision that it did.

6.6.2 Discussion

When a topic is on the agenda for initial exploration or general discussion, it is probably best to record simply that such a discussion has taken place and to add any specific points that might inform future work or that, for one reason or another, require follow-up. If the discussion produces no material of this kind, it can be helpful to record a general outcome. For instance, that the differing views of committee members are better understood or that it appears there will be little advantage in developing this area any further.

Administrative matters such as nominations, the recording of the formal receipt of minutes from other committees, dates of meetings and conferences, etc., can often be most efficiently dealt with using a pre-prepared draft minute. Brevity and precision are key.

6.6.3 Draft minutes

Drafting part of or entire possible minutes in advance can be a very helpful practice. It can save time and aid clarity of expression – important attributes with heavy and sometimes pressured agendas.

The part of a minute that provides an introduction to an item of business is usually best drafted in advance. This way factual accuracy can be improved and drafting time saved in the meeting itself. There is little danger of pre-empting the view of the committee.

Minutes dealing with administrative matters and appointments can be drafted in advance in their entirety. Again, this supports accuracy and efficiency. Often, a reading of the draft minute in committee will be sufficient to conclude the matter.

For items where a decision is required, it can be helpful to draft sentences for a range of possible outcomes. In the event, none of these may be entirely relevant, but they can often provide useful phrases that help in making a minute during the meeting that properly reflects the committee's view.

The drafting of minutes in advance, where appropriate, also gives the opportunity to include accurate references to relevant previous minutes and to consider if certain minutes will need to be sent formally to other committees or groups for action or information. When sending minutes to other committees or groups, it is important and helpful to give some background as to how and why that particular minute has been arrived at and to say clearly why it is being sent and what is expected. Be prepared to speak to the clerk of the receiving committee to explain more fully the nature of the issue involved.

If draft minutes are prepared on your behalf by someone else – the assistant clerk or the committee secretary, for example – be certain that you understand and agree with them. This is important in avoiding any confusion or hesitation in the committee meeting itself.

However carefully you have drafted minutes in advance and however uncontentious you deem them at the time, you must be prepared to abandon them entirely if the committee's thinking takes an altogether different turn.

6.6.4 *Completing the minute*

It can be difficult to draw a long and complicated consideration into a minute. The value of a period of silence to bring clarity and to allow relaxed drafting cannot be over-emphasised. Don't be reluctant to ask your committee to uphold you in this way. It is good practice for the clerk or assistant clerk to make a note of the salient points that are expressed during long or complex discussions. These can help in checking back with the committee the clerks' discernment as to the sense of the meeting and in the drafting of the final minute.

Sometimes, bringing in a minute after a coffee break or lunch can be helpful, but remember that clerks need and deserve a break too. When circumstances allow, it is perfectly acceptable to bring in a minute overnight. What is essential is to read and accept the minute in substantially the same gathering of Friends as that in which the discussion took place.

It is sometimes helpful to ask the committee to assist in finding the right words. It is, after all, their minute.

Occasionally, committee members can become restless or talkative while the clerks are trying to finalise a minute. Anyone who has been on the receiving end will know how disruptive this can be. "...uphold those at the table in prayerful silence" (*Qf&p* 3.11). Remind Friends firmly but tenderly of this if you need to.

6.6.5 *Standing aside from the minute*

Very occasionally, a committee member may disagree with a minute so strongly that they ask to be recorded as "standing aside from the minute". Meeting for Sufferings has minuted:

"The practice of recording names of Friends standing aside from a minute of a decision is not part of this yearly meeting's discipline and we do not see it as a solution to difficulties. More important is the tender, compassionate and humble search together for the grounds of our unity. We do not equate unity with unanimity and we realise we must care for those who are in disagreement over an issue which has been decided."

Minute 6 of Meeting for Sufferings, 5 June 1999

The task for the table is to be clear whether the dissenting Friend has a clarity of perception that is not available to the clerks or whether they are so committed to a personal opinion that they are unable to hear the sense of the meeting. In some cases, once it has been made clear that standing aside is not an option, a period of prayerful silence may help the Friend involved to unite with the minute. Where the Friend continues to feel disaffected, it is important to offer support after the meeting has finished.

6.6.6 Confidential minutes

Your committee may need to minute an action that concerns an individual or reflects an issue it wishes to remain confidential. In this case, a confidential minute can be drawn up that will be circulated only to the members of the committee. In the minutes circulated more widely there should be an indication of the subject matter followed by “confidential minute”, followed by a space. The minute book must contain the full text of the minute.

Before deciding that a minute should be treated as confidential, the committee and its clerk should be clear that the reasons for doing so are sound. Confidential minutes should not be used as a way of avoiding situations or emotions the committee would prefer not to have to deal with – challenge, conflict, embarrassment, etc. (See also 5.3.)

6.6.7 Signing the minutes

The handwritten minutes are usually signed in the silence at the end of the meeting as a way of reinforcing the fact that they have been agreed by all present. You will need to agree with your assistant clerk and/or co-clerk how the minutes can be checked for both factual and grammatical accuracy. When you are satisfied that you have an accurate, typed copy, it can be signed at any time.

6.6.8 Interpreting the minutes

Occasionally, you may be called on to clarify what is meant by a particular minute, or to explain what lay behind a particular decision of your committee, or to say something about the thinking that led to it. This may not happen often, but it does mean that you need to feel confident about having an overview of your committee’s work and about knowing where the expertise on specific issues can be found.

6.6.9 Further information and references

1. *Quaker faith & practice* chapter 3
2. Woodbrooke courses & events programme. Published every six months by Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ. Tel. 0121 472 5171. Email enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk
3. Morley, Barry (1993) *Beyond consensus: salvaging sense of the meeting*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 307. Wallingford (PA): Pendle Hill. Available from the Quaker Centre Bookshop at Friends House, London
4. Quaker service information form.



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Recording Clerk's Office
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain
Friends House
173 Euston Road
London NW1 2BJ

020 7663 1161
rco@quaker.org.uk

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