



# North East Thames Area Meeting **Report on the care of our Meeting Houses**

1<sup>st</sup> March 2017

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## **1. Background**

A task group was established by Area Meeting (AM) minute 15.71 on the recommendation of AM trustees. The purpose was to make recommendations on a long-term sustainable strategy on the up-keep, maintenance, financial controls and accounting of our six properties. Bethnal Green Meeting does not have its own Meeting House (MH).

We have considered the drop in numbers of Quakers and problems with expertise and passing on knowledge. We have considered the difficulty getting people to serve on premises committees and as treasurers.

Some Meetings have a long held spiritual presence in their community, and we have to consider what is needed to sustain and grow Quaker Meetings.

The group recognised the sensitive question of specific smaller Meetings and the need to address how best to take the strain off Friends and finances within them, and within AM generally. However we felt unable to address possible closures and amalgamations.

Indeed we hear that amalgamation of some London AMs may need to be considered in the future, in light of the decline in membership over the last 50 years. In the 1960s there were approximately 4000 Friends and 40 Meeting Houses, there are now approximately 1400 Friends with only 5 fewer Meeting Houses (35).

## **2. What we were asked to do**

The group was asked to:

- Explore premises problems and possible solutions by consulting Local Meetings (LM), Six Weeks Meeting (SWM) reps, overseers, elders, our wardens, other AMs and Friends and attenders within the Area Meeting.
- Look at how LMs manage premises matters
- Look at lettings and their effect on the spiritual life of our meetings and ministry to our local communities
- Look at income and employment
- Look at accounting practices in relation to Quaker values

The wide scope of the terms of reference was intended to lead towards a strategy for managing our Meeting Houses in the AM. The terms of reference brought together all aspects of caring for our Meeting Houses for consultation.

## **3. What we did**

- The group met together between August 2015 and March 2017.
- A questionnaire was developed to gather information about problems and possible solutions facing Meetings at present. The questionnaire was sent to all Local Meeting Clerks and Premises Committee Conveners within the Area Meeting and Six Weeks Meeting Representatives.
- We met with the clerk and secretary of Six Weeks Meeting.
- We contacted Mid Essex Area Meeting to gain insight about their situation.

- We referred to the following: Quaker Faith and Practice, The Tabular Statement, Centralised Admin Support for Area and Local Meetings (SWM Discussion Document), NETQAM draft Finance Policy 2017, NETAQM LM Income and expenditure (2005-2015) and the Six Weeks' Meeting Handbook.

The simple map below shows the location of our Local Meetings.



## 4. What we found out

### 4A. Context

Across Britain, the freehold of all Meeting Houses has been vested in Friends Property Trust. Area Meetings are responsible for managing their local Meeting Houses. In London, management has been the responsibility of Six Weeks Meeting: funds are pooled and shared between London AMs, and local premises committees given delegated responsibilities. In January 2017, the freehold of London MHs was transferred to London Quakers Property Trust (LQPT), and this body replaces SWM. As this report covers a transition period, we have used SWM and LQPT interchangeably.

As charitable trusts, Area Meetings are responsible for ensuring income and property are used to further the Area Meeting's objects, including 'maintaining and developing Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world'.

At the Canterbury Britain Yearly Meeting in 2011, Minute 36, committed us to, '*...make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community...*' and that, '*This process needs to be joyful and spirit-led...*' Area Meetings were asked, '*... to consider how truth prospers with regard to sustainability, taking care to relate this to all our testimonies – peace, truth, simplicity, equality and care for the environment.*'

#### **4B. London-wide strategic review**

London Quaker Property Trust is addressing similar issues across the London Area Meetings. LQPT has the responsibility to manage our buildings but is concerned that in the medium term the pooled income is not enough to cover necessary building repairs and improvements. The intention is to discern a strategy for the next 10 years, and align the objectives of LQPT, Area and Local meetings. This was outlined in a presentation to the meeting of AM clerks, treasurers, and trustees on 6 November 2016. LQPT asked: Are there too many Meeting Houses? Are there too few people to manage the work?

SWM have also carried out a consultation on centralising some services for local premises committees.

#### **4C. Responses to the questionnaire**

We received responses from 6 Local Meetings, 2 Six Weeks Meeting AM Representatives, 4 individual Friends. Below are some of the points the questionnaire brought to light:

- For many Friends, the Meeting House is at the heart of the Meeting and makes a major difference to the spiritual life of the Meeting. Others indicated that while Meeting Houses make Quakers more visible, owning a building was not essential.
- The relationship between premises committees and Six Weeks Meeting is fairly clear but needs to be spelled out simply and explicitly. However there was a feeling of ‘us and them’ and a lack of awareness at LM level regarding the role of SWM.
- AM Trustees and others need to develop good policies and be able to bring about the right ordering of decisions about funding.
- Closer working together could come from regular sharing of minutes to increase awareness of common problems and good solutions, administrative support provided at AM level, and visits to other Meeting Houses.
- In principle, SWM should probably undertake more property-related tasks with the caveat that local knowledge and experience is important to property tasks.
- Turnover of premises committee members means that valuable memory and experience can be lost.
- The questionnaire prompted several practical suggestions.
- If the sense of mutuality across the AMs is strengthened, this might in turn strengthen the mutuality across the SWM area.

A full summary of responses is set out in appendix 1. The responses have been used to investigate topics further and help frame queries and recommendations in section 5.

#### **4D. Rental income and costs of our Meeting Houses over the last 11 years**

Whilst our MHs are primarily places of worship, they also have to earn rental income to contribute to pooled funds for their upkeep. Pooled funds comprise an AM quota set by LQPT, and income from lettings. Below is a table that shows the total costs of each of our Meeting Houses compared with rental income over the last 11 years:

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Members &amp; Attenders</b>	<b>Rental net income total last 11 years (accounting for local costs)</b>	<b>Costs paid by SWM total last 11 years</b>	<b>Surplus / deficit total last 11 years</b>
<b>Bethnal Green</b>	16 + 13	n/a	Rent (approx £930 per annum)	
<b>Epping</b>	21 + 5	£ 34,746	£105,673	-£70,927
<b>Harlow</b>	18 + 8	£ 7,862	£ 21,668	-£13,806
<b>Leigh on Sea</b>	42 + 10	£ 44,143	£ 55,068	-£10,925
<b>Romford</b>	16 + 11	£134,295	£105,084	£29,211
<b>Walthamstow</b>	22 + 11	£137,665	£ 35,131	£102,534
<b>Wanstead</b>	63 + 41	£159,372	£263,827	-£104,455
<b>Total</b>	<b>198 + 99</b>	<b>£518,083</b>	<b>£586,451</b>	<b>-£68,368</b>

1. The number of members and attenders recorded in the tabular statement.
2. The rental net income shown is the surplus income from rentals once heating, electricity, small repairs etc. have been taken into account.
3. The costs paid by LQPT includes quinquennial surveys and subsequent works.
4. The surplus / deficit is the amount remaining once LQPT costs have been deducted from the rental net income.

The full breakdown, including running costs, is shown in appendix 2. When quinquennial works are carried out at any one Meeting House, it is more likely to go into deficit, and then takes several years to recover. Walthamstow and Harlow have quinquennial work planned for this year.

The figures reflect other changes, for example, Harlow does not now have a paid warden and Walthamstow has only recently joined the pooled funds scheme.

#### **4E. Accounting Practices**

There are testing demands and challenges of maintaining good accounting practices and internal controls which adhere to Quaker values of truth and integrity. These include keeping accounts and passing money to LQPT. We rely on nominated Friends, often without relevant expertise.

There is significant difficulty finding Friends to take on the roles of treasurers across the LQPT area. Often two are required per Local Meeting and further treasurers are needed at AM level and for other committees. We need to address how this can be simplified and reduce the number required.

The draft AM Finance Policy (Jan 2017) (see appendix 3) includes comprehensive internal controls, for example:

- All bank accounts and signatories must be disclosed to Area Meeting Trustees who have the ultimate responsibility.
- All expenditure should be authorised at the appropriate Meeting and a copy of the relevant minute should be kept with the accounts.

- Dual signatories are required for all cheques and online payments of over £100.
- Petty cash should, if possible, be recorded by 2 people.
- Money is not to be spent without authorization and receipts to be presented before reimbursement is made.
- Tradesmen should not be paid in cash.
- Funds can only be used for a properly designated purpose.

There are established processes for Annual Consolidation and Independent Examination of accounts and Statements of Financial Activity. Specifically mentioned in the policy is the regular discussion of finances and minuting of spending agreed at Local Meeting level.

Across LQPT there has been progress in using the same spreadsheets for book keeping. LQPT clerk and manager recognise that paid book keepers may be the way forward, employed by AM and paid for by LQPT.

Our AM trustee (finance) has prepared a paper contributing ideas about our accounting practices (see appendix 4).

#### **4F. How we manage our Meeting Houses locally**

The table below shows which of our meetings have premises committees, and those where the local business meeting manages premises matters.

	<b>How the AM manages premises</b>	<b>AM employees / volunteer staff</b>
<b>Bethnal Green</b>	Local business meeting deals with landlord matters.	No employees
<b>Epping</b>	Premises Committee - clerk, plus 3	No employees Friends oversee lettings and financial returns.
<b>Harlow</b>	Premises Committee - clerk, plus 2	Resident volunteer warden
<b>Leigh on Sea</b>	Premises Committee – clerk, plus 3	No employees A Friend manages lettings
<b>Romford</b>	Local Business Meeting does everything: joint LM clerks	Resident unpaid warden
<b>Walthamstow</b>	Premises Committee - a shared committee, with members from other Local Meetings	Employed warden 24hrs per week Contracted treasurer.
<b>Wanstead</b>	Premises Committee – clerk, plus 3	Employed wardens

There is a general problem with finding people to serve on local premises committees, the issue of turnover in committees and the importance of passing on knowledge and expertise. There are problems with expertise in an environment which is increasingly technical.

#### **4G. Working with LQPT**

NET AM has three Friends serving with LQPT who represent our AM and serve as trustees for LQPT. They give regular reports to AM based on a reporting template.

In practice, local premises committees deal direct with LQPT staff. LQPT employs a full-time manager, a part-time finance officer and part time project manager. It will be appointing an administrative assistant.

When appointed, the LQPT manager deliberately opened up communications direct with local meetings and premises clerks because it was more practical, allowing most property matters to be dealt with informally, though it has resulted in more dialogue, and also an overload of work; a problem which needs to be addressed.

The formal process remains important –

- Premises committees should send their meeting minutes to the LQPT manager. If a premises committee sends a minute to the manager in the context of the handbook, then the staff will understand what support has to be provided.
- LQPT will take matters up by means of a minute from AM, referred by premises committees.

The questionnaire responses revealed a sense of 'them and us' between local premises committees and SWM. When referring to LQPT, we should be clear whether we mean the staff, or the trustees - LQPT comprises the trustees (the AM reps) as well as the employed staff.

#### **4H. Challenges and opportunities at our Local Meeting Houses**

##### ***Bethnal Green***

Bethnal Green is the only Meeting that rents a space for Meeting for Worship, including a kitchen. In 2014 the rent was £950 PA (£237.50 paid quarterly). Since 2015, SWM has paid the rent directly. The arrangement seems secure for the future, though there is no long-term contracted arrangement.

##### ***Epping MH***

Epping had a quinquennial survey in 2011 and completed considerable energy efficiency improvement works in 2015. Currently Epping has just enough Friends to manage with volunteers.

##### ***Harlow MH***

Harlow MH is a 1960s purpose designed building, in a residential area of Harlow. It had a quinquennial survey in 2016 with works planned for 2017.

'Two Friends from Harlow produced an 'Options Report' about the future of the Meeting House in 2010. There were 11 different options for discussion which included having a Volunteer Warden, renting a property and quite detailed plans about developing the Meeting House and Gardens. It was felt that SWM was not very receptive at the time. Recent changes include having a Volunteer Warden instead of a paid Warden (thus decreasing our outgoings considerably) and we have increased the rent charged to our biggest letting (a playgroup). The change to having a volunteer warden has meant that Harlow Friends have a 'hands on' approach to the Meeting House. Until recently Friends did the bulk of the cleaning (we now have cleaners every 2 weeks), we also open up and lock the meeting House when the Warden has her days off, do a lot of gardening including cutting the grass and take rubbish home with us.'

In January, LM recorded the following minute:

*17.01 The meeting has agreed that we would like to keep a Quaker presence in Harlow. We are examining the sustainable options for the meeting. We are exploring options for some type of socially acceptable development within the grounds of the meeting house at the same time as retaining meeting space.*

### **Leigh on Sea MH**

- Leigh-on-Sea Meeting is housed in a former Victorian School that was purchased in the 1930s. The Meeting House has a Meeting room, two small rooms, kitchen, two toilets (one disabled) and a garden.
- The premises are in frequent use by Friends, regular hirers and one-off lettings.
- The last quinquennial survey was in 2011. A cracked wall and drain will incur future expenditure.
- Leigh-on-Sea is on the eastern edge of a rather unwieldy spread of LMs within the AM. Thought has been given to transferring Leigh from North East Thames to Mid-Essex AM. No change is contemplated at present.

### **Romford MH**

Romford MH is a 1960s purpose-designed building, set behind houses in Gidea Park. It had a quinquennial survey in 2011. It has an unpaid resident warden. The MH is used well during the week including a regular playgroup. It has a car park.

‘From time to time we have had discussions about ways in which we could use our quite extensive grounds for the benefit of others, and the community, but at the moment, we are so few that take active responsibilities, so we cannot take on any major projects just now. It is quite a challenge just keeping the building going, as it really is used by many groups.’

### **Walthamstow MH**

In 1998, the Meeting moved to Jewel Road, near Hoe Street in central Walthamstow, following conversion of a former industrial building funded by appeal. After completion of the MH, development costs and loans were repaid by 2008. Walthamstow remained outside of the London-wide pooled funds, until 2012. The MH is a very busy hub of community activity, with rooms on two floors. A replacement lift was installed in 2015. It has a car park with restricted access on a 99 year lease from the Baptist Church. Following a quinquennial survey in 2015 works will take place in summer 2017. Walthamstow meeting has a non-resident, part-time paid warden and a paid treasurer employed by AM.

### **Wanstead MH**

Wanstead MH is a 1960s purpose designed building. The last quinquennial survey was carried out in 2010.

‘We have 2 lists, one of work needed and one of future development ideas. This is in addition to the regular essential work. Things break and there are emergencies that take time and energy away from us getting through the lists. There are no 5-10 year plans although things like ongoing 'greening' are progressing slowly. We cope because we have staff to manage bookings and the grounds and keep an eye on the building when Friends aren't using it. Not forgetting the volunteers who regularly carryout maintenance work inside and out.’

#### **4I. Learning from a non-LQPT Area Meeting**

We learned from Mid Essex AM about how a non-LQPT AM manages property. AM trustees and representatives from each LM form a Finance and Property Committee to deal with property matters. Without a pooled system, the AM funds for its own buildings comes through lettings income and grants or loans for major works. Billericay MH refurbishment was financed by sale of part of the garden for a house, plus rental income from the former Resident Friend's flat.

Because of difficulty in finding Friends to fill offices, a professional accountant manages the AM accounts. Brentwood LM has engaged a book-keeper to receive payments for their lettings.

For major works a professional surveyor is appointed following invited quotes and subsequently acts as progress manager overseeing the work. Each major task is managed by a small ad hoc sub-committee from across the LMs, appointed by AM on nominations committee recommendations. Regular reports are made to AM and trustees.

What we learn from this non-LQPT AM is therefore:

- There is effective sharing of knowledge and expertise between the four LMs, through the AM committee.
- Nominated sub-committees manage and report on major projects.
- Use of paid-for expertise when Friends cannot fill roles.

#### **4J. Six Weeks Meeting handbook**

The handbook is a very important sourcebook for premises committees, Local Business Meetings, Area Meeting, wardens, AM-nominated representatives on LQPT. It was updated in 2015 and represents the changing role of LQPT. It is still undergoing review. The handbook covers all aspects of property stewardship and contains the accumulated knowledge and guidance from many years practice. It remains difficult to use as it covers both local premises and LQPT-wide property topics.

In section 5, we identify some suggestions relating to the organisation of information and premises committees' use of the handbook, which are set out in appendix 5.

#### **4K. Dealing with major projects**

The relationship between local meetings and the LQPT professional staff tends to be focused on major projects – when a significant repair, replacement, refurbishment is needed, either planned as part of the five yearly survey, or arising unexpectedly. We have considered a current building issue at Leigh MH (appendix 6) and the Billericay MH refurbishment (mid Essex AM) as example major projects.

When a local meeting identifies a major issue, the required process is to take an item to AM, which sends a minute to LQPT secretary. This does not always happen. LQPT trustees consider the minute from an AM to determine appropriate action, resources and programme. The LM will be authorised to engage a professional advisor at LQPT expense as required. Some of the issues are:

- Local Meetings may neglect to send a minute to AM, or try to deal with an issue with short term, expedient actions.

- Due to a considerable and diverse workload, the liaison with the LQPT manager might take longer than we hope or expect.
- Local Friends may not have the right skills to define professional work needed, seek quotes, select, appoint and manage a consultant.
- Choosing a building contractor is critical, and a consultant surveyor's recommendation may not necessarily be satisfactory.
- When work is to take place, it can be difficult to organise on-site supervision.

There is now a part time project manager employed at LQPT and an assistant post is being organised. We think consideration should be given to additional staff during major works.

#### **4L. Our changing Meetings and learning from our past**

The challenges we face now are not new.

There was a local Meeting House at Barking, but only the burial ground survives. Ilford MH was sold to a religious group.

Decades ago a committee was set up by Monthly Meeting (MM), as it then was, to look at the unwieldy nature of our Area Meeting. In particular we looked at Epping and Harlow possibly joining Hertford AM and Leigh going to Mid Essex AM. No action followed from the discussions.

Bethnal Green Friends originally met at Toynbee Hall and now rent from Quaker Social Action.

A former AM Clerk spoke of presiding over the closure of a record number of LMs, though not all with Meeting Houses. Among them were:

- Canvey LM (renamed Castle Point)
- Southend LM
- Shoebury LM

Leigh LM became the 'hub' Meeting in this area and now draws its membership from Rayleigh, Rochford, Shoebury, Southend, Thundersley, Benfleet and Canvey as well as Leigh.

This means some Friends travelling a distance to attend Meeting, but they do feel themselves to be part of a fully active Meeting and have, in their turn, greatly enriched Friends at Leigh rather than expending a great deal of energy trying to keep the smaller meetings going.

Across the AM our membership continues to decline and we need to look for opportunities to grow our Meetings.

## 5. Possible strategies and solutions to problems

In this section, we bring together considerations and recommendations for AM and LMs arising from this consultation.

Quaker Faith and Practice - part of 14.25

*A meeting house should not be regarded primarily in terms of bricks and mortar, or merely seen in relation to potential site value. Its real value derives from the worship and service of the meeting. Even so, our meeting houses no less than our own homes deserve our care, attention and imaginative thought, so that they may be attractive both to ourselves and to others whilst remaining faithful to our commitment to simplicity, care of the environment and equality. Care of our premises is an important and sometimes exacting responsibility, which should be exercised by or on behalf of the meeting to which it belongs.*

Each Quaker Meeting House on the one hand houses Quaker worship, and on the other hand is an outward-looking community centre, where it may spread awareness of Quakers in the wider area.

This report provides pointers towards a strategy. While there is always a process of evidence and analysis leading towards a strategy, in our Quaker context it is also very important to accommodate the feelings of Friends and to discern the way forward.

The future is for everyone to approach together - LMs, AM and LQPT, in order to consider possible structural and administrative changes and importantly to make our meetings more vibrant and sustainable. Change must be upheld by all. Below, we set out suggestions for short and medium term actions, and then offer a number of recommendations for long term change.

### Short and medium term measures

Suggestions to help in the short term for all Friends to consider. How Friends can contribute positively to improving our practices in the following areas:

1. AM and LQPT to ensure ongoing training for all premises committee members, including good practice about passing on minutes and accumulated information as well as the Six Weeks Meeting Houses handbook. This will improve understanding of LM premises committee role, an understanding of LQPT, and appropriate communication with LQPT and our AM reps on LQPT.
2. Premises committees to ensure transfer of knowledge e.g. practical arrangements such as emergency numbers for trades people and other useful contacts. The suggestion of having lists of approved contractors has come up several times in other AMs. LQPT cannot do this themselves, but clerks across the AM can share their own knowledge.
3. AM to forward the suggested revisions of the SWM handbook to LQPT (appendix 5), including changing the name to 'Meeting Houses handbook', to ensure the organisation and presentation makes it user-friendly, so it can be used most effectively.

4. AM to consider paying people for roles which are difficult to fill to support our work, especially treasurers, but this will have financial implications. How could this be funded and by whom? There are lessons emerging from Walthamstow LM's and Mid-Essex AM's paid treasurer role.

5. AM to ask LQPT for clarification and guidance to prevent confusion when there is a major piece of work, as to who leads it. When this is delegated back to Premises Committees to act on behalf of LQPT, the technical language and processes Friends need to use should be explained, as in the Premises' Handbook ref page 8 section J. AM to consider Nominating one or two individuals to help Premises committees to oversee such major works.

6. LQPT to centralise some of the tasks involved in managing our Meeting Houses.

7. AM to consider a Meeting Houses co-ordinator, perhaps a trustee (as per employment and safeguarding) who has an overview, consulting and advising Local and Area Meeting Friends.

8. LQPT reps to establish an occasional meeting of premises clerks and LQPT reps - North west London AM has a premises committee clerks meeting across the AM.

9. AM to promote our MHs for worship and lettings by improving signage and notice boards.

The following practical points are worth reinforcing:

10. Premises committees and LMs must send specific minutes to the AM clerk, in line with the handbook.

11. Premises committees to circulate their minutes to our AM LQPT reps.

12. Ensure our wardens and premises clerks are in the email group for wardens. The address is [wardenship@lists.quaker.eu.org](mailto:wardenship@lists.quaker.eu.org) This is publicised at the annual meeting for premises committees.

13. A building file kept in every Meeting House for anyone to use, include health and safety matters, boiler instructions and other essential information. Also it is important to have a named person for every MH.

14. Make a list of the former members of premises committees with the knowledge they hold, and so make use of this largely hidden resource.

### **Long term measures**

The task group discerned the sense that Friends have to grasp the need to change.

Our researches highlight two particular issues for consideration.

- Financial practices
- Meeting houses and falling membership

## 1. Financial practices

Our suggestion is that LQPT takes direct control of property-related financial processes, rather than local meetings acting as agent for LQPT. This would avoid important financial management being carried out by unqualified volunteers and reduce the risk of rental income owed to SWM being held in bank accounts over which SWM Trustees have no control. We refer AM to appendix 4, containing a paper prepared by our AM Trustee (Finance), which has constructive ideas relating to our financial procedures and LQPT.

## 2. Our Meeting Houses

What are the implications of a falling membership on the life of our Meetings, the way we fulfill the roles within a Local and Area Meeting and how we manage our Meeting Houses?

Some of our meetings with a MH are already considering how best to accommodate their worshipping group. We suggest all LMs with the support of AM may find it worth considering some of the following queries:

- How effectively can the MH be used by the worshipping group to spread the ethos of Friends and also reach out to the community? Are there other worship groups that could use our buildings?
- Is the premises committee large enough to shoulder the burdens of sustaining a MH?
- What are the financial implications for the Society of Friends in having a MH, bearing in mind the falling numbers and financial pressures?
- Are local Friends able to balance the joys and strains of maintaining a MH?
- How old is the MH? What will it cost to maintain the building in 10/20 years time? How 'green' is it?
- Can we continue as we are, or should we reduce the number of Local Meetings or Meeting Houses?

### Anticipating change – living adventurously

Could we be more adventurous and creative in future plans for our Meeting Houses? For example selling existing land or premises for schemes which would be in keeping with Quaker values but still have guaranteed access to a room for Quaker activities?

There is a London-wide consideration of long term options and it may be more realistic to have fewer AMs in the London area, to ensure the structure works. Other meetings have made innovations offering lessons for London AMs. Some Meetings have made very creative use of their property, to provide housing for short-term housing need.

#### *Selling a MH site:*

- Could a MH site, or some of it (as in the case of Billericay LM) be sold or might it be redeveloped for some purpose sympathetic to Quakers, such as social housing or flats as at Tonbridge? How useful is the location of the site? Would a sale for best price be appropriate? Who would help with the project management of such schemes?
- In the event of a full sale, might the LM consider joining a nearby meeting whilst continuing a presence within the area in another form?

### *Renting space for worship:*

- Should we explore moving to rented accommodation? Bethnal Green Meeting has contracted and then grown again in rented accommodation, without the burden of a building. A Meeting House might be sold to another community or religious group and Quakers continue to use it for worship by paying rent.
- Can we grow our Meetings while reducing our premises burden? Would renting be a solution, especially if, as in a town like South Woodham Ferrers, there is an existing building designed for use by several different worshipping groups? Similarly, Stratford is a growing city within our AM, where rented space could be used to grow our worshipping community and spread Quaker values in the developing area.
- Do Friends have other creative suggestions for our meetings?

These are similar to questions being considered by LQPT. We suggest feasibility studies to explore significant change projects, making good use of LQPT funding available.

### **Proposals for AM**

We ask AM to:

- consider the implications of a falling membership and whether we can continue as we are at the moment
- support individual LMs to discern the way forward, as each is unique
- consider imaginative plans to be made for the future

We believe AM needs to discern a strategic view of the whole Area Meeting while working alongside and upholding LMs. We need our MHs to be a boon rather than a burden.

There is much on which Friends need to bring prayerful consideration.

1 March 2017

Irene Davies – Wanstead LM  
Roger Estop – Wanstead LM  
Liz Ingham – Harlow LM  
Jo Law – Wanstead LM  
Audrey Regan – Leigh-on-Sea LM

## **Appendix 1 - Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

Answers from: 6 Local Meetings, 2 Six Weeks Meeting AM Representatives, 4 individuals Friends

### **1. About your local Meeting House**

Meeting Houses were valued as a place to meet, 'where we come together' and as a focal point for community activities. A number of responses expressed a feeling that the Meeting House was at the heart of the Meeting and made a major difference to the spiritual life of the Meeting. While others indicated that while the lovely surroundings did play a part and Meeting Houses made Quakers more visible, the building was not essential.

### **2. Challenges in looking after a Meeting House**

The main challenge expressed were too few active members and / or those with the correct expertise. Suggestions for meeting the challenges included a variety of 'advices' from telephone support to sharing premises matters across the AM and also some 'queries' including 'Are our Meeting Houses a boon or a burden?' and 'Should we lay down those MH that are a drain on our resources?'

### **3. Letting our Meeting Houses**

Friends felt that generally the Meeting Houses were a valuable resource for local community groups which provided important care and helped increase our visibility. Also they can be important for outreach in for example town wide activities. However there was also a comment that the majority of outreach was done as individuals.

### **Financial need to let rooms and impact on the life of the Meeting**

There were very mixed responses to this question. There were responses such as '...very occupied with business of juggling and running it' and a 'continuing pressure which takes away from the spiritual purpose of the meeting'.

Most thought Quaker needs were put first when letting rooms although one response did feel there was a 'major conflict between using the MH on a spiritual basis with its commercial value'

### **4. Six Weeks Meeting (SWM)**

#### **Clarity of relationship between premises committees and six weeks meeting**

Responses to 'is this relationship clear' were mainly 'yes' and 'hope so', but also some 'no' with the feeling that the relationship needs to be spelled out simply and explicitly.

#### **Working relationship with SWM**

When it works well the commitment and dedication involved achieves impressive and economical results, but our system of collective responsibility for buildings raises opportunities for weaknesses. However there was a feeling of 'us' & 'them' and a lack of awareness at LM level regarding the role of SWM, turnover of people means that valuable memory and experience is lost.

#### **Right Ordering of decisions regarding funding**

This is in QF&P and also the SWM handbook:

- All decisions to go through Local Business Meeting or Area Meeting and Treasurer needs an appropriate Minute endorsing the expenditure and a receipt before reimbursement.
- AM Trustees and others need to develop good policies and be able to enforce them.

### **5. LM Premises Committees**

There was a very long list of expertise and skills that Friends felt were needed in a premises committee from patience and common sense to IT and project management skills.

## **Relationship between premises committees and LM**

Generally this was felt to be good. However there are challenges such as:

- committee members changing every 3-6 years, with the loss of 'committee memory'
- members / attenders may be encouraged to accept a role who are inexperienced and / or do not have the skills, with the nominee not understanding the full extent of the role.

## **Communication between premises committee clerks across the AM**

Closer communication could include regular sharing of Minutes to increase awareness of common problems and good solutions, admin support provided at AM level, visits to other Meeting Houses to discuss problems and solutions.

The challenges of face to face meetings are that this might not be useful due to the geographical spread of LM across the AM and this would be more meetings to attend.

## **6. Employing staff**

The *pros* of employing staff included that work standards can be expected to be of a reasonable quality and carried-out within timed schedules. Appropriately skilled staff would compensate for lack of expertise and unavailability of volunteers and free up Friends to take up other tasks. The *cons* included difficulty finding Friends experienced ensuring compliance with employment legislation in managing people and the costs involved.

## **7. Administrative support for local premises committees (SWM discussion paper)**

There were many suggestions in response to the July 2015 Six Weeks Meeting discussion paper:

### **In principle, should six weeks meeting undertake more property-related tasks?**

Many responses said 'yes' and probably' to this question but there was the caveat that local knowledge and experience is important to property tasks.

### **Suggestions for SWM tasks**

- Financial record keeping with administrative support.
- SWM-wide contracts for e.g. gas and electricity, service contracts for boilers.
- Provision of a list of approved contractors for the area meeting / troubleshooting - basic checks by a roving surveyor, building administrator / rapid-response service.

### **Potential consequences of greater SWM input**

- Improved book keeping with a consistent standard of work, hiring and accounting practices
- Improved control of expenditure.
- Useful savings, both financial and time with bulk purchase, linked contracts.
- Possible exacerbation of communication difficulties and it may be hard to keep AM fully briefed
- Need for experienced Quakers to supervise extra employees

### **Financing increased SWM involvement**

- Look at how present SWM budget is used & economies of scale
- By increasing the quota paid to SWM
- By having less Meeting Houses that are unduly burdensome to area meeting,
- 'It is not affordable to get six weeks to do more local tasks'.

### **Other comments**

There is recognition of the valued use of pooled funds. There was the comment that the sense of mutuality across the AM needs to be strengthened and this might strengthen the mutuality across six weeks meeting area. Also the ever changing statutory requirements relating to letting buildings so premises committees 'must have enough people who understand Quaker stewardship, buildings finance and clerking'.

## Appendix 2 - Rental income and costs of our Meeting Houses 2005-15

		<u>Lettings</u>	<u>Local</u>	<u>Net</u>	<u>Costs</u>	<u>Surplus</u>
		<u>Income</u>	<u>costs</u>	<u>rent</u>	<u>paid by SWM</u>	<u>(deficit)</u>
<i>Epping</i>	<b>2005</b>	6,644	4,061	2,583	349	2,234
	<b>2006</b>	7,169	3,486	3,683	2,732	951
	<b>2007</b>	8,158	3,787	4,371	355	4,016
	<b>2008</b>	7,821	5,880	1,941	2,616	-675
	<b>2009</b>	7,440	5,085	2,355	4,647	-2,292
	<b>2010</b>	10,011	5,480	4,531	473	4,058
	<b>2011</b>	9,209	5,489	3,720	381	3,339
	<b>2012</b>	9,879	6,982	2,897	2,477	420
	<b>2013</b>	6,403	5,560	843	57,543	-56,700
	<b>2014</b>	7,642	5,286	2,356	31,059	-28,703
	<b>2015</b>	12,292	6,826	5,466	3,041	2,425
	TOTAL		92,668	57,922	34,746	105,673
<i>Harlow</i>	<b>2005</b>	10,664	12,091	-1,427	5,277	-6,704
	<b>2006</b>	10,477	10,154	323	8,379	-8,056
	<b>2007</b>	10,863	10,243	620	284	336
	<b>2008</b>	11,522	11,359	163	247	-84
	<b>2009</b>	10,222	11,483	-1,261	373	-1,634
	<b>2010</b>	11,021	12,337	-1,316	344	-1,660
	<b>2011</b>	11,811	12,304	-493	253	-746
	<b>2012</b>	11,054	10,423	631	2,846	-2,215
	<b>2013</b>	11,948	9,261	2,687	3,059	-372
	<b>2014</b>	11,538	7,617	3,921	311	3,610
	<b>2015</b>	11,333	7,319	4,014	295	3,719
	TOTAL		122,453	114,591	7,862	21,668
<i>Leigh-on-Sea</i>	<b>2005</b>	6,007	2,828	3,179	254	2,925
	<b>2006</b>	5,227	2,187	3,040	2,667	373
	<b>2007</b>	4,771	2,663	2,108	284	1,824
	<b>2008</b>	4,939	3,037	1,902	247	1,655
	<b>2009</b>	5,901	3,375	2,526	1,732	794
	<b>2010</b>	6,732	3,189	3,543	344	3,199
	<b>2011</b>	9,561	3,294	6,267	221	6,046
	<b>2012</b>	8,684	3,515	5,169	2,515	2,654
	<b>2013</b>	10,140	4,808	5,332	6,021	-689
	<b>2014</b>	10,033	4,586	5,447	40,525	-35,078
	<b>2015</b>	10,088	4,458	5,630	258	5,372
	TOTAL		82,083	37,940	44,143	55,068
<i>Romford</i>	<b>2005</b>	9,186	4,971	4,215	896	3,319
	<b>2006</b>	11,608	4,450	7,158	501	6,657
	<b>2007</b>	18,170	6,387	11,783	444	11,339
	<b>2008</b>	16,055	7,043	9,012	386	8,626
	<b>2009</b>	17,564	6,651	10,913	555	10,358
	<b>2010</b>	20,887	6,465	14,422	537	13,885
	<b>2011</b>	19,587	6,235	13,352	502	12,850
	<b>2012</b>	22,234	8,399	13,835	14,157	-322
	<b>2013</b>	19,173	7,176	11,997	45,930	-33,933
	<b>2014</b>	25,835	6,120	19,715	38,911	-19,196
	<b>2015</b>	23,658	5,765	17,893	2,265	15,628
	TOTAL		203,957	69,662	134,295	105,084
<i>Walthamstow</i>	<b>2012</b>	49,556	16,129	33,427	581	32,846
	<b>2013</b>	68,384	38,831	29,553	5,202	24,351
	<b>2014</b>	70,330	33,523	36,807	595	36,212
	<b>2015</b>	72,739	34,861	37,878	28,753	9,125
	TOTAL		261,009	123,344	137,665	35,131

<i>Wanstead</i>	<b>2005</b>	22,148	14,446	7,702	24,730	-17,028
	<b>2006</b>	23,900	14,861	9,039	580	8,459
	<b>2007</b>	24,478	17,687	6,791	5,387	1,404
	<b>2008</b>	31,030	22,783	8,247	1,021	7,226
	<b>2009</b>	33,839	25,253	8,586	1,447	7,139
	<b>2010</b>	44,765	25,247	19,518	10,380	9,138
	<b>2011</b>	44,053	21,227	22,826	11,271	11,555
	<b>2012</b>	37,360	23,913	13,447	94,888	-81,441
	<b>2013</b>	46,066	27,288	18,778	88,568	-69,790
	<b>2014</b>	43,122	23,177	19,945	24,730	-4,785
	<b>2015</b>	49,887	25,394	24,493	825	23,668
	<b>TOTAL</b>	400,648	241,276	159,372	263,827	-104,455
AM CUMULATIVE TOTAL		1,162,818	644,735	518,083	586,451	-68,368

## Appendix 3

DRAFT January 2017

### North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting – Finance Policy and Practice

This policy is to augment and in no way to contradict the relevant chapters in QF&P which should be read and noted.

#### 1 The Scope of this policy

This policy applies to all the financial dealings of the North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting comprising the Local Meetings' accounts for LMs and Premises, the Area Meeting account and High Leigh Conference account.

#### 2 The ownership of assets

The funds in the above accounts, other than acting as agent funds, are assets of the single excepted charity, The North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting (NETAQM) and are consolidated for independent examination (or audit) each year.

Where a Local Meeting holds a restricted fund, for example a fund for its own use, restricted by the terms of legacy or gift, these monies are still the assets of the NETAQM but restricted for the specified use.

Local Meetings should retain in their own accounts only such monies as are necessary to conduct their affairs and surpluses should be transferred to the Area Meeting account at least annually. As many contributions are only made at local level, this transfer of funds to Area meeting and then some to BYM is essential.

Where monies are not the assets of NETAQM such as those of London Quakers Property Trust (LQPT) formerly Six Weeks Meeting (SWM) or collections for other charities they are to be treated as Acting as Agent in our accounts and passed on without delay.

#### 3 Use of funds

Funds can only be used for a properly designated purpose. Where expenditure is not routine such as utility bills or catering supplies, the expenditure should be authorised **in advance** by AM, Local Meeting or Premises committee as appropriate. A copy of the relevant minute needs to be kept with the accounts. This is especially important where individuals are purchasing items or a service on behalf of the Meeting, perhaps on a credit card, and will need to be reimbursed personally.

As all the monies in the Local Meeting accounts (except acting as agent funds) are assets of the Area meeting, their primary use is for the purpose of that charity. The needs of the Area Meeting are to be considered ahead of any other charitable purpose.

Charities generally are not expected to give funds to other charities so special attention needs to be paid if another charity is to receive funds originally given to a Local meeting or to Area Meeting for its use. Giving to another Quaker charity such as Britain Yearly Meeting or Quaker Social Action, where this has been properly minuted, would usually be acceptable. If Quaker funds are to be given to non-Quaker charities, the Local or Area Meeting need to show in their authorising minute how the gift fulfils the object of NETAQM. *The object of North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of North East Thames Area Quaker Meeting and beyond.*

Detailed advice has been given by Quaker Stewardship Committee.

#### **4 Bookkeeping and managing accounts**

Treasurers should keep their records using the agreed Excel Spreadsheets. Using one system enables training and support to be given and mutual assistance as necessary. It will also make consolidation easier.

See attached minutes re deadlines etc.

Treasurers and bookkeepers should keep their accounts up to date with monthly, quarterly and annual bank reconciliations. All accounts should be reported using the agreed Statement of Financial Activities (SoFA) attached and in accordance with the current (2015) Charities Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP).

The monies in Premises accounts are the assets of LQPT and managed for them acting as agent. The Six Weeks Meeting Handbook should be consulted about the conduct of these accounts. The accounts should be reconciled quarterly and reported promptly to LQPT using the standard format. Where the net rents are in surplus, a cheque or transfer of funds should be sent to LQPT by the end of the following quarter or earlier if possible. An email of the LQPT quarterly return should be sent to the nominated AM's LQPT representative and Clerk of AM's Treasurers' Committee.

#### **4 Bank Accounts**

As the monies held in Meeting bank accounts are mostly assets of NETAQM, the Trustees of the Area Meeting carry the legal responsibility for the conduct of all bank accounts.

Any proposed changes to existing bank accounts holding any NETAQM monies or acting as agent monies must be notified to NETAQM Trustees (herein after, The Trustees) or initially to the Clerk of the AM Treasurers' Committee. This includes any change to signatories or plans to run the account online.

The Trustees must authorise in writing the opening of any new bank accounts.

Debit cards associated with these bank accounts are not to be used and no credit cards are to be issued in respect of these accounts.

#### **5 Cheque signing and online authorisation**

All cheque signatories and online authorisers must be notified to the Trustees when appointed. The Clerk to the AM Treasurers' will keep a register of these names. Both members and attenders in good standing can be signatories and online authorisers.

Only members can be **sole** cheque signatories.

All online payments and all cheques exceeding £100 must have dual authorisation/signature and direct debits and standing orders need dual authorisation.

Employees and volunteer wardens may act as bookkeepers and have read-only access to online accounts.

#### **6 Cash handling and petty cash**

Wherever possible, receipts and payments should be made by cheque, standing order, direct debit or other method avoiding cash.

Meetings are encouraged not to run petty cash systems and never for items exceeding £20. All petty cash dealings need to be recorded and these records form part of the accounts of the meeting.

Cash collections should be recorded whenever collected and ideally checked by a second person.

If the donor can be identified, cash received exceeding £50 should be acknowledged by email or a receipt given. Copy of the receipt or a printout of the email to be retained in the records.

Cash should be paid into a bank promptly and at least once a month. Itemised details should be put on the paying in book stub or otherwise recorded e.g. £15 collection and £2.50 for booklets. Payments in cash should be avoided and till receipts should be kept for items like catering supplies.

### **7 Gift Aid and CAF vouchers**

If Members and attenders pay UK income Tax or Capital Gains tax, Area Meeting may be able to claim back basic rate tax on their contributions if they are eligible and have signed a Gift Aid declaration. The Area Meeting will collect gift aid where contributions have been sent directly to it. Local Meeting Treasurers should collect it on contributions made through Local Meetings using the registration number issued by HMRC. Reclaims should be made once a year using the online forms on the HMRC website.

CAF vouchers include Gift Aid so further tax cannot be reclaimed. Vouchers should be sent to CAF for the sum to be credited to the appropriate bank account. Information is on the back of the voucher.

### **8 End of the year account checking, the Annual Consolidation and Independent Examination**

As soon as the end of the year bank statement is available, the accounts need to be reconciled and the annual SoFA prepared by the LM treasurer, Premises treasurer, High Leigh treasurer or AM Bookkeeper/treasurer.

A Friend from another meeting, approved by the Treasurers' Committee, must check the accounts. Checking the account requires ensuring the cheque books, paying in books and details of receipts and payments tally with the accounts spreadsheets, bank statements and the SoFA. A signed statement to this effect should be attached to the accounts. The SoFA, end of year bank statement and signed statement should be sent to the Trustee (Finance), who will arrange for the AM accounts to be consolidated for independent Examination and reporting.

The AM's Consolidator of accounts will produce a SoFA showing all the constituent accounts of the NETAQM. This, together with the paperwork for the Area Meeting's accounts, end of year bank statement, and SoFA are sent for Independent Examination. In addition, one set of Local Meeting accounts are also examined each year. The Independent Examiner is currently Murus Smith Accountants.

Once examined and any issues resolved, the examiner will sign off the accounts in accordance with charity reporting. The accounts and annual report are approved by Trustees and signed by the Clerk to Trustees and the Trustee (Finance). The Trustees will send a copy of the Annual Report and Accounts to BYM at Friends House for their records. This should take place by August following the end of the year.

### **9 Keeping and Storing records.**

It is important that all financial records on paper and held electronically are kept for seven years.

At the end of the year, the paper records including cheque books and paying in books and printouts of the electronic records should be filed together and stored safely preferably at the Meeting House, or where this is not possible, the Local Meeting should note where they are being kept. Electronic records should also be held on a USB stick or on a DVD. A metal storage cupboard will be provided at Wanstead MH for paper records and a private Cloud space for electronic records in due course.

A copy of the consolidated accounts for each year is retained at Friends House and by the examiner of the consolidated accounts.

### **10 The appointment of Treasurers, Bookkeepers and others associated with AM Finances**

The appointments of the AM bookkeeper or AM Treasurer and account signatories are made by Area Meeting from names brought forward by the AM Nominations committee.

The appointment of Local Meeting treasurers and Premises treasurers are made by Area Meeting, from names brought forward by their Local Meeting Nominations committee. One person may undertake both roles. If a suitable member or attender in good standing cannot be found for these role within the local meeting, the matter should be notified to AM Trustees to discuss a way forward.

The High Leigh Committee appoints the High Leigh Conference treasurer from amongst its members.

The Clerk to AM Treasurers' Committee is appointed from amongst its members

The Trustee (Finance) is appointed by the AM Trustees from amongst its members. If the AM Treasurer is a Trustee, or co-opted onto the Trustee body, a further Trustee responsible for finance is not required.

All people appointed to these roles are encouraged to undertake training. The AM will pay for appropriate Woodbrooke courses.

### **11 The responsibilities of Treasurers, Bookkeepers and others associated with AM finance.**

See various job descriptions appended to this document.

Where a treasurer or other person entrusted with responsibility for financial matters is no longer able, even for a temporary period, to carry out their role responsibly, they need to make this known to an overseer, elder, or the clerk of their Meeting or Committee so an alternative arrangement can be made.

### **12 Treasurers' Conference and Treasurers/Trustees' news**

Quaker Stewardship Committee arrange an annual treasurers' conference and publishes the online newsletter to help treasurer's keep up to date with issues including changes in legislation. Treasurers should arrange to receive and read the newsletter.

It is helpful if at least one treasurer in the AM can attend the conference and arrange feedback to the other treasurers.

### **13 The responsibility of Meetings and Committees for their financial affairs**

Notwithstanding the individual responsibility of those with financial roles, **everyone** in these roles needs the active and caring support of their meetings and committees who should be vigilant that financial matters are being attended to in a timely and competent manner, offering encouragement and practical help offered when it is required.

Any concerns about how financial matters are being managed need to be brought to the attention of the AM Treasurers' Committee on behalf of AM Trustees. This may be done informally in the first instance.

### **14 The Area Meeting Treasurers' Committee**

This committee serves as a subcommittee of the Trustees and is accountable to them.

The committee is made up of all local meeting and premises committee Treasurers, the AM treasurer and any member or attender undertaking financial work e.g. book keeping for the AM. Up to two other AM members who may have skills needed by the Committee may be co-opted for up to 3 years. The Committee includes at least one AM trustee at any point. The Clerk to AM Trustees and AM Clerk/Assistant Clerk may attend ex officio. The terms of service coincide with treasurers' terms of appointment. The Clerk is appointed from within the committee to serve for three years. All their meetings are held according to the guidance in Quaker Faith and Practice. (From the NETAQM Governing Document)

All treasurers are expected to attend these committee meetings.

### **15 The AM Appeal**

Each year the AM Treasurers' Committee will prepare a financial appeal pack to go to all members and attenders at the discretion of local overseers. This will include information about the financial needs of BYM, the area and local meetings, offer guidance on contributions, forms for regular giving and gift aid.

Forms for new or revised Standing Orders need to be sent to the originator's bank by the local or area meeting treasurer.

The Treasures' Committee will prepare a draft area meeting budget at their October meeting each year and Trustees will consider it for approval before the end of December.

### **16 The Area Meeting's budget and reserves policy**

Trustees will aim to balance the budget and to retain in reserve 6 months of AM expenditure not including the Six Weeks Meeting (SWM) Quota or any donations for BYM. The Area Meeting, via the North East Thames Quaker Trust gives £20,000 a year to SWM and it is not practical for the AM to attempt to raise any more in one year for the upkeep of Meeting Houses other than the Quota. Donations to BYM will reflect the state of the finances through the year with the aim of BYM receiving from members of the Area Meeting at least the average contribution made throughout the rest of the country.

## **Appendix 4 - Managing our Meeting Houses: finance matters**

### **Rationale for change**

The principle behind this suggestion is that SWM/LQPT (hereinafter SWM) should take control of and manage its own financial affairs rather than local meetings to do so on an acting as agent basis.

It doesn't seem right to me that important legal work such as the drafting of leases and much of the financial management of SWM should be done by unqualified volunteers over whom SWM LQPT has no control. It doesn't seem right that so much of the money, in the form of rental income owed to SWM, is held in bank accounts over which SWM Trustees have no control. I also believe that staff whose work is wholly in respect of buildings owned by SWM such as wardens should be employed or contracted by them even if they are recruited and managed locally. It might be argued that the law would regard SWM as actually being the employer whatever we think, as their pay is from SWM assets and their terms of employment are at the discretion of SWM.

End of year accounting would have virtually all the year's rental income included in the SWM accounts enabling a truer picture of the financial position to be produced earlier in the year. AM's consolidation should be much easier and with the current large acting as agent sums eliminated make their accounts more readily understood.

### **Practicalities - Income**

All leases, and letting contracts would be in the name of SWM, there would be a centralised online and telephone booking system and invoicing arrangement. All rental income would be paid into a single SWM bank account ensuring SWM got all the rental income due as soon as possible and this should be a much more professional and efficient income collection system. Many hirers would pay online. Payments by cheque should be sent to SWM. Any cash payments would have to be made directly into a bank.

### **Practicalities - Expenditure**

SWM would negotiate contracts for utilities such as gas and electricity, boiler and fire extinguisher servicing. This should produce a saving and such payments are usually direct debits so once running are easily managed.

For larger (say £200+) irregular items which are usually managed by LMs such as carpet cleaning, or replacing a vacuum cleaner, an invoice would be sent to SWM (scanned and sent electronically with payment made electronically to the supplier). Currently these payments are often paid by a member on a credit card and repayments made. This might continue to be possible.

More expensive items currently require SWM approval and a tendering system which could be better centralised with some approved contractors undertaking work regularly across the SWM area.

Day to day items such as cleaning materials, toilet rolls and replacement electric kettles would need to be managed locally with a small 'petty cash' system settled quarterly with till roll receipts being generally acceptable as evidence of expenditure. SWM could perhaps negotiate a deal with one of the cash and carry stores such as Macro which might produce savings. Local meeting treasurers could probably manage these small sums and it might be possible to have a card charged with a limited sum for small purchases.

## **Costs and benefits**

Such a system would need an accounts person at SWM to manage the work but as area and local meeting find it increasingly difficult to find competent people to undertake finance roles and are already as in the case at Walthamstow, having to pay, it would be better to pay one person centrally and to develop a more efficient system. Although this would be a considerable cost with large on-costs if the person was based at Friends House the role could mostly be done remotely (at-home) with perhaps one day a week attendance at FH. AMs should be able to dispense with paid bookkeeping/treasurer roles for their premises accounts. There would be an element of future-proofing if this bold step were taken.

There should be savings in utility costs and other contracts arranged across the area. CAF have introduced a £5 a month charge on CAFCash accounts and other banks are likely to do the same whilst interest rates are so low. I do not know how many premises accounts are held across the SWM area but perhaps 30. At £5 a month for each of these, this could amount to £1800 a year of income lost to SWM. If interest rates rise, it becomes more important that SWM/LQPT receives its rental income as soon as possible which would be achieved in this arrangement.

If all wardens and others employed by AMs on wholly premises matters were actually employees of SWM there would be a saving on Employers' Liability insurance premiums of about £700 pa. as currently AMs have to have their own policies, with premiums reimbursed by SWM.

Apart from probable financial benefits, the more important benefit would be the day to day control of SWM money by SWM employees. In our own Area, virtually all the problems we have had with our treasurers and accounts have stemmed from the failure to be able to control and manage money which is not actually ours. I do not think it will get any easier to appoint book-keepers and treasures and if AMs do not need to appoint premises treasurers this may help the situation.

As SWM/LQPT own the meeting houses, their Trustees have to be able to exercise control over their use as rental properties to produce the income for their upkeep. Up to now much of this control has been delegated but we are moving to a time when AMs and LMs do not have the people or expertise to act in this way. A shift to a different arrangement sooner rather than later and certainly whilst there are people able to manage the transition is strongly suggested.

## **Debbie Taylor**

Leigh on Sea LM and premises treasurer, AM Trustee (Finance)  
September 2016

## Appendix 5 - Six Weeks Meeting handbook

The handbook is a very important sourcebook for premises committees, Local Business Meetings, Area Meeting, wardens, AM-nominated representatives on LQPT. It was updated in 2015 and represents the changing role of LQPT. It is still undergoing review. The handbook covers all aspects of property stewardship and contains the accumulated knowledge and guidance from many years practice.

For the purposes of this exercise relating to our AM, we have identified some suggestions relating to our use of the handbook.

As well as the LQPT vision stated at the foreword, we could suggest it also has a shared mission: that Friends across London Meetings work together to care for our buildings and nurture our community.

### *Organisation of the handbook*

There appear to be opportunities to make changes to the way the content is organised to make it more accessible and usable for each type of user, in particular premises committee clerks and members.

These changes could include the following:

- All premises committee finance could be arranged together;
- All maintenance matters grouped together;
- There could be a section devoted to project management of major work.
- Policy and best practice belongs to an appendix, but the other four items in appendices could be integrated into the main sections. There are currently too many appendices.

### *Use of the handbook by Local Meetings and premises committees*

All matters that local meetings and premises committees need could be organised together – within the LQPT handbook or as a stand-alone handbook.

Building reference manual, checklists, confidentiality could be moved from the appendices, into a local meeting section.

The local meetings section should group together the useful explanations of LQPT, the quota, income (4.1), pooled funds (4.1.1), chain of responsibility, LQPT rep role, AM and LM roles (3.4 - 3.5), officer contacts and communications, including email assurances.

The General Responsibilities (3.6.1) could be reorganised for the LM section.

- Separate out Cleaning, Housekeeping, Maintenance.
- Routine maintenance (5.1) should be moved here, as well as emergencies (3.3), and testimonies (6.1).
- Separate out hirings guidance for Local Meetings.

Section 6 on energy and environment, section 7 technical matters, could be merged with local meeting guidance.

#### *Finance guidance*

The finance section could be simplified and expanded. What LQPT will pay for (4.2 - 4.3) is a key part of the handbook for LM premises committees. Add the pro forma for quarterly returns from 4.1.2.

#### *Guidance on major projects using contractors*

A separate section on major projects using contractors would be most helpful. Section 5.3 and 5.4 should be pulled out to stand alone. In this important section, the process could be set out as a sequence for greater clarity. The section should introduce the discipline of project management.

Cost control (4.3) could be incorporated into this.

Appointing green architects and surveyors (6.2) also.

There could be a single section on technical advice from sections 6 and 7.

#### *Quinquennial surveys*

Section 5.2 should be a stand-alone handbook for quinquennial surveys.

#### *Matters for LQPT only*

Matters for LQPT attention only could be taken out into a separate handbook, containing Taxation and ratings (4.1.4) and Acquisition of property (5.5) which LQPT trustees only need know.

#### *Details and presentation*

The title of the handbook could change - it is more plainly, 'Handbook for Quaker Property in London'. LQPT is the author, to be put at the bottom with the date.

It could be split into specific handbooks for specific users.

It would benefit from desk top publishing for ease of finding things and reading.

## Appendix 6 – An example of a major project

We learned more about one current building issue at Leigh MH, which acts as a case study for major projects. In summary:

- The latest quinquennial report mentioned internal cracks in the front wall of the building.
- The report advised repairing a faulty drain as a priority as this could have caused the cracking.
- A soakaway was dug to divert water away from the building;
- The report also says "It was noted that when viewing externally there was a fracture in the south west corner externally. It is suggested that a Structural Engineer is invited to comment. As previously mentioned this could be caused by the defective rainwater drain."
- Leigh premises committee clerk engaged a structural engineer to visit. This was cancelled so that SWM secretary could see the state of the wall himself first. He then recommended that the premises committee clerk ask the structural engineer to look at it.
- The clerk then asked a structural engineer inspect and report on what needed to be done.
- The engineer's report did not mention the drainage.
- The insurers would not pay out unless subsidence had been caused by faulty drainage.
- Leigh premises committee has sent a minute to AM and SWM. The secretary is considering how to proceed.