

## **Northumbria Area Meeting**

### **Conflicts of Interest.**

#### **Policy**

In our discernment at meetings for business we will be alert to the possibility of conflicts of interests and will follow the procedures below to ensure that all potential conflicts are recorded and addressed appropriately in such a way as to ensure that our discernment is taken in the interests of those represented by the meeting.

We do have a special case within the Society that is worthy of note. We believe that everyone in a meeting for worship can help the meeting in its discernment of the right way forward, whether or not they should formally remain outside a decision-making group (for example, because they are employees of the meeting). Those who are formally appointed to take a decision (the trustee group) must be those who ultimately carry the responsibility for it. Employees may well be valued members of the meeting, taking a full part in discerning a way forward in business affairs, but they should, nevertheless, always withdraw if a matter under discussion touches on their employment.

#### **Procedures**

Some Friends will inevitably have interests that might conceivably conflict with their position within the meeting. They may, for example, have professional skills or expertise that they are happy to place at the disposal of the meeting, but the meeting may in its turn have concerns about whether they ought to pay for the help that they are receiving. The crucial point is that such individuals should declare their interest to the meeting. They should withdraw while a particular item in which they might have a financial interest is being discussed and such withdrawal should be recorded in the minutes.

Many Friends are involved in a number of different Quaker committees or decision-making groups, both within their own meeting and in the larger Quaker community, and this is a more complex situation. Through their other work they may be aware of larger issues or of issues that impinge on the authority of another Quaker body. Some examples are given below. What is important here is that there may be a perception from outside the body, which may well be quite unjustified, that an individual Friend has been influenced in some direction that is not necessarily in the best interest of the meeting.

This is normally handled by “disclosure”, the individual disclosing this wider interest to the others present so that they are aware that difficult matters may come up for the individual concerned. In this sort of case the individual would not necessarily need to need to withdraw from the meeting, though again it is wise to record any disclosure that has been made in the relevant minute.

As Quakers, our practice is to trust each individual and each committee to act responsibly. Should a possible conflict of interest arise Friends and committees are asked to:

- consider whether they have a personal interest in the matter(s) which may be discussed (e.g. personal, employer/employee, membership of another committee or organisation)
- declare the interest to the clerk of the committee concerned, asking the committee to decide whether the individual should leave the meeting while the relevant item(s) is/are discussed. Such decisions should be minuted.

Some examples may help to illustrate the sorts of matters that need to be considered:

1. A Friend is a member of a committee that sets a budget for another committee, but is also a member of the committee that spends that budget.
2. A Friend is a member of a committee that oversees property owned by a meeting in a landlord role, but also rents property from the meeting in a tenant role.
3. A Friend is an area meeting trustee and also sits on other Quaker charities such as one that funds the maintenance of a particular meeting house owned by the meeting.
4. A Friend is a member of a committee that sets the rates that are used for meeting the expenses claims of members, but also has to submit considerable expenses claims for work that she/he has undertaken on behalf of the meeting.
5. A Friend is a member of a committee that sets the rates for hiring out rooms by the meeting, but is also a member of another body that seeks to hire the rooms.
6. A Friend has family or friends who receive benefit in kind from the meeting, such as bursary help.

It is impossible to completely avoid conflict of interest issues within a meeting. This is particularly the case when one remembers that the responsibilities and interests of close family members may also need to be considered.

Our Trustees will follow the approach advised by Quaker Stewardship in the Handbook for trustees on which this document modelled.

NAM Trustees January 2019