

Proposal for a Merged Charity Encompassing London Area Meetings

Pan London Working Group
17 January 2021

1. Background & Objectives

1.1 There are about 40 Quaker meetings in London, organised into 7 Area Meetings (AMs), with each AM being a separate charity. Quaker Faith & Practice asks each AM to appoint a Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Treasurer, Registering Officer, Custodian of Records, Nomination Committee and body of Trustees. This means that of the 1300 Friends in London, there is currently a requirement for about 67 Friends to serve as trustees. This is a high number for nominations committees to find and fill – 1 in 19 members needs to be a trustee. As the number of active Friends in London diminishes, filling these roles – as well as other Local and Area Meeting appointments (e.g. Treasurers, Premises, Elders & Overseers, Children's Committees etc.) has become increasingly challenging.

1.2 In recent years a number of groups within Britain Yearly Meeting have been considering how to simplify our structures, and reduce the time spent on administration. In 2019 Quakers across the seven London AMs began to explore 'Pan London Governance'. A Steering Group mainly made up of AM Clerks and Clerks of Trustees was established to oversee this work, and a Working Group to develop specific proposals (see Appendix 1 for members of each group). The groups have been meeting regularly since October 2019 (with some delay due to COVID-19).

1.3 One impetus for the timing of these discussions was an upcoming deadline for the 5 currently unregistered AMs to register with the Charity Commission which would have increased the administrative burden on AMs further (currently only North West London and London West AMs are registered). This registration deadline has now been extended by up to 10 years, removing one source of external pressure. However, there are many other stresses on our limited resources, meaning that we still see this work as an important priority for London Quakers.

1.4 Our overarching goal was finding a model which is simple and sustainable for the future. We assessed ideas based on the following criteria specified by the Steering Group:

- Is the arrangement simple to understand?
- Is the arrangement true to our Quaker values?
- Does the approach reduce work and risk levels for trustees and local meetings (LMs): e.g. centralised property services, employment and compliance support?
- Are fewer trustees and other roles needed?
- Does it use our financial resources efficiently?
- Does it allow for economies of scale?
- How is this arrangement likely to affect relationships between LMs/AMs and London Quakers Property Trust (LQPT)/Pan London? What degree of communications and trust is needed?
- Does this arrangement keep current AM identities but allow for future changes if AMs wish?
- What amount of change would this arrangement require?

1.5 A focus of this work was whether AMs could be combined into a single charity, with a single trustee body, thus avoiding the need for every AM to have their own trustees, and relieving AMs of some onerous legal and financial responsibilities. This reflects similar discussions taking place among several other groups of AMs – see for example Appendix 2 for changes proposed in Wales.

2. Our Current Proposal

2.1 We envisage a Pan London charity governed by a trustee body of 12-16 people, meeting about 5 times a year. This charity would be registered with the Charity Commission (as currently required given its annual income). It is expected that most London AMs would become part of this charity, but an individual AM could decide to continue to operate as a separate charity with their own trustees.

2.2 Pan London trustees would be appointed or nominated by AMs (2 or 3 from each). To maximise the information flows between the Pan London trustees and the 40 Local Meetings, we propose that each trustee would have special responsibility for maintaining two-way communication with their own LM and one or two neighbouring ones. This should ensure that Trustees can effectively reflect the members in the LMs they cover, and have sufficient oversight to monitor compliance with important policies at the LM level.

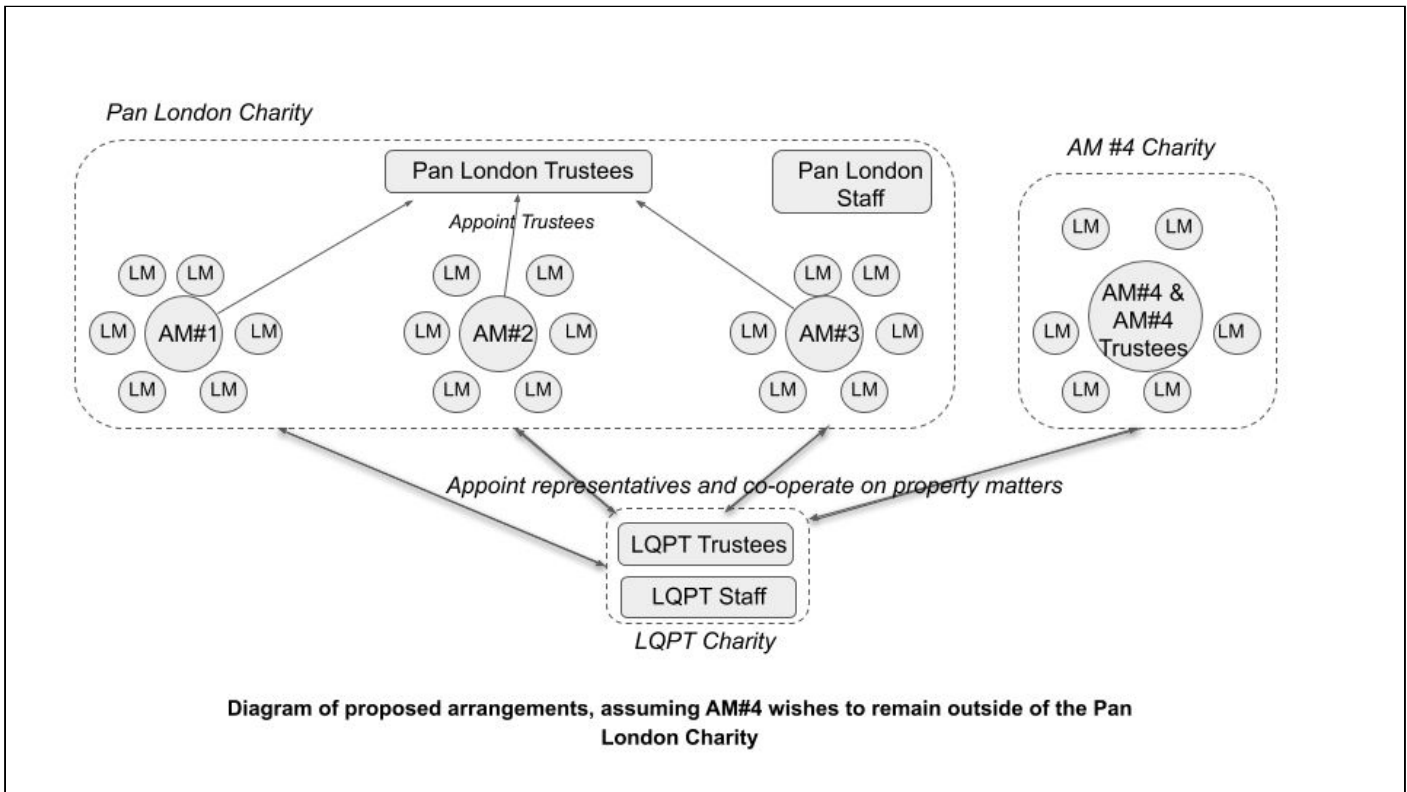
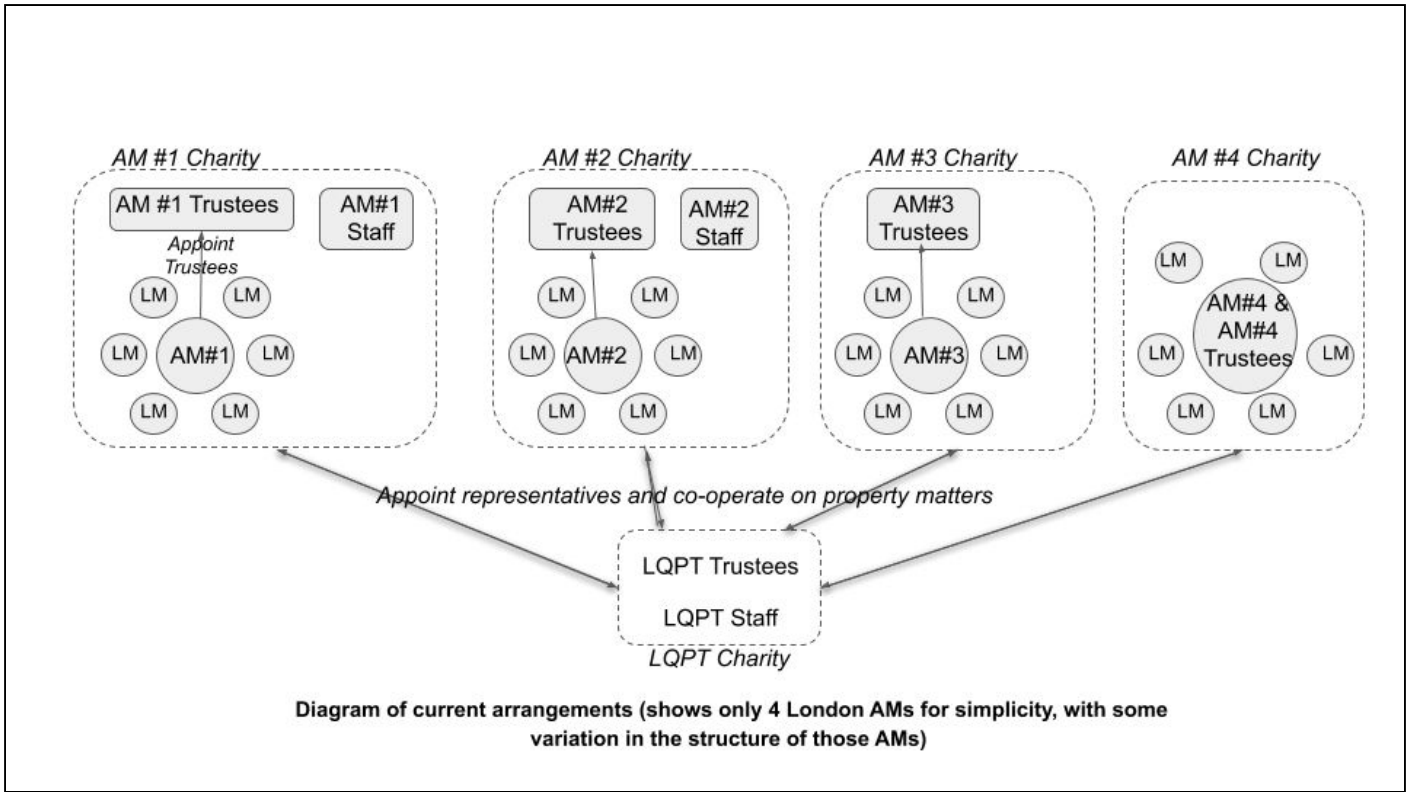
2.3 The Pan London charity would have meetings open to all members and attenders. At a minimum these would be annual, but if Friends wanted these could be biannual or quarterly to provide an opportunity for shared Meeting for Worship, other meetings (like gatherings of London Elders/Overseers) and social events (as quarterly / general meetings used to be many years ago). The pandemic experience has shown us that it is possible to employ the Quaker business method effectively on video conferences, thus potentially reducing the need for Pan London trustees and members to make long journeys across the city for meetings, and increasing opportunities for participation.

2.4 The Pan London charity would be responsible for Policies for Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Data Protection etc. To keep the burden on trustees manageable, we propose that professional administrative help would be employed to support key functions e.g. accountancy and bookkeeping, employment advice - perhaps paid for by a per member quota like LQPT. We recognise that the pandemic has had a major impact on our income, but this may change again in the future. All funds (aside from LQPT's) would belong to the Pan London charity, with AMs and LMs having delegated budgets. So the Pan London charity would need to handle the overall financial health of the charity, and any major financial issues across London. Exactly how this would be managed is important and yet to be worked out. We can draw on our experience with SWM (Six Week Meeting) and LQPT of pooling funds and upholding each other as a London-wide worshipping community.

2.5 We envisage that, at least for the time being, LQPT would continue as a separate registered charity. Some or all Pan London trustees could also be LQPT trustees. Were all London AMs to join the merged charity, it would be logical for LQPT to become more closely aligned. This might be through further merger, or perhaps by becoming a wholly owned subsidiary company, given that the members of LQPT are the AMs. If any AM remains outside the Pan London charity, any further integration of LQPT would be complicated and has not been considered.

2.6 We have left open the question of how London Quakers, an already established and recognised Quaker body, would fit into the proposed new structure. It might continue to have a role if not all AMs join the merged charity. However if all AMs do join, its activities might be better organised through the Pan London members' meeting.

2.7 The proposed structure is illustrated in the diagram below, together with a diagram of our current arrangements for comparison:



2.8 The Pan London trustee body would be responsible for all standard trustee matters. Area Meetings would continue to exist but with a more limited set of responsibilities than those laid out in QF&P 4.10, focusing for example on the membership process, and activities that bring LMs together (e.g. cross-meeting study groups or annual residentials), and activities for children & young people. LQPT would continue to be responsible for property matters for all AMs in London. Examples of the allocation of responsibilities are given in the Table, though these could evolve over time.

Table. Examples of proposed responsibilities for London Quaker Matters

Pan London Charity	Area & Local Meetings	LQPT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Administrative support for record keeping, e.g. publication of lists of members and attenders ● Overall supervision of custody of minutes and other records QF&P 4.10 j ● Preparation of consolidated accounts (Statement of Financial Activities and Balance Sheet) QF&P 4.10 l & m ● Overall financial health of the charity, and determination of how funds are delegated to AMs ● Trustees annual report QF&P 4.10 l & m ● Employment of staff working in LMs, including payroll and tax & HR ● Contracts with service providers ● Policies for Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Data Protection etc QF&P 4.10 t ● Charity Commission compliance QF&P 4.10 c & t ● Facilitate connections and support roles across AMs/LMs ● London Link Group (Young Quakers in London) <p>(Relationship with London Quakers to be determined)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintaining records of members and attenders, & Tabular Statement QF&P 4.07 f, g & h ● Eldership and oversight QF&P 4.10 d ● Applications and decisions on membership, and level where membership is held ● Custody of their minutes and other records QF&P 4.10 j ● Managing local and/or area budgets ● Financial record keeping using a harmonised system to enable the Pan London trustees to prepare consolidated accounts ● Children’s and young people’s meetings ● Concerns ● Social and spiritual gatherings and activities e.g. residentials, study groups ● Local outreach ● Implementation of Pan London policies e.g. Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Data Protection etc ● Appointment or nomination of trustees to Pan London charity and to LQPT ● Right holding of MfW ● Right holding of MfWfB within constituent meetings QF&P 4.10 b ● Use of A&Q QF&P 4.10 e ● Advice on wills ● Supervision & recording of marriages QF&P 4.10 m ● Deaths ● Provision of advice on funerals & supervision and recording of burials QF&P 4.10 n & o ● Maintenance and use of libraries QF&P 4.10 q ● Nomination of prison chaplains QF&P 4.10 r 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Management of properties of all AMs in London (as now) ● Facilitate connections between premises committees across London <p>(LQPT is currently considering how it can better support Local Premises Committees and Treasures in management of meeting houses)</p>

2.9 We also considered a range of alternative proposals for the organisation of Quakers in London – the main ones are summarised in Appendix 3, together with the reasons why they were not taken forward at this stage.

3. Next Steps

3.1 Our intention in this initial proposal is to provide enough information about our current thinking so that Friends can give us constructive feedback which we can incorporate into a second fully detailed proposal for decision by AMs.

3.2 In particular, we recognise that this outline proposal would need considerable further work and wider consultation on the details of how specific issues would be managed, such as employment issues, addressing safeguarding concerns, engagement with Yearly Meeting (e.g. Meeting for Sufferings representation), laying down a Meeting, or setting up a practical project based on a tested Quaker concern, how the responsibility for finances would be shared. We are also aware that the specific legal form of the new charity is still to be determined, and that professional advice may be needed on this point. Please send us other ideas for such specific issues, which we could turn into worked examples for the final paper.

**We welcome your comments, suggestions
and challenging questions!**

Appendix 1 – Steering Group and Working Group Membership

Steering Group: Helen Drewery (clerk, SL AM), Mary Aiston (K&W AM), Fred Ashmore (London Quakers and K&W AM), Lesley Bacon (SEL AM), Barbara Cairns (SL AM), Rod Harper (NWL AM), Tim Heath (NWL AM), David Irwin (assistant clerk; NET AM), Bruce Johnson (NL AM), Jo Law (NET AM), Jonathan Lingham (LW AM), Caroline Nursey (LW AM), Bernadette O'Shea (LQPT), Yvonne Rigby (SEL AM), James Robertson (LW AM), Catherine Utley (NL AM). Former member: Trottie Kirwan.

Working Group: Alan Smillie (clerk, SL AM), Barbara Limon (SEL AM), Catherine Goodman (K&W AM), Peter Daniels (LQPT), Daphne Stedman (NET AM), Dugan Cummings (NWL AM), Jenny Moy (NWL AM), Jonathan Carmichael (BYM Staff), Judith Roads (NET AM), Keith Walton (K&W AM), Loveday Shewell (LW AM), Anna Sharman (NL AM), Richard Martin (LQPT), Sandra Horsfall (LW AM), Sarah Totterdell (SL AM), Susan Newsom (NL AM), Peter Ede (SEL AM). Former members: Mary Stiasny (SEL AM), William Weston (NET AM).

Appendix 2 - Recent Discussions of Changes to Quaker Governance in Wales

Over the past few years, several other groups of AMs have been considering similar issues to us. For example, in mid-2020 Friends in Wales agreed a set of changes to the way they are organised. The changes are outlined in the following documents, and this short video is recommended as an accessible and entertaining summary:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrnhypiZJw0&feature=youtu.be>.

The Welsh group, "Moving Forward / Symud Ymlaen Group" has gained agreement from their four AMs and the Meeting of Friends in Wales to move towards a single charity. These are not final decisions, but ones of principle and direction. The four AMs have also agreed to an interim arrangement, involving nominating trustees to join each other's trustee bodies, to help to draw things together.

- Proposal and Report <http://www.smquakers.org.uk/downloads/sydoc1e.pdf>
- Summary <http://www.smquakers.org.uk/downloads/sydoc3e.pdf>
- Appendices <http://www.smquakers.org.uk/downloads/sydoc5e.pdf?LMCL=QsMMpP>

Appendix 3 - Alternative models which we considered

In our deliberations we considered two main alternatives, but chose not to recommend them for the following reasons:

- 1) Continue with each Area Meeting as a separate charity, registering with the Charity Commission in due course. Share best practice and common resources like templates for policies and procedures across meetings, perhaps with the support of Friends House staff. This option has the advantage of requiring least change, as it is based around existing Quaker structures (i.e. the AMs). However we felt that this model did not provide sufficient benefit in terms of increasing simplicity or reducing roles and admin. One variant of this approach would be the model for Trusteeship used by North West London Area, where all Local Meeting Clerks and Treasurers automatically become AM Trustees if they are willing, thus tightly aligning existing Quaker governance with the legal requirements of the Charity Commission.
- 2) As per our proposal above, but with LQPT also merged into the new charity. This has much to recommend it, being the simplest model to explain, and requiring the fewest Trustees in total. However, if some London AMs choose to remain as separate charities, we would have to 'unpick' the parts of LQPT covering AMs which did not join the Pan London charity. With the current proposal, even if an AM did not join the Pan London Charity, their meeting houses could still be managed by LQPT. If all London AMs decide to join the new Pan London charity we may be able to consider also merging with LQPT at

a later stage. As mentioned above, with the current proposal the same objective of only appointing one set of trustees for LQPT and a Pan London Charity could be achieved by simply appointing the same people to both bodies.