

Handbook for trustees of Quaker meetings

2024 edition



About this handbook – creation and updating process

This handbook was commissioned by Britain Yearly Meeting and created in 2023 by Rhiannon Grant of Woodbrooke Learning & Research (www.woodbrooke.org.uk).

The research and writing process was supported by a project board including staff and volunteers from Quaker Life. It uses some material from a previous version of this handbook, written in 2014 by Quaker Stewardship Committee.

Future updates to the handbook will be administered by Quaker Life. Please contact supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk if you have further questions or identify any errors in the handbook.

Handbook for trustees of Quaker meetings

2024 edition



Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to serve the Quaker community as a trustee.

This handbook will help you understand what the role involves from a Quaker point of view, and direct you to lots of useful resources in the secular world as well. It has four main sections: the basics you need to get started, an exploration of the spiritual basis of the role, general information about charity law, and support with more detailed issues. The section on support is broken down into different topics so that you can quickly find what is relevant.

You can read this handbook in any order – there is no need to start at the beginning and read until the end unless you would find that useful. You are not expected to read it all in one go! The contents list, icons and index will help you identify sections that are relevant to you at the moment so that you can go straight to the most helpful part. You could start by flicking through, reading just the headings, or looking up an issue that is important to you. You may also like to search the digital version for key words.

We have tried to make this handbook feel friendly and hope that you will use it in a way that works for you.

This handbook is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive – it does not and cannot cover everything, or lay out exactly what should be done in a specific situation. It aims to provide guidance and directions to further information to help you and your trustee group make good decisions. The language aims to be plain and accurate without being too formal, so on some subjects you will need to refer to more technical sources as well. There are suggestions throughout on where to go for more information and when to get professional advice, and at the end there are two checklists – one for new trustees, and one list of reminders to look at annually.

This handbook supplements *Quaker faith & practice: The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* and you may find it useful to consult that as well. The latest version can be found online at <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk>.

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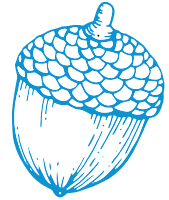
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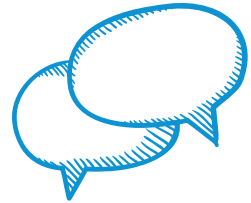
Key

The following icons will help you quickly find relevant sections.

The acorn marks sections that are especially useful for new trustees. If you read these you should have a strong foundation from which to grow into a grounded, effective and thoughtful trustee.



The speech bubbles show that a section is more discursive or talks about our experiences as a Quaker community.



The briefcase is for sections that are focussed on the legal details or key documents. In these sections you are more likely to need expert advice or to consult other sources.



The megaphone marks topics on which it is especially important for you to speak up or raise any concerns. There are often a number of issues facing trustees where naming the situation and assessing whether any action is needed as soon as possible can prevent more serious problems arising.

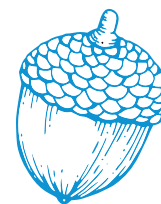


The open book (representing a minute book) appears in sections that are especially useful for clerks to trustees, including sections about how Quaker meeting for worship for business process is used in trustee meetings and ways to organise the work of the trustees.



The basics

Getting started



As a Quaker who is a trustee of a Quaker charity, you:

- continue to participate in the Quaker community
- serve the Quaker community by helping to put our leadings into action
- serve the wider community by helping the Quaker community to provide meeting for worship and other activities of public benefit
- serve the whole community by taking care of people, resources and the environment
- ensure that your Quaker charity fulfils its legal duties
- take on some legal responsibility beyond that which is expected of everyone in society
- belong to an organisation and networks that can support you in this work.

In order to do this, you should:

- participate in meetings for worship for business with your fellow trustees
- inform yourself about the work of the charity and relevant legislation
- undertake the work that is needed, which might include communicating with others, maintaining relationships, gathering information, assessing options, considering risks, preparing reports, making recommendations, and joining in decision-making processes
- know and communicate what you can and can't do, including the boundaries of your knowledge, skills, time, and energy
- seek support or undertake training when appropriate
- be patient and prayerful with whatever arises.

The most important things you need to know to get started are:

- who else is a trustee of this charity, and who is clerk of the trustees
- when and how the trustees meet
- the charity's charitable purposes and what the charity does
- the financial state of the charity and its legal structure
- where to go for help.

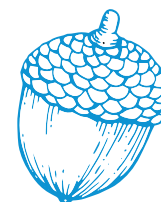
Hopefully, you already know some of these things. If you don't yet know who else is a trustee or when and how the trustees meet, the clerk of the appointing body should be able to help – for example, the area meeting clerk if you are the trustee of an area meeting. In most cases, there will also be more experienced trustees to ask – if you are all new at once, try to share out the learning you need to do. If it seems to take ages to get to know everything, be reassured that it typically takes six months or more to feel fully involved.

In most cases, Quaker trustees are trustees of an area meeting, which is registered as a charity. The guidance in this handbook may also be useful in cases where the same body of trustees cares for multiple area meetings or other Quaker charities, and for Quaker charities that are not area meetings but have their own separate trustee bodies.

If you need to know about the charitable purposes (or other key things about the charity and its status), find the charity's governing document, and if you need to know about the charity's activities and finances, the most recent annual report and accounts will help. The current clerk to trustees should be able to provide you with these. Some of these key documents are available online – search the Charity Commission register (<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search>) for England and Wales and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (www.oscr.org.uk/search/register-search) for Scotland.

The rest of this handbook includes further information about all these topics and more.

Organisations to know



- The **Charity Commission** (CC) looks after all charities and their registrations in England and Wales.

They provide guidance in their handbook, *The Essential Trustee*:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3

and a series of 5-Minute Guides to key areas:

www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-commission-guidance#minute-guides-for-charity-trustees

- In Scotland, the **Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator** (OSCR) is the relevant body.

They provide a handbook of guidance and good practice for trustees:

www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/guidance-and-good-practice-for-charity-trustees

and have many useful videos on their YouTube channel:

www.youtube.com/@OSCRScottishCharityRegulator/featured

- **Britain Yearly Meeting** (BYM) provides support for Quaker role-holders and has specific pages of resources for trustees: www.quaker.org.uk/trustees and treasurers: www.quaker.org.uk/treasurers

BYM's current book of discipline, *Quaker faith & practice*, has a chapter on Trusteeship:

<https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/15>

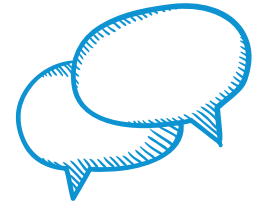
This book is currently being revised and a new version will be agreed by the yearly meeting in due course.

- **Woodbrooke** runs courses for Quaker trustees and treasurers, as well as other role-holders in Quaker communities. Upcoming courses are listed on the website: www.woodbrooke.org.uk
- The **Association of Church Accountants and Treasurers** (ACAT) provides advice, training and support for churches in the UK: www.acat.uk.com
- The **National Council for Voluntary Organisations** (NCVO) offers courses, consultancy and other services to support charities and voluntary groups of all sizes: www.ncvo.org.uk
- The **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations** offers similar support in relation to Scottish law: <https://scvo.scot>
- The **Charity Governance Code** offers guidance and sometimes aspirational principles and suggestions for applying them to both larger and smaller charities: www.charitygovernancecode.org/en

The spiritual basis of Quaker trusteeship

What it means to be a trustee

A Quaker trustee serves the Quaker community – usually an area meeting, or sometimes another Quaker charity or wider group – by looking after the property, money, legal compliance and the duties that enable the whole group to witness and worship.



From the point of view of the law, a group of trustees cares for the assets of a charitable trust and ensures that these assets are used for the purposes for which the trust was established. Trustees make sure that the charity, such as the area meeting, and all its assets are administered in the interest of current, potential and future beneficiaries. Much of the work of trustees therefore involves caring for practical matters, such as finance and property, in the service of the work to which the community is led. That work includes the regular and unnoticed, such as the cleaning of meeting houses and the holding of worship, as well as special projects and particular concerns that can attract more attention.

Trusteeship also goes beyond issues of finance, property, employment, and safeguarding. It is to do with ensuring that the meeting is well run, with proper regard for the law and for good practice in general. The care of our Society is laid upon everyone involved, but the formally appointed trustees are members of the community who are asked to ensure that things are being done properly. This might mean providing support, asking awkward questions, checking that the community has relevant information about legal requirements, leaving projects alone when they are fine, or simply maintaining contact to know how things are going.

When you become a trustee, you take on – for the time during which you serve – a particular responsibility within the Quaker community. This can be a source of insight and joy. It can also become a burden or make you feel isolated from others who do not have the same knowledge and understanding. It is important to remember that it does not separate you from the community as a whole or from the Light that guides us all.

“In the multiplicity of details and in the pressure of business, a committee may lose the keen sense of mission to attempt and achieve great tasks. The committee, like the individual, needs time to think and it needs an attitude of mind and soul which can make it able to receive what is of God about its work. We cannot be too clear that it is nothing less than ‘a new thing’ which will meet the situation. Individually the faith of most of us is too weak sufficiently to grasp the promise ‘Behold I will do a new thing’ (Isaiah 43.19) but a committee which grasps with corporate faith such a promise is the committee which will have the spirit of adventure in attempting the humanly impossible. And those who trust God, discover God.”

Friends Prayer League 1914, quoted as *Christian Faith & Practice* section 357

Being a charity and a church



In Britain Yearly Meeting, we are a faith community (a church, in the language of our Christian tradition) that also functions as a charity. The details of structures vary, but in most places there is a worshipping community consisting of an area meeting, which is registered as a charity and has a trustee body. When you serve as a trustee of a Quaker meeting you are serving that whole community – all the local meetings within an area meeting, and in some cases all the area meetings in a wider body. The church and the charity can't be separated, although sometimes it's useful to discuss them differently.

Our goal for our organisation is to have a simple structure that does what we need to do in order to support the work we are called to do. What this means for your Quaker community and for you as a trustee depends on the circumstances. It may mean asking questions like:

- can we share this work with others?
- do we have the committees we need for the work we do, not too many nor too few?
- what work needs to be done by a nominated Quaker and what work could be done by employing someone?

The videos and documents from the Simpler Meetings project may be helpful in exploring this further: www.quaker.org.uk/simpler.

If you are interested in this history of our structures, the following background may help you to understand how we got here:

- 1990s-present: Religious charities, previously in a different legal category, have had to register with OSCR and the Charity Commission. This has been a process with several steps as charities in different categories (e.g. with more or less income) have been required to register. Some churches are still exempted but this situation is expected to end on 31 March 2031. For details of this, see www.gov.uk/government/publications/excepted-charities/excepted-charities--2.
- 2005: Yearly Meeting considered the RECAST report. (RECAST stood for Responsibility, Communication and Accountability in our Structures.) This led to the governance of the Society being enhanced and roles clarified. Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings appointed their own trustees, freeing those roles from Meeting for Sufferings in Britain Yearly Meeting and meetings for church affairs in area meetings.



Photo by Shane Rounce on Unsplash

Reflections from other Quaker trustees

The following reflections have been chosen to offer a variety of perspectives on what it means and what it feels like to be a Quaker trustee.

In 2013 Britain Yearly Meeting explored 'Trust in Quaker Trusteeship'. The minute gives some of our discerned, collective perspective on being and having trustees:

"We have continued our consideration of what it means to be a Quaker today by focusing on Quaker Trusteeship. We have been reminded that our spiritual journey is about living in the world and wrestling with the tensions between living out the testimonies and dealing with practical, financial and property matters. The real test of our faith is whether we can connect with the spirit in the mess of our daily lives.

Having bodies of named trustees is therefore not about giving all the power to a small group but making sure that all the difficult work gets done. Nor should we be surprised if mistakes are made, as this is where we as individuals fail as well. Both trustees and meetings need to hold each other in the light and above all to keep the lines of communication live and vibrant. We all belong to the same worshipping community, we are all working together and it is the same spirit that leads us.

Community is two way. Trustees need to empower other Friends to ask questions, perhaps by making minutes more widely available, and other Friends need to talk to trustees and ask for information. This openness will in turn support trustees in their work. God has placed trust in us. We need to honour that trust in moving forward together to build the Kingdom."

Jennifer Barraclough shares some of her experience as a member of trustee bodies both within and outside the Quaker community:

"It's hard work, sometimes frustrating, sometimes alarming – as chair or clerk of various boards, I've joked that I'd be one the one going to prison if something goes wrong, then gone home and realised the truth of the joke.

It can be difficult, complicated work and it does expect a high degree of literacy and intellectual ability – except that it needn't ask it of every trustee in equal measure, and we should be more inventive about the ways the work is done, to ensure that a properly diverse range of skills and life experience can be brought to the table.

I treasure trusteeship. It has given my work and my relationships meaning, it has deepened my Quaker life and enabled me to share good Quaker practice beyond the Society of Friends. Above all, it has helped me live out the truth that 'our life is love, and peace and tenderness....and praying one for another and helping one another up with a tender hand'."

Voirrey Faragher writes about the group becoming one as they work together:

"I am co-clerk of our area meeting trustees. The work can be stressful when we try to get our heads around a difficult issue or when we realise we carry a heavy weight re the well-being of our Meeting or when it is hard for us to reach agreement. Yet I enjoy this role - it is an area where I feel I have the skills to be of service. It is rewarding when we feel we, as Quakers, are achieving something. It is great when we are bonded and united. It is joyful when we feel uplifted, when we feel as one, when we trust one another and feel trusted. Everything about trustees is spiritual because we are working together in the Light, in right ordering, within the Quaker business method."

Raymond Thompson describes a particular situation in which trustees and other Friends worked together to achieve something neither group could have managed on their own:

“At an area meeting, a group of Friends were getting very excited about the idea of purchasing a former chapel to be a new Quaker meeting house in a locality with Quakers living nearby but where a meeting house was several miles away. This group, no criticism intended, did not have much idea of how to go about it. In any case, it had to involve the trustees to whom this daunting, even frightening, task was passed. There was no reason to say “No” – we had some money from a legacy that had originally been given to one of the local meetings that could not make use of it. So, we needed an appeal and a loan to get going. It took some time, of course, but the old decaying chapel was transformed into a very fine meeting house, home to a thriving Quaker community.

The trustees could never have decided to set up this meeting house on their own. There was a group of Friends with the vision and a group of Friends, the trustees, who worked out how to achieve that vision – a real exemplar of how an area meeting and its trustees can, and should, work together.”

Deborah Rowlands reflects on the connections between different aspects of the role:

“The stressful, joyful and the spiritual are often all woven together. It is undertaking a potentially difficult (and perhaps ‘boring’) task on behalf of Friends in the company of other Friends who bring their own skills, knowledge and experience (often very different from mine) to the discussion that I find all three.

The stress is in trying to grapple with unfamiliar language or concepts which I find baffling, working with people whose timetables are different from mine, or in the times when Friends are fixed in their ideas and not really listening to each other. This latter has not been a feature of my time as a trustee – we seem genuinely to wish to make the most of one another’s skills.

The joy is the shared endeavour in recognising the principles which should govern our approach which usually means that we can deal with specifics quite easily.

And the spiritual is not an add-on little bit at the beginning (though suitable readings etc can help to create the right atmosphere in a meeting) but it’s the moment when someone sees ‘the new thing’, the link with Quaker spirituality, or bring us back to a shared understanding.”

Alan York wrote at the end of an article for South Wales Area Meeting in 2010:

“A trustee body always contains a wide range of experience and interest among its members. Don’t worry if you hate budgets, or if, indeed, budgets are the only thing you are confident about. There is always at least one other trustee who has a better understanding of the areas you may be nervous about. And, Quakers being Quakers, the discussion will always enable the more knowledgeable to make things clear to the rest of us.

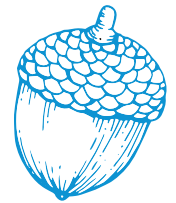
And then a marvellous thing happens. As time passes you gain in confidence, experience, and knowledge. You take a bit of training, and you find yourself dealing with matters you never thought you could deal with. The whole thing becomes a real pleasure, because you find yourself privileged to serve the Society in ways you maybe never thought possible.

In the end it is a joy, and I thoroughly recommend it.”

Charity law basics

What it means to be a trustee

As charities, Quaker area meetings sit within an overarching framework of charity law. Charity law is clear about the duties which charity trustees have. The Charity Commission for England and Wales and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) provide a range of support and guidance to charities and regulate their compliance with charity law. (For more information on these, see the section on ‘Organisations to know’ on page 8.)



What is a charity?

A charity is an organisation that is set up for charitable purposes and operates for the public benefit. The charity – and its trustees – must work towards achieving those purposes.

All charities within the Quaker church will have charitable purposes. Quaker area meetings are set up for the charitable purpose of furthering the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends, in the area where the meeting works.

What are our charitable purposes?

To be a charity, a trust must have charitable purposes and provide public benefit.

Churches, such as the Religious Society of Friends, meet the public benefit test through providing facilities to support their activities, including provision of places of worship that are open to the public. In general, all charities, apart from some trusts for the relief of poverty, must be for the benefit of the community or for an appreciable section of it, and not restricted to a particular group of people.



Quaker meetings are regarded as charities for the advancement of religion. This is understood broadly – a religion may involve belief in multiple gods, one god, or no gods, and religious practice, educating people about a particular religion, and maintaining religious premises such as places of worship and burial grounds can all be included. For more details on how this is understood, see www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/meeting-the-charity-test-guidance/c-the-advancement-of-religion for Scotland or www.gov.uk/government/publications/charitable-purposes/charitable-purposes#the-advancement-of-religion for England and Wales.

Specifically, the wording agreed by the Charity Commission and Britain Yearly Meeting in session (in 2005) is that Quaker meetings should have the following as their object in governing documents:

“The furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain (or in the area of a particular Monthly Meeting) and beyond.

The religious purposes of the Society include:

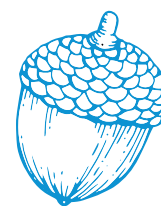
- a) holding public meetings for worship
- b) fostering the spiritual life and spiritual development of all members and attenders at these meetings.”

This objective might be achieved through attendance at Quaker conferences and courses, the provision of literature, etc. Other charitable activities bearing witness to the principles and practice of the Society would include education and the relief of poverty of members and attenders associated with our meetings, and social projects carried out by the meeting for the benefit of the wider community. The constraints are that such activities must be charitable, and they must be undertaken under the concern and direction of the meeting itself.

The phrase “and beyond” indicates that, although there is a main geographical area in which the charitable objects are focused, there is no strict geographical limitation.

As well as the advancement of religion many meetings also have additional trusts connected with them and these may have other charitable purposes. For example, funds for the relief of poverty (overseers’ funds) or the advancement of education (bursary funds), homes for the elderly, or other activities. In some cases charitable trusts associated with meetings have been registered with the Charity Commission or with OSCR separately to the area meeting. In other cases, such charitable work has been taken to be part of the Quaker witness of the meeting and to be covered by the meeting’s own charitable status.

While a charity may have more than one charitable purpose, no charity may have an additional purpose that is not itself charitable.



What are the implications of being a charity?

All the work that a charity does must be devoted towards achieving its purposes.

This means:

- The trustees, who serve and guide the charity, have a primary legal responsibility to further the charity’s purposes.
- The charity’s resources - including its property, time and reputation - must be used towards its purposes. The trustees and members cannot receive financial benefits from the charity, except in very limited circumstances.
- In the unlikely event that a charity needs to close, its resources must be used for its charitable purposes.

Charities benefit from a range of tax reliefs and exemptions. They don’t generally pay tax; they can claim Gift Aid on many donations which are made to them; and their premises usually qualify from significant relief from business rates.

All Quaker charities in England, Scotland and Wales are regulated by the Charity Commission for England and Wales, or the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. They may (but will not always) be registered with one of these regulators, meaning that they have to file accounts and other information at least annually. These regulators are responsible for overseeing charitable activity: they can provide support and guidance, and also have powers to step in if they have any concerns about a charity.

What does this mean for trustees?

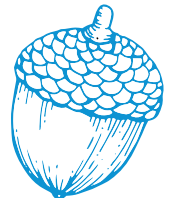
The term “trustee” can be helpful since it gives a sense of the trust which the law places in those responsible for running a charity. In working to further their charity’s purposes, trustees are expected to:

- comply with the charity’s governing document and the law: this covers issues like making sure that the trustees are properly appointed and that trustees’ meetings are properly run;
- act in the charity’s best interests: this includes taking steps to manage any conflicts which there might be between a trustee’s own personal interests and loyalties, and the interests of the charity;
- manage the charity’s resources responsibly;

- act with reasonable care and skill – if a trustee has particular experience or skills they will be expected to use them – and trustees will be expected to seek advice when they need to; and
- ensure their charity is accountable: one of the implications of this is that trustees can only delegate decision-making to others (for example, to committees) if they have power to do so in their governing document.

Breach of these duties can mean that the trustees are liable to make good any resulting loss to their charity.

There is useful detail about these duties in the Charity Commission's guidance [The Essential Trustee](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3), www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3 and OSCR's Guidance and good practice for Charity Trustees www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/guidance-and-good-practice-for-charity-trustees



Understanding the broader responsibilities of running a charity

All charities within the Quaker church including area meetings are affected by the same laws as other organisations, as well as some particular rules that apply exclusively to charities. The following are likely to be particularly relevant:

- **Trading:** Charities are only able to trade – ie buy and sell goods and services – in limited circumstances – such as where the trading activity actually furthers the charity's primary purposes or falls within a "small scale" limit.

See Charity Commission guidance CC35: Trustees trading and tax: how charities may lawfully trade www.gov.uk/government/publications/trustees-trading-and-tax-how-charities-may-lawfully-trade-cc35/trustees-trading-and-tax-how-charities-may-lawfully-trade

and OSCR's Charities and Trading Guide www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/charities-and-trading-guide

- **Political activities and campaigning:** A charity can carry out campaigning activity to further its purposes, where that activity raises awareness and campaigns for change. But a charity must not give its support to any one political party, nor can political campaigning (including campaigning to secure a change in the law or policy) be a charity's sole and continuing activity. At election times, charities must act within electoral law.

See Charity Commission guidance Campaigning and political activity guidance for charities www.gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities

and OSCR's Campaigning on political issues FAQs www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/managing-a-charity-guidance/campaigning-on-political-issues-faqs

- **Fundraising:** Charity fundraising can have legal, tax and VAT considerations. Charities should always be alert to the need to protect their charity's reputation when fundraising. Fundraising is regulated by the main charity regulators and by the Fundraising Regulator in England and Wales and the Scottish Fundraising Standards Panel in Scotland.

See Charity Commission guidance Charity fundraising: a guide to trustee duties (CC20) www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-fundraising-cc20

and OSCR webpage www.oscr.org.uk/managing-a-charity/fundraising

- **Land:** When charities sell, lease, grant interests in or mortgage land in England and Wales, they must comply with specific rules that apply to charity land.

See Charity Commission guidance Sales, leases, transfers or mortgages: what trustees need to know about disposing of charity land (CC28) www.gov.uk/government/publications/sales-leases-transfers-or-mortgages-what-trustees-need-to-know-about-disposing-of-charity-land-cc28

For Scotland, land law is different but see guidance for charities from the Scottish Land Commission: www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/5eecd1aa5d4c8_20200622-LRRS-GP-CharitiesProtocol.pdf

- **Investment:** Charity trustees need to be mindful of their duty to safeguard their charity's assets when investing charity funds. They can take non-financial considerations into account to some extent. Most charities may carry out social investment, which has the dual purpose of furthering the charity's purposes and producing a financial return. There is more information about investments on p33.

See Charity Commission guidance Investing charity money: guidance for trustees (CC14) www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-investment-matters-a-guide-for-trustees-cc14

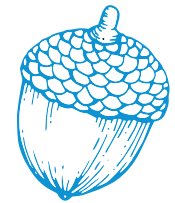
and OSCR guidance Charity investments: Guidance and good practice www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/accounts-and-finance-guidance/charity-investments-guidance-and-good-practice

- **Employment:** Charities, just like other employers, need to comply with employment and equality law. There is a full section on employment on p37.
- **Data Protection:** Trustees of Quaker charities must make sure that their charity complies with data protection legislation when dealing with information about their members and attendees. There is a full section on data protection on p38.
- **Safeguarding:** Quaker charities are committed to protecting people from abuse. The Charity Commission and OSCR publish guidance on safeguarding and a range of support is available. There is a full section on safeguarding on p35. If there is immediate danger, call the police on 999 or NSPCC on 0808 800 5000. The charity thirtyone:eight provides safeguarding training, help with DBS checks, and a helpline for questions and advice. Most area meetings are already members. <https://thirtyoneeight.org>
- **Financial procedures:** Charities, along with other organisations, should make sure that they have proper financial procedures in place to guard against fraud and mismanagement.
See Charity Commission guidance Internal financial controls for charities (CC8) www.gov.uk/government/publications/internal-financial-controls-for-charities-cc8
OSCR provide guidance too: www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/fraud-how-to-reduce-the-risks-in-your-charity
- **Risk management:** Charities must manage risk. There are some obligations to include information about risk management in the charity's annual report. There is a full section on managing risk on p34.
- **Accountability:** Charities registered with the Charity Commission or OSCR must file information with their regulator at least annually. If something that threatens to have a significant impact on the charity or its assets has happened, or is happening, all Quaker charities must notify the relevant regulator: this is called either a "serious incident" (Charity Commission) or a "notifiable event" (OSCR). Some charities are structured as companies: they have responsibilities to file information with Companies House (for more about different structures, see the section on p24 on deciding legal status).
For information about how to report serious incidents and notifiable events, see www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-serious-incident-in-your-charity and www.oscr.org.uk/managing-a-charity/notifiable-events/

Many of these areas are also covered in the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings.

Finding support

When you're appointed as a trustee



When you're appointed as a trustee, you should be given some relevant documents, including this handbook, the charity's Governing Document, and the terms of references for the trustee body. In many cases there will be an induction process. This could be for a small group or a one-to-one meeting in which a more experienced trustee talks through the current situation.

Trustees' responsibility is shared between the group of trustees. As trustees, you are responsible for your trust as a body, and must not act individually, except within defined parameters (for example, the work of the treasurer). Trustees should always be appointed as named individuals. The meeting's governing document may specify that certain office bearers (such as the treasurer or the clerk of the premises committee) should be trustees, but these individuals should be specifically appointed as trustees by a minute of the meeting in which they are named.

All decisions of the trustees should be taken jointly in a spirit of worship, and should be recorded by minute during the meeting. Trustees hold a special position of responsibility within the meeting and this requires that the trustees between them should:

- be aware of the concerns of the meeting
- always act with probity and due prudence, and seek professional advice on any matter on which nobody among the trustees has relevant expertise
- ensure that employed staff are properly overseen
- ensure proper minutes are kept, and records of contracts and other commitments are maintained
- hold themselves accountable to the members of the Religious Society of Friends (and to the general public) for their decisions, and for the work undertaken by the meeting, reporting regularly to the relevant meeting or meetings in session
- as a general rule not let their personal views take precedence over the interests of the meeting, aiming to exercise the same degree of care in dealing with the administration of their charity as a prudent business person would exercise carrying out their own business affairs
- avoid conflict of interest between themselves, their families and friends, and the meeting. If exceptional circumstances justify a trustee or their family or friends receiving benefit as a result of their work, great care must be taken to show why this is in the overall best interest of the meeting (see [4.8] below on conflicts of interest)
- ensure that there is no personal financial benefit from being a trustee. This means that an employee of the meeting, such as a warden, cannot satisfactorily act as a trustee. If it is suggested that a trustee should provide professional services to the meeting, whether paid for or not, this must be thought through very carefully
- not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside organisations that might influence them in the performance of their duties as trustees and, when appropriate, should declare conflicts of interest and absent themselves from further discussion on such matters
- ensure that all orders, contracts, and commitments are made in the name of and on behalf of the meeting, and not in the name of individuals

- when entering into contracts and other commitments on behalf of the meeting, ensure that adequate resources will be available to meet the bills as they fall due.

A breach of trust can arise if funds are applied other than for the charitable purposes of the meeting, or if there is a failure to comply with statutory requirements, or if losses occur through unauthorised investments or negligent failure to insure buildings, etc.

When you become a trustee, you should be given a clear explanation of your responsibilities and access to all the relevant documents. You should also sign and deposit with the clerk of trustees:

a. **'Fit and Proper Person' declaration**

(see the help sheet and declaration here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/597664/Fit-and-proper-persons-helpsheet-and-declaration.pdf which is relevant to trustees throughout the UK)

b. **'Disclosure of interests' form**

(see the section on Support with conflicts of interest).

Trustees' appointments and terms of office should always be recorded by minute of the meeting, and the names of those serving in this capacity should be recorded in each year's annual report.

In all of this it's important that trustees work cooperatively, both as a trustee body and as part of the Quaker community which they support. As an individual trustee, you can turn to other trustees and other members of your Quaker community for support, including your local development worker. You may find it useful to connect with other Quaker trustees, directly or through conferences and Woodbrooke courses. Quaker Life staff members can also be contacted for support.

To explore this further, you may find it useful to read the explanations, questions and examples in the NCVO's page on the legal duties of trustees: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance/responsibilities-for-boards/the-legal-duties-of-trustees

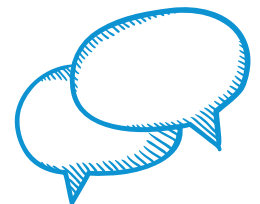
Area meetings that are already registered as charities already have a governing document, and it is important to refer to yours specifically in case there are small changes from the sample one. However, a template can be downloaded from here: www.quaker.org.uk/trustees

If you are in the position of registering a new Quaker charity, the sample governing document should be followed with a minimum of changes as this language was negotiated specifically with the Charity Commission/OSCR. If changes are needed, these will need to be listed and explained.

There is a checklist for new trustees at the end of this handbook. It includes a list of documents which should be provided to new trustees and suggested questions new trustees might want to ask themselves and others.

Support with Quaker decision-making

Quaker trustees discern the way forward in the same way as all other Quaker meetings. Our book of discipline, *Quaker faith & practice*, offer plenty of advice on this. What follows picks out some key points which are important in the context of trustee work.



- **Worship.** We make decisions in a meeting for worship for business. There should be enough time for silence before and after the business, and between contributions. This creates space for prayerful discernment. Although some items may lend themselves to discussion and direct replies, to air different views or to explore a topic, it will help to make sure that this activity is surrounded by periods of stillness which allow what has been said to be truly heard.

“Our meetings for church affairs, in which we conduct our business, are also meetings for worship based on silence, and they carry the same expectation that God’s guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other, and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions. It is this belief that God’s will can be recognised through the discipline of silent waiting which distinguishes our decision-making process from the secular idea of consensus. We have a common purpose in seeking God’s will through waiting and listening, believing that every activity of life should be subject to divine guidance.”

Quaker faith & practice 3.02

- **Preparation.** We try to come to these meetings, as to any worship, with hearts and minds prepared. In trustee work, there may be an emphasis on the preparation of the mind through reading papers and other research. But decisions can be emotional too, and taking time to open our hearts to different perspectives and to hold situations in the light is also valuable preparation. Some Friends may also find it useful to consider the physical and social aspects of preparing for a meeting: sharing a meal in advance, bringing a cushion, checking in about how people feel, and other simple and practical measures can all help the worship deepen. For clerks, preparing the agenda in a patient and prayerful way, ensuring that space is given to all the topics which need to be covered, is also important.

~ It can help to plan meetings well in advance. Arranging meetings for a full year ahead is common and helps to plan agenda items, such as the annual report, in good time.

~ It can help to keep a forward agenda document, either just for the clerks or for all trustees. This might include items which need to be taken every year, items such as reports from subgroups which can be easily foreseen, and other items as they arise (for example, anything to which you decide to return in a future meeting).

- **Discernment.** As each agenda item is placed before the meeting, those gathered try to sense what we are being led to do in that time, place, and situation. This leading may be expressed in terms of the guidance of God, the movement of the Spirit, the promptings of love and truth, or in other ways. The discernment should take into account factual and emotional matters as well as relevant professional advice, but the resulting decision can be right even if it does not follow recommendations, does not appear sensible in worldly terms such as those of maximising financial gains, or is upsetting to some people. A discernment process may include a time of threshing – getting issues out into the open or airing multiple perspectives – which may not follow the same structure as formal clerked sessions. This can help people to share and listen more deeply especially where a decision or situation is difficult. As the discernment moves towards a conclusion, it is the clerk’s role to identify and articulate the meeting’s sense of the right way forward.

“The unity we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other’s utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognise and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting views have been heard and considered. We do not vote in our meetings, because we believe that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views and inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God. We must recognise, however, that a minority view may well continue to exist. When we unite with a minute offered by our clerk, we express, not a sudden agreement of everyone present with the prevailing view, but rather a confidence in our tried and tested way of seeking to recognise God’s will. We act as a community, whose members love and trust each other.”

Quaker faith & practice 3.06

- **Listening.** As we wait in worship, we are listening to each other and what is within and beyond us. We need to be patient with ourselves, our communities, and the process: spiritual matters do not always advance according to clock time. As each agenda item is placed before the meeting, those gathered try to sense what we are being led to do in that time, place, and situation. This leading may be expressed in terms of the guidance of God, the movement of the Spirit, the promptings of love and truth, or in other ways. The discernment should take into account factual and emotional matters as well as relevant professional advice, but the resulting decision can be right even if it does not follow recommendations, does not appear sensible in worldly terms such as those of maximising financial gains, or is upsetting to some people. A discernment process may include a time of threshing – getting issues out into the open or airing multiple perspectives – which may not follow the same structure as formal clerked sessions. This can help people to share and listen more deeply especially where a decision or situation is difficult. As the discernment moves towards a conclusion, it is the clerk’s role to identify and articulate the meeting’s sense of the right way forward.

“[W]e are called to honour our testimony that to every one is given a measure of the light, and that it is in the sharing of knowledge, experience and concern that the way towards unity will be found.”

Quaker faith & practice 3.05

It is also worth thinking about how and where meetings for worship for business are held. We should ask:

- Is this venue accessible for everyone who needs or wants to attend? For example, at a physical location we may need to think about parking, public transport routes, wheelchair access, loop systems for hearing aid users, and so on. For an online video conferencing meeting, we may think about technical support and internet access, whether to use captions, the costs and benefits of having cameras on, and other factors.
- Is the time accessible? For example, we may need to take into account people’s other commitments, such as to paid or voluntary work, care for children or family members, whether it is too late or early in the day, journey times, how long they spend on screens, etc.
- Is the length of the meeting and the way we run it supportive of all our needs? There needs to be enough time to complete the work without rushing or skipping over items, but also include enough breaks to prevent tiredness, hunger, etc. Among other things, unmet physical needs make it more difficult to discern well.
- Does this venue support us in holding our meeting in right ordering? For example, in a blended meeting with some people physically present and others on Zoom we need to make sure that everyone can communicate freely, and especially that the clerk can have a clear sense of who has ministry to offer. We may also need to think about how we make sure we are all reasonably free from distractions,

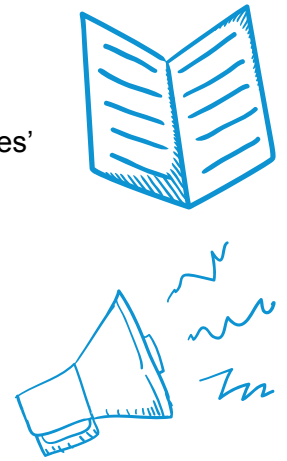
Further support with Quaker meetings for worship for business can be found through:

- *Quaker faith & practice*
- *A Guide to Quaker Clerking*, on the Woodbrooke website: www.woodbrooke.org.uk/guide-to-quaker-clerking
- Jane Mace, *God and decision-making: a Quaker approach*, published by Quaker Books, London, 2012
- Woodbrooke courses on Quaker decision-making and discernment in general, and clerking specifically – search www.woodbrooke.org.uk/our-courses for upcoming events

Support with running a trustees' meeting

Beyond the general guidelines in the previous section about holding a meeting for worship for business for trustees, this section outlines some things specific to trustees' meetings.

If you think an area meeting trustees' meeting is not working well – for example, if it does not follow the discernment process of a Quaker meeting for worship for business, if you think charity law might not be followed, or if you are missing key people or information – it is important to speak up and find out whether your concerns are shared by other trustees. It's better to ask the question, even if it turns out that everything is okay, than to discover later that there was a real problem.



Make sure you are all aware of the requirements of charity law

Every Friend appointed as a trustee should become familiar with trustees' duties and responsibilities and with the background and details of the meeting's business. Basic material about duties and responsibilities, such as the following list, might be included in induction material or discussed periodically in meetings to keep it fresh. Information about the meeting's business, including the agenda and any reports, should be circulated in advance with enough time for all the trustees to read and reflect on them.

As you go about the work, and especially through your meetings and discussions, all trustees should make sure that you are:

- safeguarding the assets of the charity
- ensuring that these assets are applied only for the proper purposes of the charity
- ensuring that your charity provides a public benefit
- providing for accounting records to be kept and annual reports and accounts to be produced
- providing advice to the community on the relevant law and regulations, and checking whether these are being followed
- ensuring that all appointments to remunerated positions are made in compliance with good employment and equal opportunities principles
- taking professional advice when it is needed

While trustees can appoint others to do work on their behalf, especially where the sums involved are small, where there is some urgency or where there has been approval in principle by the trustees or by the meeting, they cannot delegate their responsibility for what is done or for its financial consequences.

Make sure you have an appropriate number of suitably informed people present

The idea of a quorum or minimum number of decision-makers is not usually present in the Quaker understanding of a rightly held meeting for worship for business. However, even a well-intentioned group can be too small to make sufficiently considered decisions and the approved governing document we use suggests that an "effective working strength" should be present. The trustees must decide, on any particular occasion, whether that is the case. Some guidelines to bear in mind are:

- If less than half the total number of trustees are present at a meeting, it is time to consider whether decisions should be delayed until more trustees can be involved.
- If a quarter or more of the trustees are absent over several meetings, the schedule, location, agenda, and make-up of the trustee body may need to be reviewed.

- Background papers should be circulated well before the meeting, with time for those prevented from attending to send comments to the clerk, and decisions should not depend on papers not seen before the meeting.
- Good Quaker process benefits from diverse opinions and perspectives and from high quality information clearly presented. It suffers when decisions are rushed. Although some trustee matters are time sensitive, it is generally better to avoid pressure to get on with something when facts, views, or space for Spirit-led discernment are missing.

Further assistance on these points can be found through OSCR and the Charity Commission websites.

There is also a more general aspect to being suitably informed as trustees, which involves making sure that people who have information you might need can easily find and contact you with it. It can help to be proactive – for example, visit meetings to worship with them, especially if you are the link Friend for one or more, and talk about your work as a trustee so people know you are involved. Don't be shy about mentioning trustee work when it's relevant in your own local meeting! It is also useful to share at least some contact details (as safe and appropriate for you as an individual, perhaps setting up a trustee work email with a free provider distinct from your personal one) so that people can reach you easily. As a trustee body, you may also want to be visible at area meeting (and during any social time before or after) and at any area meeting events such as weekend away, camp, or study day.

Make sure you are clear about the authority of your meeting

In any given meeting, you need to know what can be decided and what can be considered by needs to be referred elsewhere for final decision. This includes aspects of the relationship between trustees and the area meeting, for example, but also includes ensuring that if you meet by Zoom or as a blended group (some online and some in person) you are clear about the status of that meeting.

Find the right people to serve the meeting

Normally a trustee body has a clerk (or perhaps co-clerks or a clerk and assistant clerk). The clerks plan the agenda, ensure papers are circulated in advance, support the group in using Quaker processes, write the minutes, and often work in other ways to enable the smooth running of your meetings. Sometimes, it is difficult or impossible to find someone to take on this role. In that case, options include:

- sharing out the work differently (for example, the person who clerks during the meeting may not be the same person who prepares the agenda; a minute-writing clerk might focus only on that while someone else calls for ministry and a third person handles correspondence outside the meetings)
- finding out whether something specific is daunting about the role and changing it (for example, some clerks can be very hard acts to follow, and adjusting the name of the role as well as the responsibilities can help, or an individual may struggle with a particular task which can be passed to someone else or support provided)
- working with nominations committee to bring someone else into the trustee body who has relevant skills or offering someone extra support and training to give them the skills they need for the role (in some cases, both of these may be needed: are there enough people with knowledge and experience of clerking in your area meeting as a whole?)

Understanding liability



Serving as a trustee carries some legal responsibility. It does sometimes happen that there is legal action if something goes wrong in an area meeting or other Quaker community. In that case, if the meeting has no trustees, all members of the meeting are likely to be considered to be responsible.

A meeting protects itself against this by ensuring that trustees, with appropriate powers and responsibilities, have been appointed. The trustees show (through the minutes of their meetings) that they have been considering matters that might have major effects for the meeting (for example, risks against which they ensure that the meeting has insured itself). The Charity Commission's advice is that "if trustees act prudently, lawfully and in accordance with their governing document then any liabilities they incur as trustees can be met out of the charity's resources".

Trustees should be aware that if, alone or with other trustees, they act negligently or recklessly, or in such a way as to commit a breach of trust, they may be liable to make good any resultant loss to the meeting.

A summary of the main types of trustee liability is given below. It is unlikely that any conscientious trustee would break the law in this respect. It may be possible for the meeting to obtain trustees' indemnity insurance, though it should be noted that it is not possible for a meeting to cover itself against acts of dishonesty on the part of trustees.

Breach of trust

Trustees must administer the meeting in accordance with the terms of its governing document (and of Quaker faith & practice) and in accord with the requirements of charity law. A breach of trust would arise if some or all of the trustees act in a way that is contrary to the terms of the governing document, or if they failed to perform their duties as trustees.

Possible examples could include:

- allowing money to be used for purposes for which it was not intended, or for purposes that are not allowed under the governing document (for example, improper political activities or trading)
- failing to obtain some required consent from a court, or from OSCR or the Charity Commission
- causing a loss through fraud, mismanagement, failure to show a proper duty of care, or failure to take appropriate professional advice.

Trustees committing a breach of trust resulting in financial loss are liable to make good that loss. However, as long as trustees are taking reasonable care of the assets of the meeting they are unlikely to commit a breach of trust.

Contractual liability

The meeting enters into contracts in order to carry out its work (e.g. contracts with suppliers of goods or services). In an unincorporated association it is the trustees who are party to such contracts, since the meeting does not have its own "personality" in law (since it is not a company). Provided that they acted properly in entering into the contract, the trustees can use the meeting's resources to meet their obligations. But if the meeting does not have enough funds to meet its obligations the liability would remain with the trustees personally.

However, if the charity is an incorporated body, the trustees are not personally liable in this way. This is something to consider when looking at the legal status of your charity.

Breach of statutory duties

Committing, authorising or assisting an offence against any person, property or the public interest would expose trustees to criminal liability. Thus, for example, care must be taken to ensure that premises are not used for drugs-related offences.

Trustees must be aware that the state imposes a number of statutory duties, and that they must ensure that the meeting is acting in compliance with the relevant laws. This may seem technical or abstract at times but the aim of these laws and the work of trustees in following them is to care for people and resources in a fair and socially responsible way. For example, trustees must be aware of the laws relating to the following, or they must be prepared to take advice relating to such laws:

- Charities
- Health and safety
- Use of land
- Safeguarding, the protection of children and vulnerable adults
- The supply of food and drink
- Planning regulations
- Employment
- Trade descriptions
- Data protection

Training and professional advice on all these subjects are readily available. Not every trustee will need to be trained in every area, but the trustee body will need to assess which topics are relevant and make sure that they have access to accurate and up-to-date information about their duties. In many of these areas, rather than seeing the legislation as a burden, we can be relieved that others have done the work to decide what it means to keep one another safe and look after everyone involved.

Financial governance and legal compliance are also covered in one the appendixes of the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings.

Vicarious liability

The general rule is that trustees will be responsible for:

- any conduct of individuals which they have authorised, including their own conduct
- conduct which, though not authorised, takes place in the course of a business which they conduct, and where there is a close connection between the conduct and what any wrongdoer was employed to do.



This is known as ‘vicarious liability’. Although the wrongful action – or an omission – is not primarily attributable to some policy of the meeting or to the trustees personally, the law might nevertheless hold them liable for some misconduct of others in the organisation, be they employed staff or volunteers undertaking some activity on behalf of the meeting.

- The Charity Commission’s document [The Essential Trustee](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do#reduce-the-risk-of-liability) has a clear section on liability which will provide more information: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do#reduce-the-risk-of-liability

There are also a number of legal firms who have published blog posts or general advice documents about this, and a Google search for key words will find the latest ones of these. If in doubt about a particular situation, trustees should seek specific legal advice. It is better to ask questions as soon as they arise than run the risk of missing something.

Deciding legal status, including becoming a CIO

This is a technical area in which the law can change. It is good to seek expert legal advice before making significant decisions.



Very simply, an organisation such as a charity can either be unincorporated or incorporated. An incorporated organisation forms a 'body' and has a legal existence distinct from the people who make it up, while an unincorporated organisation does not. This means that in an unincorporated charity, the trustees do things as themselves; in an incorporated charity, the charity does things and the trustee's liabilities are somewhat limited.

A charity can become incorporated by becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), or in Scotland a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), or by registering as a Charitable Company. Otherwise, a registered charity remains an unincorporated organisation.

Should area meetings consider becoming Charitable Incorporated Organisations or Companies? A paper from Quaker Stewardship Committee in 2014 (www.quaker.org.uk/documents/cio-and-companies-qsc) identified the following advantages and limitations for area meetings becoming CIOs.

Advantages of being a CIO	Disadvantages of being a CIO
Limited liability – safety for trustees' personal assets in some situations	Time and cost – the work involved in making the change
Corporate status – able to register assets in the name of the charity	Documentation – the governing documents are different and this can raise some challenges
Appointing trustees – people may feel more confident about serving in this role	Agreement by area meeting – this must be a discerned decision that members understand
	Running an incorporated organisation can be more complex afterwards

Most area meetings and similar Quaker charities are unincorporated. However, some are charitable companies and some have recently been becoming Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs), since that option became available in 2013. The following comments on property and names reflect that experience and the things trustees wished they had known before beginning.

Transfer of property

On becoming a CIO, there is the option to transfer the formal ownership of property from Friends Trusts Limited (FTL) to the area meeting or other body. (This is not relevant for SCIOs as FTL does not work in Scotland.) Taking full control of your area meeting's property may seem appealing, but it means losing the benefits of the experience and support provided by Friends Trusts Limited – which can create extra work if you need to sell or buy property at some point. A further benefit of retaining FTL as a (holding) trustee is that it provides a single address for the service of notices, which substantially mitigates the risk of property theft or missing important information.

Use of 'Society' and 'Britain' in names

Certain sensitive words require particular permission before they can be used in the names of CIOs. Most of these are not relevant to Quakers ('Stock Exchange', 'Chartered', and many others), but some, including 'Britain' and 'Society', are often used in formal versions of the names of Quaker organisations, in phrases like 'the Religious Society of Friends'. Advice on choosing a name and links to the full guidance on sensitive words can be found at: www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-choose-a-charity-name

Charitable Companies

Since the option to become a CIO became available, it is unlikely that an area meeting would choose to become a charitable company, but some already are and the possibility remains. A charitable company is limited by guarantee, which provides protection to the trustees if the charity incurs debts, and it can employ staff etc. However, it comes with extra work and expenses because a charitable company is ruled by both charity legislation and companies law: documents have to be submitted to both the Charity Commission/OSCR and Companies House, and trustees also have to take on the duties of company directors as well as the usual duties of trustees. Charitable companies can choose to change their status again, including to a CIO.

The following resources may help you understand your charity's current situation and the alternative options.

- NCVO, Understanding charity status and registration: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/setting-up/understanding-charity-status-and-registration
- Guidance from the Charity Commission on how to change your charity structure in England and Wales: www.gov.uk/guidance/change-your-charity-structure
- Guidance from OSCR on becoming a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation: www.oscr.org.uk/becoming-a-charity/becoming-a-scio and a very clear factsheet laying out the different legal forms available to charities in Scotland: www.oscr.org.uk/media/2506/legal-forms-factsheet.pdf
- Transferring to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Status: The Experience of Luton & Leighton Quaker Area Meeting: www.quaker.org.uk/documents/cio-transferring-lutonl-mervyn-dobbin-march2020

Support with Terms of Reference

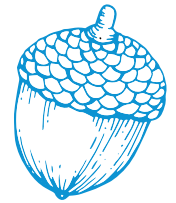
Meetings should agree terms of reference for their trustees. Terms of reference are a list of what the trustees are allowed to do and what responsibilities they hold on behalf of the meeting. This document should be agreed by area meeting in session and sets out the functions and responsibilities of the trustee group and how the trustees will work.



Terms of reference can be revised periodically by the area meeting in session in the light of experience or in response to changes in the meeting, as long as they are consistent with the meeting's governing document. They will differ for each meeting, depending on how its properties are managed, the respective roles of the area meeting and its constituent local meetings, and so on.

- There are examples of terms of reference documents in 'Right Ordering', the guide to the governance of Quaker meetings developed by Luton & Leighton Area Meeting: https://lquakers.org.uk/area_meeting/right-ordering
- The terms of reference for Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees might also be a useful example. The document can be found here: www.quaker.org.uk/documents/bym-trustees-tor-2021

Support with organisational relationships



It is important to be clear about the relationships between the trustee body and other parts of the Quaker community. The details will vary but the following general principles may help you make sense of your specific situation.

Area meeting

The area meeting in session gives directions to its trustees, and needs to consult trustees when decisions have financial or legal implications. If trustees want to start a new initiative, they need approval from area meeting. There is therefore a close relationship between the area meeting and the area meeting trustees – we might think of the trustees as an active and vital part of the area meeting, like an organ within a body. We can name them separately, and discuss them separately in theory, but they can't live separately.



One important aspect of the relationship between area meeting as a whole and the area meeting trustees is the role of the clerk of area meeting. Generally, the clerk or clerking team of the area meeting should be informed about but independent of the work of trustees. A Friend serving as an area meeting clerk is not normally appointed as a trustee. This enables them to support the area meeting through decision-making which operates above the level of the work of trustees – for example, agreeing the terms of reference for trustees. Trustees and the clerk(s) of area meeting can decide for themselves how to ensure a good flow of information in both directions, but this would usually include circulating all trustee's papers to the clerk and inviting them to some or all trustee meetings. Whenever possible, trustees of the area meeting are recommended to attend area meeting in session so that they are aware of issues raised, the mood and energy of the community, etc.

It is also useful to think about the relationship between an area meeting and its trustees in the context of the Quaker discernment process. Both the area meeting and the trustees it appoints gather in meetings for worship for business in which they seek a right way forward for that group at that time. This is a spiritual process and not a secular one; even when faced with mundane and practical questions there is a sense of being guided by the Light, sometimes in directions which are unexpected or even seem irrational by the standards of the outside world. We need to be able to challenge each other lovingly if something seems wrong, while at the same time maintaining a high level of trust that each meeting did pay attention to the movement of the Spirit as it was shown to them at that time. This process is supported by our commitment to the (sometimes difficult) discipline of the meeting for worship for business – listening deeply to all the ministry which is given; speaking clearly when we are called to do so, but not too often; accepting the decisions to which the group is led even if they are not the outcome I personally wanted – and by our own spiritual practices and prayer lives. At times, related processes such as threshing meetings, in which complex and emotional issues can be aired prior to detailed discernment, may be helpful.

In the Quaker context, the language often used about charity trustees – 'driving the strategy', 'setting a vision' – may not seem appropriate. However, as much as any other organisation we need to articulate the changes we want to make in order to avoid maintaining the status quo without reflection. As a community, we expect to be called to witness to the possibility of a just, equitable, peaceful, loving world, sometimes called the Kingdom of God or Divine Commonwealth. This might be regarded as our overarching vision. Our area meetings discern which elements of this need our attention and energy at the moment, which we could call a strategy – anything from deepening our worship to running a foodbank and many other possibilities – and our area meeting trustees help to put that into action

by making sure that suitable legal and financial arrangements are in place. Those legal matters are delegated by the area meeting to trustees and in those areas trustees will sometimes need to take the lead to ensure the area meeting complies with the law and good practice. For example, trustees will initiate new policies around safeguarding, employment, data protection, and similar areas, and bring information about new requirements to area meeting or recommendations for major changes.

In most cases, Friends are grateful for the service of trustees. Depending on who is in your area meeting, you may find that some Friends are antagonistic towards trustees. This can be rooted in the history of the introduction of trustee bodies, especially if this is seen as an inappropriately secular requirement placed on us by an outside force. It can also be based on perceptions of trustees taking power or decisions away from the area meeting, or not using a rightly ordered process of meeting for worship for business, or on a more local issue such as disagreement over an action trustees have taken. If you experience this, know that you are not alone. It is always good to take the time to make sure we understand any objections Friends raise and why, but we also need to share in the trust we ask them to have in the leadings we receive. Quakers in Britain introduced trustees following the discernment of Britain Yearly Meeting. If your area meeting and trustee body are also working in a rightly ordered way, you do not need to take the anxieties of other Friends personally, nor do you need to be defensive. Disagreement is always part of community life. Calm listening and patient transparency, including the willingness to admit if there is a mistake made, are the best ways to respect both the views of everyone involved and the duties we have accepted as trustees.

A special case: merging charities

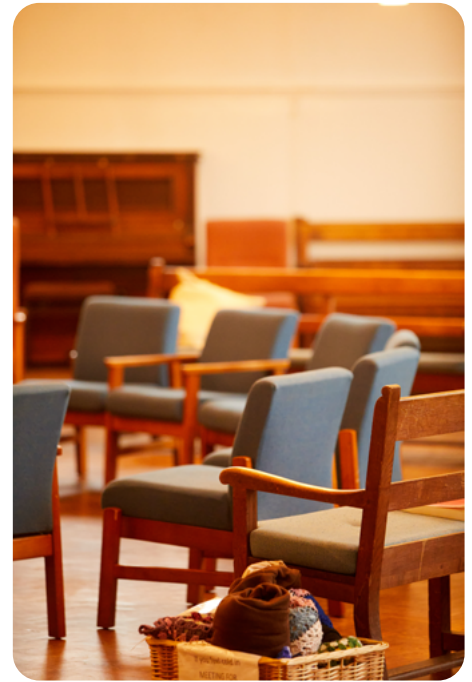
There are some situations where it makes sense to merge charities – in particular, some area meetings have recently merged with other area meetings so that they share a trustee body and energy is released from that work for other activities. There are many different approaches to this and it needs to be considered in the specific context. Aspects to explore include communication (how will the trustees and the area meetings keep in touch?), real rather than superficial simplification (is the work being reduced or put onto fewer people?), legalities (especially communicating with OSCR and/or the Charity Commission), and whether it is the right way forward in the discernment of all the meetings involved.

Local meetings

Memoranda of Understanding are used in lots of situations to help make sure organisations on both sides of a relationship know how it will work. Drawing up a memorandum of understanding between an area meeting and each individual local meeting helps everyone to be clear. It is an agreement that is not set in stone. It can and should be modified both in the light of experience (what really works in practice) and with time, as the local meeting develops, becoming larger or smaller. It needs to be reviewed regularly and whenever either partner feels it would be helpful.

A memorandum of understanding between an area meeting and a local meeting helps to make sure that everyone knows:

- who is responsible for what
- which tasks area meeting trustees have delegated to other Friends
- how the charity is organised.



Four key areas that will normally be covered by a memorandum of understanding are:

1. The responsibilities of local meetings as set out in *Quaker faith & practice*.

Each local meeting needs to consider the list of responsibilities listed in *Quaker faith & practice* Chapter 4, considering what it can do itself, what is best done in conjunction with another local meeting, and what is best done through the area meeting.

2. The legal responsibilities of trustees for ensuring proper stewardship of assets, and for seeing that statutory requirements are met, including the following areas:
 - a. Financial aspects
 - b. Property management
 - c. Employment
 - d. Legal compliance
3. Factors specific to the area meeting and the local meeting, such as particular activities carried out, particular funds, special charities or anything else dependent on local circumstances.
4. How and when reports will be made to the area meeting or to the trustees.

More details can be found in this document from QSC:

www.quaker.org.uk/documents/memorandum-understanding

Yearly meeting

The memoranda of understanding which area meetings, represented by their trustee bodies, have with Britain Yearly Meeting lays out how the responsibilities which area meetings have both to yearly meeting and to other area meetings, and what they can expect to receive from yearly meeting and other area meetings. The emphasis is on mutual obligations and support.



The memorandum of understanding explains in its opening paragraphs that:

This Memorandum of Understanding (“MoU”) sets out the terms and understanding between the Organisations who have signed and adopted it in relation to:

- A their roles as independent organisations forming the legal structure which supports Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and
- B the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain and beyond.

Our national and local organisations all exist to support our worship and witness as a united faith community. We are committed to working together and supporting each other using established Quaker practices as set out in *Quaker faith & practice*. We have a responsibility to comply with the law (including, where relevant, charity law and duties as charity trustees) in order to deliver a safe, inclusive and equitable environment for members, attenders, role-holders, employees, and other parties with whom we interact. We recognise that the actions of one organisation within our community may have implications for the reputation of other organisations and of the whole Society.

This MoU documents the relationship of the organisations forming the Society to each other and provides a framework within which they can support each other and hold each other to account.

Among other things, the MoU between area meetings and Yearly Meeting lays out formal structures for sharing information, including strengthening our reporting for safeguarding issues and addressing reputational risks to the whole of the Religious Society of Friends such as lettings to controversial hirers. It should provide reassuring support and back-up on a number of issues.



Charity Commission/OSCR



These relationships are more distant and formal than the others mentioned here. However, it is important that the clerk(s) of trustees know how to contact the relevant regulator when necessary, and that documents we are required to submit to them are sent in a timely way.

Each charity should have a governing document, which is registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales or OSCR in Scotland. These are specific to the charity, but area meetings in Britain Yearly Meeting follow closely a set pattern.

- As examples, you can find the governing document for Britain Yearly Meeting here: www.quaker.org.uk/documents/bym-governing-document-revised-min34-bym2014 and the one for Hertford & Hitchin Area Meeting here: www.hhq.org.uk/am_docs/Gov_Doc_MM_13_jan_13.htm
- Information about how and when to contact the Charity Commission can be found here: www.gov.uk/guidance/what-to-send-to-the-charity-commission-and-how-to-get-help
- Information about how to contact OSCR in general can be found here: www.oscr.org.uk/contact-oscr
- Information about submitting annual returns to OSCR is here: www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/how-to-use-oscr-online-to-submit-an-online-annual-return

Doing and delegating

It can sometimes seem that trustees have a lot to do, and that it all has to be done by people appointed as trustees. Sometimes and to some extent this is true – there are particular processes which require trustee involvement, and decisions which can only be taken by the trustee body, who therefore need to be informed about the relevant situation. However, there are also lots of cases where this might not be true. For example, it is often the trustees' responsibility to make sure that things happen – that the accounts are kept correctly, for example – but so long as there is a proper arrangement for reporting and accountability, the trustees can appoint someone else to do the work on their behalf.



Support with property

When a charity owns property it can take up a good deal of time and energy. Property held by area meetings might include meeting houses, burial grounds, and land or buildings rented out or used for other purposes. Things which are apparently property issues may overlap with other questions – cleaning a meeting house might be an employment issue; repairing a meeting house may be a financial issue; discussing changes to a meeting house requires attention to the relationship between trustees and the local meeting and any other groups which use it.

- There is property advice for Quakers on the Britain Yearly Meeting website. This includes ways to connect with others for more advice, information about help to maintain buildings, and information about sustainability and buildings: www.quaker.org.uk/property

Housing and tenancies

Some area meetings own property in which someone lives or could live – this could be related to employment, as when a warden or caretaker lives in a meeting house, or separate properties which are rented out either commercially or to support people in need of housing. This area can be technical and subject to changes in the law, so seek out updated training or legal advice if appropriate.

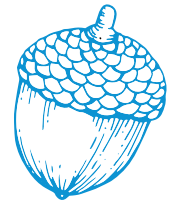
Friends Trusts Limited

When you are dealing with property and legal matters in England and Wales you may need to know about Friends Trusts Ltd (FTL), which is a Quaker charity originally set up in 1923. One of its main purposes is to act as a custodian trustee or nominee on behalf of Quaker charities in England and Wales, including meetings, so that the charity's land or investments could be registered in the name of FTL, rather than in the name of individual trustees or members of the meeting. (This would have necessitated a transfer of the asset every time there was a change or death of a trustee.) All responsibility still remains with the meeting and its trustees, not FTL.

FTL still holds the land belonging to most area meetings in England and Wales in its name, though some have arranged for their investments to be held by their stockbrokers. Those area meetings that are now incorporated have the option of putting land and investments in the name of the meeting itself. That option will also apply to any meetings that become CIOs – see also the section on deciding legal status.



Support with finances



It is helpful if all trustees understand the basics of the financial position, such as whether you have more money going in or coming out. Not everyone needs to be an expert. Charity accounts also need to be checked by someone outside the organisation, so there is always an independent view as well. As trustees we need to think about both how to keep our money – to have enough in hand and sometimes to save for larger projects – and how to spend our money, especially to make sure that it is being used in the service of our community’s charitable purposes.

Within an area meeting, the finances may be handled in different ways. There will usually be some money managed at the area meeting level, which may include restricted funds such as money given for educating members of the meeting or financial support for individuals. There may be a centralised set of accounts which covers all the money handled by local meetings, or local meetings may keep their own accounts – in this case, they all need to be brought together at the end of the financial year because the area meeting is the registered charity which submits a financial report. The work of managing the accounts may be done by nominated Quaker treasurers, by professional bookkeepers, or a combination, but there should always be a trustee who cares for this work and all the trustees should be familiar with the overall situation.

- Financial matters are an area where Quakers have been vulnerable in the past. We have learned that we need to exercise ‘tough trust’ – being prepared to be open and to challenge, to both ask and answer questions, so that trust does not allow things to be hidden. The report ‘A Vulnerable Victim’ has much more on this arising from a specific case: www.quaker.org.uk/documents/a_vulnerable_victim.
- There are lots of professionals and organisations who can help you. The Charity Commission gives a short introduction (with a 2 minute video summary): www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-charity-finances.
- OSCR’s equivalent page is here: www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/guidance-and-good-practice-for-charity-trustees/charity-finances.
- To get training on financial matters, you could take a course with ACAT, the Association of Church Accountants and Treasurers: www.acat.uk.com (most area meetings are already members).
- The Quaker treasurers’ guidance sheets sit alongside the ACAT handbook and provide further information: www.quaker.org.uk/treasurers.
- Woodbrooke also offers courses for Quaker treasurers: www.woodbrooke.org.uk/our-courses.
- There are also professionals who can handle book-keeping and other services. There are plenty of options in both the secular and religious communities. Mindful Business Services is a Quaker company who understand the needs of Quaker meetings and also offer training in these areas: <https://mindfulbusinessservices.com>.

Two particular aspects of finances are worth understanding properly – they can seem technical but have a direct impact on running a charity effectively and ethically. These are reserves and investments.

Reserves

It is important to have a reserves policy which is both realistic and involves the right use of your charity’s resources. By reserves, we mean the amounts of money which the charity holds back in case of emergencies – for example, to spend if there is suddenly no income. It is important to have the right amount of reserves: too little, and an unforeseen cost could cause a major problem; too much, and you are hoarding resources which should have been used for the charity’s main purposes. Working out

what the right amount is will require looking at the income and outgoings, the risks of different kinds of problems, and the charity's existing commitments.

You can get further information about reserves and writing a reserves policy from:

- NCVO: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance/financial-procedures-manual/writing-the-financial-procedures-manual/financial-responsibilities/reserves-policy
- OSCR: www.oscr.org.uk/media/2681/v10-charity-reserves-factsheet_pdf.pdf
- The Charity Commission: www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-reserves-cc19/charities-and-reserves

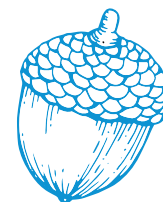


Investments

Trustees should be aware of the kind of investments the charity holds. There are multiple factors to balance in deciding what to invest your charity's money in: whether to entrust it to a professional or to be more or less actively involved in the decisions, how to ensure the money is being used ethically and not in ways which are against the commitments of the Religious Society of Friends, how to ensure the money is safe and producing an appropriate return on the investments, and whether to look for other forms of positive impact from the use of invested money, among others.

- In England and Wales, there are statutory powers for charities to carry out social investment, and there is specific case law on ethical investment. Guidance from the Charity Commission, including setting an investment policy, is here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-investment-matters-a-guide-for-trustees-cc14
- OSCR provides similar guidance for charities in Scotland: www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/charity-investments-guidance-and-good-practice
- The Charities Aid Foundation provides some investment options, and has guides to decision-making in this area: www.cafonline.org/charities/investments/knowledge-centre/plan-your-charity-investments

Support with managing risk



Risk is part of everyday life. In the context of a charity, risk refers to anything which could prevent the smooth running of the organisation – problems with governance or finance, problems with the practice operation of the charity or the way it complies with the law, and external problems such as a changing situation. To manage risks, we need to identify them, work out what risks are worth taking, and explore which can be controlled and how.

Charities often use a risk register in order to do this. A risk register identifies risks and says how big they are, in two ways: how likely are they to happen, and how much impact they would have if they did. Some examples of risks can help us understand this.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall risk	Management
Loss of income because fewer groups hire meeting houses	Medium (some groups will leave, but it's unlikely to be all at once)	Medium (could cause significant problems e.g. with cash flow)	Medium risk	Ongoing communication with hiring groups; seeking new hirers; setting appropriate prices
Loss of expertise as experienced trustees finish their terms of service	High (at least some loss of this type is built into our nominations/ appointments process)	High (could prevent the organisation functioning)	High risk	Supporting the nominations committee to find new names with relevant expertise; providing high quality induction for new trustees
A participant is injured during an area meeting activity	Medium (our activities aren't usually especially risky, but accidents happen)	Low (bad for the individual, but low impact on the organisation)	Low risk	Ensure first aid kits up to date and available; health and safety policies and checks; training for key volunteers and employees
Reputational damage from a member acting in the meeting's name, but without a proper discernment process	Low (most members are aware this is not appropriate)	Medium to high (a letter claiming the authority of the meeting to a local MP or newsletter may have a small audience; on the national stage it could be larger)	Medium risk	Appropriate training for clerks and others serving in positions of responsibility; appropriate explanations about our structures offered to all members and attenders; conflict handling plan in place to address smaller incidents before someone is tempted to speak out inappropriately in public

As well as looking at the details of risk, it can be useful to think about risk and resilience more broadly. You may like to think about the different forms of resilience your charity and community need in order to weather different kinds of storms. For example, do you have the financial resilience to handle a sudden cost or a drop in income? If a surprise expense and a reduction of income came at the same time, would you have a cashflow problem? In other areas, do you have the spiritual resources to draw on if there is a difficult decision to be made or a tragedy of some kind? Do you have access to spiritual and emotional support in cases of conflict, anger, or other challenging emotions?

- As well as official guidance from OSCR and the Charity Commission, helpful resources are provided by NCVO: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/governance/responsibilities-for-boards/helping-your-board-meet-their-responsibilities/how-to-manage-risk
- Southern Marches Area Quaker Meeting/ Cyfarfod Crynwyr Rhanbarth y Gororau Deheuol have put their risk register online and it provides useful further examples: <https://smquakers.org.uk/downloads/policies/pdfs/riskregister.pdf>

Support with safeguarding

Our commitment to protecting people from abuse is rooted in our understanding of all people as unique and precious children of God. Formal structures around safeguarding focus on children and adults with care needs, who have particular vulnerabilities. We want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to look after everyone in our communities. This will usually mean thinking through situations carefully, having good policies and procedures, and making sure they are followed. It also means responding appropriately and sensitively if there is any concern.



- If there is immediate danger, call the police on 999 or NSPCC on 0808 800 5000. People age under 18 can also call Childline on 0800 1111.
- The charity thirtyone:eight provides safeguarding training, help with DBS checks, and a helpline for questions and advice. Most area meetings are already members. <https://thirtyoneeight.org>
- Britain Yearly Meeting has a safeguarding office, which can be contacted at SAFE@quaker.org.uk and provides resources, including a model safeguarding policy, at: www.quaker.org.uk/safeguarding
- Safeguarding is also covered in one of the appendixes of the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings.
- Guidance from OSCR is here: www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/safeguarding-guidance-keeping-vulnerable-beneficiaries-safe
- And from the Charity Commission here: www.gov.uk/guidance/safeguarding-for-charities-and-trustees



Support with data protection



Like safeguarding, the purpose of data protection is to look after people: our data includes lots of things about us which might be more or less personal and sensitive. It includes names, contact details, medical information, dates of birth, and lots of other items which Quaker communities might formally or accidentally collect. Key principles of data protection that any information about people should be held appropriately, with their consent, only used for the appropriate purposes, updated as necessary, and be removed on their request or when it is no longer useful. If data is not held and cared for well, we can break confidences, lost trust, and even put people in danger – for example, if someone is being abused, stalked, or harassed. The law on data protection applies to charities just like other organisations.

For an area meeting, it is important to think about how information about members and attenders is collected, held, and distributed. Who has access to any details you hold? How are they used? How do people give permission for information to be shared (for example, for an update about their health to be given in local meeting notices) or ask for it to be changed (for example, if they move house)?

Related issues may involve the use of IT and cybersecurity (for example, how data is stored and shared via different apps and websites), the need to maintain contact and provide pastoral care to members, and the practicalities of putting any procedures into action in your specific circumstances.

- The NCVO has a page which works through the process of writing a data protection policy and procedures: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/digital-technology/data-protection-and-cybersecurity/gdpr-data-protection-law-brexit-and-how-keep-top-your-responsibilities/writing-data-protection-policy-and-procedures
- Detailed advice is given by the Information Commissioner's Office: <https://ico.org.uk>
- Data protection and information governance are also covered in one of the appendixes of the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings.

Support with documentation and archiving



Any organisation generates documentation – sometimes large amounts! As well as ensuring that we have systems for handling the paperwork of ordinary trustee activities, there are some forms of documentation to which we need to pay particular attention.

Minutes

The minutes of a Quaker meeting for worship for business, produced and agreed in the meeting, are an important document. Trustee minutes may be circulated to the area meeting so that everyone is well-informed and this can be helpful. Trustee minutes can also provide proof that we have followed proper processes, both in Quaker and legal terms: they show that the trustees met and may comment on the worship as well as the business. If a question is raised in future (for example, about whether good health and safety practice was followed), the minutes can provide evidence about this. However, both these things mean they are relatively public and we should be careful who is named and how. This can include people who have been nominated in their absence and hence without their consent, as well as more dramatic cases such as minutes which relate to possible crimes. If the minutes have attachments such as reports, we should think carefully about whether and how these are circulated.

Other records

Other records produced and kept by trustees may include financial records, employment records, property records, and records of safeguarding checks and incidents. Trustees may also be responsible for records created by the area meeting or local meetings, including membership records, the personal

data of members and attenders, records of attendance at children's meetings, etc. Each of these kinds of information may need to be kept in a different way – in order to be useful and accessible as well as appropriately confidential and protected – and a policy should lay out the relevant details for your area meeting.

Forms of communication

All records are created and stored in some format, perhaps several: handwritten notes, computer files, emails, printouts, etc. You will have personal preferences about the formats in which it is easier for you to work. For each kind of record, it is useful to consider the pros and cons of different forms of storage. For example, if something needs to be updated regularly, it may be useful to have it as a computer file (but make sure it shows clearly the date of the most recent change). On the other hand, it may be easier to write notes by hand in a meeting (but think about how you will find them later). If something needs to be shared, what will work best for the people who need to access it? If something needs to be confidential, can it be password protected or in a locked filing cabinet? Who holds the details, and is there sufficient cover if someone is unexpectedly unavailable? If something needs to be kept for a long time, is it in a format which will remain accessible? It can be easy to get into habits which involve unconsidered risks – for example, email is less secure than we often assume and the contents of a telephone call can be quickly forgotten unless we make notes as well.

Digital signatures

There are a number of places where it is conventional to use a signature as a form of identification. In some of these cases, a digital signature – a typed name or photograph of a signature, or a squiggle produced with a mouse – is adequate. In others, a physical signature is needed. In general, digital signatures are adequate for documents which will be stored electronically anyway (for example, the minutes of a trustees minute), but physical signatures may be preferred on physical media. In the case of legal documents or those required by a bank or other institution, it is always best to check with the relevant organisation.

Removal

We can be so concerned with keeping records that we forget to get rid of records at the right time. This is not something to be rushed, especially because it cannot be reversed, but records which are no longer needed may take up unnecessary storage space, both physical and digital. It is also important to note that some records which include personal information should be destroyed after a suitable time period has elapsed.

- There are a range of general and more specific services that provide cloud storage for digital records. These include the Quaker Meetings Network, which provides cloud-based services for Quaker meetings: <https://quaker.app/about>.

Support with employment

If your charity employs any staff, it is important to make sure that this is done in a fair and transparent way, in accordance with our Quaker commitments to equality and truth, and that you follow employment law to protect everyone involved. This includes matters relating to pay, tax, and leave; equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace; health and safety, and safeguarding; and being prepared for situations such as an employee leaving their role or raising a grievance. Employing staff can be a great support to area meetings, as staff provide consistent help and free members of the community to focus on other work. There is also the potential for difficulty, but appropriate training for both line managers and staff members can help to avoid this. If your meeting has employees, they are often line managed by trustees; if you take on this work, make sure you have suitable and up-to-date training on good practice.



One situation for employees which is unique to our circumstances is attending meeting for worship for business. A Quaker employee may be familiar with the process but need to consider how to relate to it in

their new role. For an employee who is not familiar with Quakers before taking a job with us, there may be a steep learning curve about the decision-making process. If this will be relevant, it should be part of the induction. This could include discussing it with an experienced Quaker, attending a course which explains the process, observing a meeting for worship for business, and having a debriefing afterwards in which questions about the process can be answered. It is important to stress that everyone who attends a meeting for worship for business can and does contribute, through their listening and silence as well as any words they speak or preparation they have done, but also to acknowledge that it can be a strange and sometimes uncomfortable discipline to adopt.

- NCVO provides clear and helpful guidance on this as well as sample employment policies: www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/running-a-charity/employing-managing-staff
- Britain Yearly Meeting's advice for Quaker meetings who are employers can be found here: www.quaker.org.uk/employers
- Employment and volunteering are also covered in one of the appendixes of the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings.
- It is helpful to provide appropriate induction for all employees, but what is involved in this will depend on the job role. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development offer this guidance on designing an induction process: www.cipd.org.uk/knowledge/factsheets/induction-factsheet
- It may be appropriate to bring in external support with Human Resources, and there are a number of firms which offer this including some who specialise in helping non-profit and religious organisations. It can also be useful to consult ACAS, who offer advice and training as well as dispute resolution services: www.acas.org.uk

Support with annual reports

It's important to submit the required annual reports and accounts. Reporting checklists (which have links to the various key documents from the regulators and BYM) can be found online:



- For Scotland, www.quaker.org.uk/documents/tara-checklist-scot-2023
- For England & Wales, www.quaker.org.uk/documents/tara-checklist-ew-2023
- If your Quaker charity is an area meeting or other constituent body of Britain Yearly Meeting, the annual report and accounts should also be sent to Britain Yearly Meeting. For details of this process, see www.quaker.org.uk/documents/quaker-charities-reporting-to-bym-07-2022

Some trustees pay for services relating to creating the annual report and accounts, especially support with bookkeeping and accountancy.

Some charities choose to produce an annual report which is more accessible, may contain pictures and other materials, and can be distributed more widely. This can be an opportunity to make sure that members of the Quaker community, and sometimes others, are aware of the work your organisation does.



Support with finding new trustees

In the Quaker community, finding new trustees falls to the relevant nominations committee. This is different to many secular groups where trustees may look for new trustees themselves or support a wider membership body in seeking new trustees.

In general, when nominations are looking for trustees for an area meeting or other Quaker body, they should look for someone who is:

- A member of the area meeting – it isn't reasonable to ask someone, even a very long-standing attender, to take on this responsibility for a body they don't feel able to join
- Reasonably experienced with Quaker processes, having participated in meeting for worship for business and understanding how the local, area, and yearly meetings relate to one another
- Aged 18 or over
- A 'fit and proper person' who has not been involved in fraud, tax avoidance, etc. – for details of this test see www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-fit-and-proper-persons-test/guidance-on-the-fit-and-proper-persons-test

The fit and proper person test is the key vetting process for trustees. There is no specific requirement that people nominated as trustees should have business, financial, legal, or other expertise. The trustee body does not need to have representation from any particular range of experience or communities but will benefit from a diversity of life experience and perspectives. Governing documents say that every local meeting should be represented on an area meeting trustee body, but this does not mean that there needs to be a trustee from every local meeting – many trustee bodies use systems such as 'link friends' to create connections between the trustees and local meetings even where there are, for example, more local meetings than trustees. Similarly, it is common but not necessary to include everyone involved in the treasurer's work as a trustee so long as someone on the trustee body is involved in keeping the accounts and can explain them to other trustees with authority.

A trustee body needs at least three and usually five or more members. There may be considerably more, up to fifteen or so, in large area meetings or where more than one area meeting is covered, but it is best not to make the group too large. It is good to rotate the appointments so that at any given time there are experienced trustees to welcome and support new trustees.

Trustees can help nominations by providing relevant information and support for the committee and nominees. This might include:

- A skills audit of current trustees which helps the nominations committee to understand what skills and experience are present and what else might be needed
- Have conversations with Friends who might be willing to serve, to describe the work and discuss the responsibilities involved
- Role shadowing opportunities, in which someone who is considering nomination can get a full understanding of the work involved by accompanying an existing trustee
- Good induction, mentoring, and pastoral care so that those appointed as trustees are fully supported in their new roles and are able to remain in them for their full terms of service

Support with conflicts of interest and loyalty



As the OSCR website says, “Conflicts of interest can and do come up: it is how you manage them that is important.”

A conflict of interest appears at any time when a trustee’s personal interests (including those of a business they work for or own, or the interests of their family members) are or could be different from those of the charity. For example, if an area meeting is seeking to employ a meeting house warden and one of the applicants is related to one of the trustees, there is a potential conflict of interests. Conflicts of interest can also come up in lots of other cases where one person has multiple roles in life, such as if they are trustee for more than one charity at the same time and the two charities both apply for the same funding. There can also be conflicts of loyalties, for example where the interests of your local meeting and the interests of the area meeting seem not to align. These need to be handled in the same kinds of the way we handle conflicts of interest.

A more complex situation can arise when a Friend is involved in a number of different Quaker committees or decision-making groups, both within their own meeting and in the larger Quaker community. Through their other work they may be aware of larger issues or of issues that impinge on the authority of another Quaker body. What is important here is that there may be a perception from outside the trustee body, whether or not it is at all justified, that an individual Friend has been influenced in some direction that is not necessarily in the best interest of the meeting.

The central principle in handling conflicts of interest or loyalty is transparency. If there is any possibility of a conflict of interest arising, you should tell other trustees about it as soon as you realise, and keep mentioning it when it may be relevant. Many trustee bodies take potential conflicts of interest as a regular agenda item so that everyone is reminded to consider their personal interests in relation to the current work of the trustees. Where there is a conflict, it should be recorded (usually by minuting), and sometimes it is right to ask a trustee to withdraw from specific items of business where conflict of interest could be a problem.

The following examples illustrate the sorts of conflicts of interest or loyalty which occur in Quaker communities:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- A Friend is a member of a committee that sets the rates used for meeting the expenses claims of members, but also has to submit considerable expenses claims for work undertaken on behalf of the meeting.
- 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.
- A Friend has family or friends who receive benefit in kind from the meeting, such as bursary help.

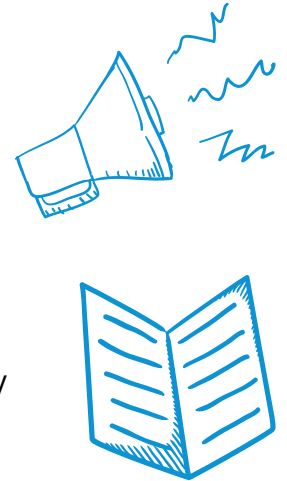
The special case of employment by the Quaker community is also worth noting. We believe that everyone in a meeting for worship can help the meeting in its discernment of the right way forward, whether or not they should formally remain outside a decision-making group (for example, because they are employees 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 always withdraw if a matter under discussion touches on their employment.

- OSCR gives detailed guidance here: www.oscr.org.uk/guidance-and-forms/guidance-and-good-practice-for-charity-trustees/conflict-of-interest
- The Charity Commission gives detailed guidance here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/conflicts-of-interest-a-guide-for-charity-trustees-cc29/conflicts-of-interest-a-guide-for-charity-trustees

Support with conflict in general

Conflict is a normal part of life – we have disagreements, personality clashes, and other problems, and they can become polarised, especially where individuals not directly involved start to take sides. Conflict can involve a few people or many people, and the way it is handled affects the whole community. One of the most important things to do is to recognise it early and address it, even if this means being the first to make it explicit. Conflicts almost never go away by being ignored. Instead, there is a risk that unhappiness festers, other issues become connected to the first problem, misunderstandings spread, and the situation becomes increasingly difficult to resolve.



Some conflict will happen within the trustee body. Sometimes this can be handled within the discipline of the meeting for worship for business, in which everyone is free to share their experience and perspectives honestly while also accepting the discernment of the group. Sometimes it may be appropriate to use other ways to address it, including other processes such as threshing meetings, meeting for listening, or mediation.

Other conflict may be between trustees and other parts of the area meeting, such as a local meeting or area meeting in session, or between trustees acting on behalf of the area meeting and an individual such as a neighbour or employee. Some conflicts can be understood as complaints: an individual or group feels that the charity has not acted in the way that it should. Other conflicts are more like disagreements between equals, where both sides can understand the other point of view but find different evidence to be relevant or draw different conclusions.

The Eldership and Oversight handbook Conflict in Meetings provides lots of practical advice on handling conflict situations in Quaker contexts:

www.quaker.org.uk/documents/conflict-in-meetings-v4-eo-handbook-2005-edition-2.

You can also seek help from the Quaker Life team (email supportmeetings@quaker.org.uk) and your local development worker.

Complaints

It's good practice to have a complaints procedure in place. This involves recognising complaints as such, even if the person complaining doesn't use specific words; having more than one step so that a complaint can be considered and then escalated if not adequately addressed; and making sure that the complaints process is transparent and accessible.

- The Charity Commission publishes Cause for Complaint?, a full guide to complaints procedures for charities: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/284733/rs11text.pdf

Support if something goes wrong

Any charity can experience problems. When something is going wrong, you need to assess what your options are and seek support.



Serious incidents which affect people associated with your charity, your charity's resources, the work your charity does, or its reputation, should be reported to the regulator. If the incident has caused significant problems, assessed within the context of your charity's work and finances, it should be reported. Types of problems suggested by the Charity Commission include:

- harm to your charity's beneficiaries, staff, volunteers or others who come into contact with your charity through its work
- loss of your charity's money or assets
- damage to your charity's property
- harm to your charity's work or reputation

Details about what to report and how can be found on the Charity Commission website: www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-report-a-serious-incident-in-your-charity

OSCR can be contacted online or by phone:
www.oscr.org.uk/contact-oscr



Photo by Matthew Waring on Unsplash

If you receive a complaint, make sure you are following any complaints process your area meeting has in place – see the section on Support with conflict on p41 for more on this. Some complaints will also rise to the level of an incident which should be reported to the regulator, so consider whether anyone who comes into contact with your charity through its work has been harmed, and whether there is damage to your charity's work or reputation.

If your area meeting or the community for which you are a trustee decides, in a properly informed and considered Quaker discernment process, that it is morally right to break a law, it would be appropriate to seek professional legal advice before, or as soon as possible when, that course of action begins. Historically Quakers have sometimes chosen this path, and have sometimes been successful in challenging laws which did not allow us the free exercise of our conscience, but it is and should remain a very rare event reserved for strong felt leadings which have been thoroughly tested by the relevant meetings for worship for business.

There are other cases in which a trustee duty can come into conflict with a Quaker principle. For example, letting Quaker owned buildings to controversial groups can require a delicate balancing act which takes into account whether the discerned positions of the area and yearly meeting support the group or not; whether there is a practical or reputational risk to members of the area meeting, its employees, the group who want to hire the building, or to the property; the desire to make spaces available for community groups to use, and to create income by letting our properties; and many other factors. Ideally, creating a lettings policy which covers some eventualities before they happen is best practice. However, no policy can cover all cases and when doubt arises we need to go back to the principles of our Quaker discernment process: trying to gather all relevant information and hear from all perspectives equally, including getting outside advice when needed, in order to find a right way forward for the particular situation.

Contacts for other organisations are mentioned throughout this handbook. Some which may be useful when things go wrong are:

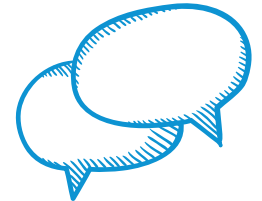
- For safeguarding issues, thirtyone:eight: <https://thirtyoneeight.org>

- For workplace problems and disputes, ACAS: <https://www.acas.org.uk>
- For situations specific to Quakers:
 - staff at Quaker Life: www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-life
 - your Local Development Worker: www.quaker.org.uk/local-development

Serious incidents and notifiable events are also covered in one of the appendixes of the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and area meetings.

You can also always seek emotional and spiritual support for yourself, other trustees, and members of the Quaker community as described in the next section.

Support with emotional and spiritual aspects



When we take on any major Quaker role, such as serving as a trustee, it is important that we look after ourselves and one another.

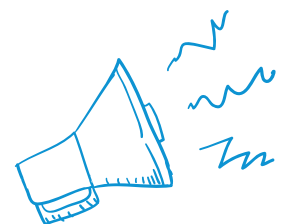
The pastoral care which is in place for all members of the Quaker community should also be there to support those who are serving us. Are you familiar with the system used in your community? It would be good to make sure that members of your meeting know about the work you do as a trustee for many reasons – one is that it helps them to support you in it.

(Are you familiar with the pastoral care provided in your community because you are also providing some of it? Does that feel life-giving at the moment? Serving in multiple roles at the same time is common and can be energising but can also be a cause of exhaustion; if this is you, your work is appreciated but please take care of yourself.)

It can also be helpful to attend to networks of support among trustees. This could be within the trustee group – having a buddy, having an eldership role within the trustee group, having social time and check-ins, or whatever else helps you to get to know one another and support each other. It could also be in wider groups – connecting with the trustees of neighbouring area meetings, connecting with events for trustees organised at the Yearly Meeting level, or connecting with trustees of non-Quaker organisations. When you are planning trustee work, it is worth considering whether there is a backup: if someone was suddenly unavailable for whatever reason, is there someone who could step in on a temporary basis? We can also ask whether people who are not trustees can be involved in the work – for example, some groups of trustees set up service committees, in which one or two trustees work with two or three other people who are not trustees in order to care for a particular area such as property. It can be good to share and this helps with transparency as well.

There are times when we need to be proactive in looking after our well-being and attending to our spiritual lives. Even when there are many tasks to do – and the work of trustees can involve a large number of urgent tasks – we should attend to what love requires of us. We may need to spend time in silence, engage in another spiritual practice, enjoy the company of family or friends, care for our physical or mental health, or simply rest. Please give yourself permission to prioritise activities like this when it feels right to do so.

If your trustee work feels like a burden, whether all the time or temporarily, please let other people know and talk about how it can be adjusted to be manageable for you. If you will be unable to do work which you agreed to do, say so as soon as you realise – it happens to everyone and it is easier to redistribute work earlier in a process than later on. A group of trustees serves as a team, within a wider supporting community, and individuals will need to take on and release work trustfully without undue pride or guilt.



If these suggestions seem much too minor for your situation and you feel you cannot cope any more, please consider seeking urgent support.

- The Samaritans can be contacted at any time on 116 123, and provide a listening ear for anyone who is struggling with thoughts of suicide or other mental health issues, including low mood or energy, mood changes, finding it hard to cope with everyday things, drug and alcohol use, self-harm, and many more.
- Mind provide information and support with a range of mental health problems, including advice about how to help other people. www.mind.org.uk
- CALM: the Campaign Against Living Miserably run an overnight helpline and provide support via their website at all times, with a particular focus on support for men: www.thecalmzone.net/get-support

If you are uncomfortable because you think or feel that something is going wrong in your trustee group, charity, or Quaker community, it's better to raise that early and check with others to see whether things can be improved. If it is serious, you may want to follow the advice in the section on "Support when things go wrong" on p42. Depending on the specific issue, you might find it helpful to discuss it with a fellow trustee or the clerk of trustees, to share it in confidence with a friend or someone with a spiritual care role in your meeting, or to talk to your local development worker or another member of Quaker Life staff. Quaker process works best when we are all listening to each other, ourselves, and the promptings of love and truth – which can be quiet and may not seem logical. You are making an important contribution to discernment by bringing them into your consciousness and sharing them with others.

You can also ask to be released. Quaker roles are never forever, and if you need to stop before the end of your term of service that is a normal situation. You don't have to present a clear reason – if you discern that it is time to stop offering this service, you can stop. It's important to communicate this clearly and work with other trustees to ensure an appropriate handover takes place. It's better to ask to be released than to remain in the role and struggle or find that you are unable to do the work.

If you feel fed up with the work but none of the suggestions above seem to apply, it may be time to look for the joy or the energy in it. You could:

- Bring it into worship and hold the work and yourself in the Light.
- Explore ways to adjust the work, both the content and the practicalities.
- Ask questions like: Which aspects of the trustee role feel better to you? Are there ways to make other tasks seem easier?
- Consider relatively simple changes which tailor the work to your strengths and interests.



- If reading a lot of papers daunts you or seems overwhelming, could you break them down into smaller sections or talk them through with another trustee rather than tackling it all at once and on your own?
- If you are supported by silent worship or social time, could that be extended in your trustee meetings?
- Is there a topic or area of the work which is more interesting to you at the moment and which you could be more involved in? This might not follow expectations based on your professional expertise, existing skills, or previous experience – sometimes we are led to learn new things and find fulfilment in that process.

- Other changes might be more dramatic, but trustees have lots of options – to employ someone or seek another nomination, for example, or to rearrange the work amongst themselves or share more with local meetings.
- Take other steps to ensure you are caring for yourself and your spiritual life, whether that means taking time for prayer, retreat, rest, exercise, friends and family, the outdoors, art, music, play, or something else.

Even if some of the work is still hard, paying attention to the parts of it which are personally or spiritually nourishing for you may make the difficult parts seem more manageable.

Appendix 1: Checklist for new trustees

On appointment, new trustees should be given access to the following information, usually by the clerk or someone appointed as a mentor. They should not be expected to read it all at once. Check with the individual whether they prefer to have it on paper or digitally, whether they prefer to have it all at once or in stages, and whether it would be useful to meet and talk it through. There is a lot of information and we should be ready to customise our induction process to suit different ways of learning.

- Trustee Terms of Reference
- Current trustees' contact details
- Trustees' minutes for the past year
- Dates of upcoming trustees' meetings
- The relevant governing document for the area meeting
- All the memoranda of understanding which include the area meeting and its trustees. This typically includes:
 - The Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and the area meeting
 - Memoranda of Understanding between the area meeting and its constituent local meetings
- Trustees' Annual Report & Accounts
- List of owned properties
- Contracts of employment
- Legal agreements
- List of reference documents (RDs)
- Link and password for any online storage system used by trustees
- This handbook

New trustees will need to complete some forms and give relevant information, usually:

- Personal details including names of referees
- Safeguarding declarations
- Probity declaration
- Trustees' skills and interests

It can be useful to assign a mentor or buddy from among the existing trustees. New trustees should also be offered suitable training, for example Woodbrooke courses, safeguarding training, and any other specialised training they need.

Every area meeting (or other similar body) is different. As a new trustee, you may already be familiar with what's going on locally – or you might find that there's a lot more to know.

- How many trustees are there? Who takes on specific roles, such as clerk, treasurer, and perhaps others?
- How is work shared out between the trustees?

- Are you expected to be a 'link friend' for one or more local meetings, to join subcommittees, or take on other roles within the trustee body?
- How many local meetings does your trustee body cover?
- How many of them have you joined for worship?
- Is their worship deep? Are they energetic meetings or tired? Are they growing or shrinking?
- If you wanted an update on the health of a local meeting, how could you get it? Would you know – or know how to find out – who to contact?
- How many of them have a children's meeting?
- Do they keep their accounts locally, and if so, is that all working smoothly?
- How does your trustee body communicate with local meetings?
- How does your trustee body communicate with your area meeting?
- How does your trustee body communicate with other bodies?
- How many properties belong to this area meeting?
- How many have you visited?
- What else would you like to know?

Appendix 2: Checklist for each year



- Have you completed your annual report and accounts?
- Have you reviewed your environmental impact and carbon footprint?
- Does your trustee body have a good balance of competencies?
- What ongoing training have trustees had this year?
- Have you reviewed and updated your risk register?
- Have you checked which policies need reviewing this year?

The following table lists policies (statements of intent which explain what you do and why) and procedures (describing the process by which the policy will be implemented, explaining what, how, when and where the work will be done) which you may need. For many of these areas, the Memorandum of Understanding between Britain Yearly Meeting and the area meeting will also lay out the responsibilities of the organisations involved.

Policies	Procedures
1 Archive: safe keeping of historical documents	Archiving
2 Data protection: to comply with the Data Protection Act 1998	Data protection
3 Disability equality: to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 & the Equality Act 2010	
4 Employment: comply with the Equality Act 2010	Recruitment and selection Induction Training and development Disciplinary Grievance Insurance Capability Sickness and absence Harassment Lone working Maternal/parent leave Working time regulations
5 Environmental: to outline commitment	
6 Equal opportunity	

Policies	Procedures
7 Financial: practical management	Internal financial controls
8 Grant making	
9 Health & safety: relating to premises and people	Fire Asbestos Furnishings People Material Equipment
10 Hiring: hiring of rooms in functional property	Hiring
11 Investment: clear principles	Investment management
12 Letting: leasing of investment property	
13 Property: care and maintenance	Property maintenance Service record
14 Reserves: reason and purpose	Reserves
15 Risk management: financial and non-financial	Risk register
16 Safeguarding	Protection of children and vulnerable adults or those with care needs Disclosure
17 Secure storage: confidential material	Confidentiality & continuity
18 Volunteer involvement	

Handbook for trustees of Quaker meetings

2024 edition

Accessible versions of this document are available. Please contact the publications manager at publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.

**Britain Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**
Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ
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www.quaker.org.uk

