

CONFIDENTIAL

Replacement of Meeting House Manager

I'd already started thinking about this and indeed had emailed Henry and Neil on 7 June. Neither responded – perhaps the email got lost in the ether – but I have since had a brief conversation with Neil. I have included most of the text of the email later but I'll start by addressing Miranda's point and the questions Henry has raised, taking account of some of Rachel's responses (all of which I found very helpful).

Miranda's 11 points

1. "Pick a direction – are you a business (Monday to Saturday) that wants to offer a service to Edinburgh and Scotland and increase income or are you a Meeting House that occasionally lets out rooms?"

I take Rachel's point about 'professionalising' our approach but I don't think it is right for us to make a clear-cut distinction between being a business or a Meeting House. Our Governing Document, under 'Application of Resources', says : 'Within South East Scotland Area Meeting, resources are used to further the area meeting's objects by work such as ... (vi) maintaining and developing Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world.'

I think we are some of both, mostly a Meeting House (and we need the MH for our own activities at some points on some weekdays), but the MH has a further purpose and in any case we can't keep the MH unless we regularly let out rooms. It was also originally, and I think should still be, part of our social remit to offer rooms to local and grass-roots groups.

Miranda might well see this as an amateurish fudge; for me it is a pragmatic approach. Furthermore, if we were to become purely a business six days a week, we would probably need to spend considerable sums upgrading the building – we need to do the work anyway but can take longer over it if we don't see ourselves primarily as a (Monday to Saturday) business. Can we find a middle way?

2. "Speak to Anthony and Sue and Sue and Tony ..."
David Sterratt had a discussion with Sue and Tony when they left which I think included this so we should start by talking to him. I find the idea of asking Anthony and Sue bizarre as we're still dealing with problems they created.
3. "Get AM trustees to take the MH business and the job of MH manager seriously ..."
I think that as a general rule trustees do take the MH seriously. (Occasionally other matters may distract from that.) The convenor is invited to attend trustees' meetings and reports to it as well as to AM. Could there perhaps be argument for requesting that the convenor should be a trustee, and another for inviting the MH manager to attend (some?) meetings. But the affairs of Edinburgh Quaker Meeting House are not the only matters with which trustees are concerned, and trustees should not need to duplicate the work of MHMC..

With regard to minutes, AM minutes are circulated to everyone on the AM emailing list (which in the past has included the managers) and future managers should be on the list. Trustees' minutes might need to be redacted, possibly down to a minute of the report from the convenor of MHMC. Perhaps the report brought to trustees by the Convenor should be agreed in advance between the convenor and MH manager.

4. "AM trustees to visit the MH and inspect it with the MH manager at least twice a year."
I'm not quite sure why Miranda is suggesting this, given the role of MHMC. Once a year,

when trustees are meeting in the MH, could I think be feasible and have purpose.

5. "Get a budget agreed for the year ahead ..."

I sense some confusion between the roles of trustees and AM. I admit I am not good at budgeting (perhaps Jonathan will be better); budgets are currently drawn up by Heather our accountant), based on previous years' expenditure but taking account of information I've given her about expected changes, capital expenditure, etc. which may be required. In any case, I think sections of MHMC's Terms of Reference are relevant here, and the manager has a role to play in producing a list of what s/he thinks needs to be done, marked according to urgency, and discussing it with MHMC.

There is a wider problem here in that we have no one either on MHMC nor on trustees with specific responsibility for the fabric of our two meeting houses, nor anyone with responsibility for fund-raising for major building work.

6. "Have regular ... meetings of Management Committee – ask for proper reporting from the MH manager ..."

Yes. While I've been on MHMC, I think there have been ups and downs – which may indeed be connected with the point Rachel made about volunteers in her answer to 1. As there is at least one trustee on MHMC and minutes are circulated to the clerk to trustees, communication should be reasonable. MHMC may need to ask trustees to meet more frequently.

7. "... who on MC does what ..."

Yes, we've discussed this and have tried to implement it in the past – but Nominations have struggled to find people for specific roles.

8. "Be professional with the MH manager ..."

I think we all need to recognise the skills – and limitations – of others, whether those others are our paid staff or volunteers. I think we have recognised Miranda's skills but also that she, like all of us, does not do everything equally well.

When she says 'help the meeting to recognise that' is she referring to Central Edinburgh LM? That has indeed been a problem for a long time and is difficult to sort.

9. "Support the MH manager ..."

An interesting point. I'd have thought it was the manager's job to support the rest of the staff team, propose goals, etc., but of course the manager should in turn be able to rely on the support of MHMC. That probably needs to be channelled, most of the time, through the convenor.

10. "Enable paid-for professional support ..."

We do draw on some professional support – our accountant and architect, for instance – and brought in Mark Kisby when we were upgrading some of the video conferencing equipment. If more is needed, the manager should make MHMC (who in turn should inform trustees) aware of what is required, why, and the likely cost.

11. "Use the quinquennial review ... as the start of planning for the year ahead."

The QR looks at the state of the physical structure of the building and is intended to provide the basis for planning repairs and improvements over the following five years. I think Miranda may have misinterpreted its purpose. If the manager thinks the Risk Assessment should be a planning tool, I think it is up to the manager to bring that to MHMC.

Yes, the manager and MHMC should start looking at the following year's festival period as soon as the current year's arrangement has finished – and preferably before that.

Just a general comment here from me, following on from what I have said under 5: there is no magic money tree. When I started as treasurer, there was a regular transfer from the Meeting House to SESAM's main account of £5,000 a month. The amount has not risen, despite the increase in the cost of living, and it does not cover the monthly bill for salaries, let alone anything else. Yes, we still have some of a large legacy left, but it would be only too easy to spend it all and then have no reserves to meet major items of expenditure or indeed the deficit we incur most years. If the Meeting House Manager needs more financial resources in terms of a budget for 5 and 10 (for instance), the MH may need to bring in more income.

Henry's other questions

Business development: yes, to a certain extent. Sue and Tony seemed to manage that with a reasonable degree of success (see 2019 accounts) but there is a limit: when the MH is again accepting as many lettings as it can while allowing time for a certain amount of repair work, then further business development may not be possible.

I like Rachel's comments here, not least about the need for a self-starter.

'Upskilling': we need to see what actually happens after Miranda leaves. It will take time for the staff to settle into their new roles and how they feel about them. Yes, it would be good if we can continue to help them develop further (and so free up some of the new MH manager's time) – but then we're back to the question of where the money comes from if we are to continue paying them more, and who does the jobs requiring lesser skills.

Job share: preferable, but I agree with Rachel and don't think we should say we would definitely not accept a single person. (The advantage of a job share, as we saw with Sue and Tony, is not only that the role holders can support each other but also that we benefit from having a wider range of skills than one person can bring.)

Non-resident: if there is a good local candidate/pair of candidates, then we should agree to non-residency. There might also be a situation where there are two good candidates both wanting a job share, one of whom is local and one of whom would welcome the accommodation.

As to financial differences resulting from non-residency, we would need to make this a matter for discussion and agreement (taking into account as Rachel indicates, the rental value of the flat).

With regard to responsibilities, we need to think about how we would provide back-up if, say, a casual staff member on duty on their own, had a problem, or if there were a building emergency such as a leak or other damage. (In fact that's a situation which may arise after Miranda's departure and I'm not sure how it will be dealt with then.)

Moving forward

First of all, a (slightly edited version of) the email I sent to Henry and Neil dated 7 June:

...

Just for starters, I thought I'd take Miranda's job description and tweak it a bit, which I've done. Tweaks are minimal and I've added a few comments. We now need to take into account other comments and decide what is needed, and then check with trustees as to whether they wish to query anything, or add anything further. Yes?

I'd have thought we could do this relatively quickly.

I know there are divergent views on **urgency**. My perspective is that we have three permanent and three casual staff members. The permanent staff are good but all are on part-time contracts:

Majk 27 hours per week on a regular pattern (although I think he is occasionally willing to be flexible)

Ellie 16 hours per week on a regular pattern (although I understand she is willing to be flexible)

Ken 15 hours per week on a regular pattern (although he is willing to be flexible)

We know Majk doesn't want more hours

Ellie is, I understand, willing to do more (how many more?)

Ken already does extra hours and might be willing to do more - but I think I'm right in saying he doesn't want his *contracted* hours to increase.

We should not exploit our staff members' willingness to be flexible. Any of them might find other work even if Ellie is probably the 'hungriest'.

Liang and Marie on the casual staff can work no more than 20 hours per week as they are international students and they are in any case entitled to turn down any work offered, as is James. They have their studies, and will return home at some point.

Miranda's contract is for 37.5 hours per week so that time needs to be covered. It's true there will be things which Miranda does but which aren't essential for basic running of the MH, but the remaining staff will be slower initially when they take on new tasks. We need cover for holidays and illness - it could be disastrous if we had to cancel a booking at short notice because we couldn't staff the Meeting House. I guess that winter months are when staff are most likely to be sick but we seem to be seeing a wave of Covid at the moment.

If we can actually operate the Meeting House successfully with the above staff members, then of course we don't need a new manager but is that realistic? If so, why have we had managers for so many years? We know Sue and Tony ran up considerable overtime bills at certain times when they couldn't take TOIL, and they normally had three permanent part-timers (Cathie instead of Ellie) and four casuals. I therefore see it as a high priority for us to appoint a new manager or job-share managers. For someone to start in early January, and reckoning that they might need to give 3 months' notice, we'd need to reach agreement with them by the end of September. That would mean advertising in July/August, and interviewing first week of September (given that it wouldn't give applicants a realistic view of the MH were we to interview in August).

Further to the above:

My view on the urgency has not changed. Indeed, I fear that if we take a long time over consultation the time frame will slip. I know Neil sees us as very vulnerable if we don't move as quickly as possible.

And lastly

With regard to the suggested starting point for a job description for new manager, we might want to add in reference to the January AM minute about the future of 7 Victoria Terrace, following the report from the Affordability Group, i.e.:

2024/01/08 Future of 7 Victoria Terrace

On behalf of AM Trustees, David Sterratt (CE) has presented the report of the Victoria Terrace Affordability Group, which was published in the current edition of *Sesame*. He outlined the group's thinking, and presented its conclusions and recommendations, which are that Area Meeting should:

- a) Keep and develop the Meeting House as a Quaker home and presence in the city.
- b) Invest in any remaining easy environmental upgrades, including energy-efficient lighting.
- c) Continue to investigate incremental improvements to insulation and upgrading the heating system.
- d) Continue to urge Friends to consider the costs of running the Meeting House when considering their Quaker giving, including in legacies. Friends' ongoing contributions to the Area Meeting make a difference!
- e) Continue to work on ways of using the Meeting House to raise the profile of Quakers.
- f) Encourage Meeting House Management Committee to seek to increase high volume, high income lettings.
- g) Investigate the café suggestion further, addressing the previous two points. In particular two options:
 - i) A pop-up café in the existing Foyer space, requiring minimal reconfiguration of the building
 - ii) A café occupying more of the ground floor (including perhaps the Bow Room and Office), which would probably include reconfiguration upstairs, most likely in the kitchen and study area.

Both should be evaluated on income generation, benefits to Quakers, outreach, capital costs, and any change in utility to Quakers.

We thank the group warmly for the work they have put in to this report.

We have heard the view that the meeting house should be sold: however, the group has followed the strong view expressed at previous meetings that this would be a matter of last resort.

The full version of the report outlines options not carried forward in the recommendations: Friends are encouraged to ask the Clerk if they wish to read this.

We adopt the report as our way forward and ask Trustees and the Meeting House Management Committee to progress the work. We will review the situation in three years.

We are reminded that we make these decisions in the light of what God requires of us.

I note that, although Miranda was on the Affordability Group, she did not (as far as I can recall) raise some of the points on her recent list that would have been relevant.

JN / 21/6/24