

## Options for Scotland History

### Where did it all begin?

The consideration of the future for Quakers in Scotland began in **2015** when North Scotland Area Meeting wanted to understand, and address, their lack of active membership, and to find ways to ensure the Area Meeting could continue to function.

So, in **2016** they set up The Listening Project, asking Friends 4 questions:

- *How do you connect with Quakers/ Friends?*
- *How do you feel about this?*
- *What would you like to change?*
- *How do you envisage the future of the community of Friends in North Scotland?*

They found that Friends visualised a future built around an enhanced community, based on local meetings, with a simplified administration structure allowing them to put their energy into community building. Their report listed several ways in which they might achieve this. Among these was the suggestion that the AM might lay down its charitable status.

The conclusions of the report came to General Meeting in November **2017** asking General Meeting to consider the possibility of forming a single body for the whole of Scotland, which would release many Friends serving as trustees, enabling them to undertake other service. General Meeting welcomed the minute and asked General Meeting trustees to meet with North Scotland Area Meeting trustees to see how best to move forward with the consideration.

The trustees met in April **2018** and a minute and summary of the meeting went to General Meeting in June 2018. The Meeting recognised the concern that we needed to fully understand and come to unity on, and the importance of not losing the insight that the Listening project had enabled. The Meeting agreed to arrange a day for interested Friends to meet with some Britain Yearly Meeting staff to work on this together with the intention:

*“to let the Spirit move amongst them; for NSAM to be heard, and for their concerns to be addressed; and to look critically at the structures that are currently in Scotland”*

A paper was prepared for the meeting by Constance Tonge, clerk of North Scotland Area meeting at the time of the meeting and it identified 5 possible models ([full paper](#)):

1. **A:** North of Scotland Area Meeting would be laid down and its functions devolved to Local Meetings.
2. **B:** All four Area Meetings would be laid down and their responsibilities would be divided between an enhanced General Meeting for Scotland and nationwide Local Meetings and Worship Groups.
3. **C:** North of Scotland Area Meeting (perhaps in a different form) would be retained but would lay down LMs in favour of worshipping groups. All church affairs would be handled by North of Scotland Area Meeting or General Meeting.
4. **D:** North Scotland Area Meeting would not be laid down but would adopt practices adapted from other meetings around the UK.
5. **E:** North Scotland Area Meeting would not be laid down but could adopt practices adapted from other meetings around the UK.

The discussions sought to consider the issues both in principle and practical and possible solutions.

The meeting was well attended and there was much discussion, but it was unable to reach unity of understanding or vision at this stage. [A report of the meeting and a minute](#) were sent to General Meeting September 2018.

General Meeting agreed that their meeting in March **2019** would be dedicated to identifying the next steps of discernment on the matter. The meeting focused on: "*Scottish Quakers: How do we liberate ourselves to focus on spiritual growth, community building and witness in the world?*". The meeting was joined by Paul Parker (Recording Clerk), Jonathon Carmichael (Simpler Meetings Project staff) and Sandra Berry (Director of Woodbrooke). The considerations were summarised and shared with Local and Area Meetings for their consideration and Area Meetings were asked to bring responses back to General Meeting in November 2019 for further discussion and to develop an action plan. ([Minutes from this meeting](#))

At the [November 2019 General Meeting](#), Friends agreed a plan of actions and allocated funds to support improving communications, supporting role holders and building community.

The arrival of the pandemic in **2020** and the wider use of video conferencing which enabled our ways of meeting to evolve. Various Scotland wide blended meetings were held to widen community connections through training and informal meetings of role holders.

However North Scotland Area Meeting were still struggling and they met with General Meeting trustees in May 2020 to discuss how further support could be provided. North Scotland went on to give their situation further

consideration and after a Meeting for Clearness in October 2020 where they found unity in a way forward they sent a minute to General Meeting:

***North Scotland Area Quaker Meeting 19th October 2020, Minute 53/20***

*This Meeting was arranged to consider the minute from Inverness Local Meeting on 8th October 2020 that adopted the Minute from the Meeting for Clearness held on 6th October 2020 (attached). There was unity amongst us and North Scotland Area Quaker Meeting accepts the minutes and forwards them on to General Meeting.*

*We do not have answers as to what greater cooperation looks like. We have welcomed the cooperation to date that has involved Trustees working together on various policies (health & safety, finance, safeguarding, data-protection, to name a few) and we hope that further efficiencies can be made in the future. A single legal body for Scotland might be an option that can be considered whilst acknowledging that any new structure must recognise our local and regional experience in regard to organising social and spiritual events.*

General Meeting asked all four Area Meetings to reflect on the matter in preparation for further consideration at the March **2021** meeting at which it agreed to set up a working group (which became known as Options for Scotland 1, OfS1) to:

1. Reflect further and more deeply on a range of solutions and models which would assist us in developing Quakers in Scotland
2. Identify options for GM and AMs to consider, including organisational changes we can make within our current structures which would benefit us all. Work already done will be considered along with new thinking. We hope the group will be creative in generating and exploring further options.
3. Set out the pros and cons of each option
4. Write a paper on their findings for the consideration of GM and AMs

[\(Full minute\)](#)

Options for Scotland 1 reported back to General Meeting in March **2022**. As a group they had discerned that we needed to strengthen our sense of community to enable us to work together as Quakers in Scotland to find solutions. Simply proposing a different structure would not work without bringing the community to work together as a single body.

They suggested the 5 attributes we needed to develop a stronger community were:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Cooperation
- Contribution
- Compassion

[The OfS1 report](#) recommended a range of actions that could be taken immediately without any structural change, and identified 3 options for structural change which might support a simpler more sustainable future for Quakers in Scotland.

1. The reconfiguration of responsibilities - transferring to GM roles/matters that are best done Scotland wide – with AMs supporting Local Meetings (LM).
2. All Quaker charities within Scotland to merge to form a single charitable body, while Area Meetings (AMs) continued with all their other current responsibilities.
3. Lay down AMs in Scotland, creating a single body to take on their responsibilities

General Meeting accepted the report and its recommendations, and the Options for Scotland 1 group was laid down. ([Full minute](#))

The second working group (Options for Scotland 2) was appointed by between meeting procedure in May 2022 and recorded by minute at the June General Meeting. They reported regularly to General Meeting and in June 2022 their remit was amended slightly asking the group to bring forward recommendations in their final report:

## **22/09/16 Options for Quakers in Scotland - update**

*The working group is due to report back to GM in June 2023 and we have been asked to consider whether we would like their report to include a proposal for changes we might make to benefit Quakers in Scotland. Their current remit is to:*

- *Explore and analyse changes to our Quaker structures, which might be of future benefit to Friends in Scotland.*
- *Keep a watching brief on changes being adopted by Quakers elsewhere to learn from the experience of others.*
- *Monitor how we are putting into practice the suggestions for strengthening our Quaker community in Scotland.*

*We are content for the Options 2 Working Group to bring us their recommendations, as part of their report next year. We note that the report will go to the four area meetings, before it comes to General Meeting in June, so that any decision made lies with the whole Quaker community in Scotland.*

The group met regularly considering

- the vision of what our community would look like in 10 years
- the pros and cons of 4 options; the 3 options for structural change identified by the Options for Scotland 1 group and the option of no change, and
- what were the needs of our local meetings for worship are that the structure must support.

The group identified the basic needs as:

- Spiritual ~ a faith community to worship and learn with
- People ~ to share worship with and to care for one another
- Resources ~ premises to meet in and finance to pay for it and staff where required

Additionally at the March **2023** General Meeting Zoe Prosser, Local Development Worker, led a [session for reflection](#) asking us to consider:

- How are we feeling about our Quaker community?
- How are our Quaker Meetings being sustained?
- The sense of the meeting was that whilst we struggle with many aspects regarding sustaining our communities, there were signs of spring and new growth.

The group held open sessions to share their considerations and recommendations with Area Meetings prior to the matter going to General Meeting in June 2023.

[The OfS2 report](#) recommended:

- **We form a single body, 'Quakers in Scotland' through which we support all our Local Meetings, where our membership is held and which enables us to speak, as Quakers, on Scotland wide issues.**
- **We form a single charity (a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), to be responsible for the stewardship of all our resources across Scotland.**
- **We develop further the use of paid professional support to undertake routine tasks and provide advice, easing the load for the Friends we ask to give the greatest practical ministry**

The meeting was not in unity over the recommendations but recognised the need for further exploration of the issues raised at the meeting and in the area meeting minutes. [General Meeting agreed](#) to extend the life of the Options for Scotland 2 group to allow the work to continue whilst names were found for a new working group.

In response to the concerns raised at the June meeting General Meeting trustees sought legal guidance to check on the most appropriate charitable status for a single charitable body and the group produced an interim report responding to some of the concerns and suggesting a way forward.

General Meeting trustees were advised that a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation was best, providing a legal identity for the charity to hold property and sign contracts, and to provide better protection for trustees from personal liability.

[The interim report](#) was sent to Area Meetings to consider prior to the matter going to General Meeting in September.

In September 2023 General Meeting received the interim report and the minutes from the four Area Meetings responding to four questions:

1. Is the AM interested in taking the planning for a single charity further? (A definite commitment will come later when we have done more detailed work on things like the constitution so that Friends can have a clear idea what they are considering joining.)
2. Is the AM happy to have the GM nominations committee find any further names needed for Friends to serve in particular ways in relation to Quakers in Scotland? (For example they may need to find Friends to serve as the first trustees of a new SCIO.)
3. Are Friends happy to work with Friends across Scotland in fleshing out the various aspects of Quakers in Scotland beyond the work towards the single charity?
4. Are Friends content that General Meeting write to Meeting for Sufferings on behalf of all Area Meetings explaining the work we are engaged in?

All the Area Meetings responded positively to the questions, though some Friends still expressed reservations regarding the process and the lack of detail on how the new body could fulfil all the functions of the Area Meetings and General Meeting as they are currently operating. Dundee Friends Property Trust had also given agreement to the way forward. General Meeting affirmed everyone's commitment to the process and [gave authority for the new working group](#) (later called the Quakers in Scotland Coordinating Group) requesting:

- that draft documents to be brought to us for the decision on having a single charity, following liaison with the six trustee bodies;
- wider options to be brought to General Meeting and the four Area Meetings on how best our meetings might evolve, if they wish, and be grouped together;
- how we could improve common ways of working together, such as for eldership and pastoral care, and for learning and growth.

The new working group (later called the Quakers in Scotland Coordinating Group, QiSCG) then used the current Area Meetings and General Meetings governing documents to produce a governing document that also included the additional requirements of a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Trustees of the Area Meetings, General Meeting and Dundee Friends Property Trust along with other interested Friends were consulted and contributed to the development of the [draft governing document \(Jan 2024\)](#) which was circulated for consultation in January **2024**. (Note that future drafts supersede this, including the [March 2024 draft governing document](#)).

### **Where are we now?**

The future of Quakers in Scotland is a matter for all Friends in Scotland to consider and contribute to. Some Friends are fearful of the consequences of any change fearing loss of their identity and community connections. Some Friends are fearful for the future of their Quaker community if we do not adapt and change. Some Friends want to know how the new structure will be better before they feel they can commit to it. Other Friends are excited at the opportunities that a change in our structure could provide, widening Quaker connections and providing a single Quaker identity and presence for all Quakers in Scotland, and want to move ahead. We need to listen to the concerns and worries and work together to find a way forward as a single community, Quakers in Scotland.

There is still much to be done to discern how we might structure our Quaker community as a single body to ensure we build on the community connections we currently have, and enhance and extend our care and support for our local meetings and worshipping groups across the whole of Scotland.

The governing document describes the formation of a single charity which could provide a simple, national charity supporting a network of local meetings and worshipping groups which could:

- reduce the number of Friends required to serve as trustees and release Friends to serve in other roles and have more time for Quaker witness

- reduce the risk of personal liability for those Friends serving as trustees, so making serving as trustees an option for more Friends
- reduce the duplication of roles and responsibilities, releasing more Friends to engage in other aspects of Quaker life
- enable centralisation of financial management and reduction of the work load on treasurers

The governing document is designed to support a variety of possible structures including a single body (a single area meeting), retaining the current area meeting bodies or some other arrangement.

We are working on how best to:

- retain the benefits of current area meeting and other communities, while reducing the burden of administration and governance
- enable non-geographically based Friends to join the national body with the flexibility to move and worship anywhere in Scotland
- increase the opportunities for participation and inclusion

The group is coordinating subgroups working on the Governing Document, Memorandums of Understanding, Property and Finance management, and Community. The group welcomes support from Friends interested in taking this work forward.

A [full set of GM minutes](#) on these matters is available.

Published 21 March 2024. **Further updates** are available at [QiS News](#).