

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting Annual Report 2018 from Trustees

Reference details

1. This is the trustees' report for the Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), abbreviated as Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting. The Area Meeting is also known as Hertford and Hitchin Quakers, and was previously known as Hertford and Hitchin Monthly Meeting.

The Area Meeting is part of the organization of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and the national body is known as Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). The Area Meeting contains a number of Local Meetings, which hold public Meetings for Worship and have day-to-day care of Meeting Houses and other property.

The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond. This may be done by work such as:

- strengthening the life and witness of Quaker meetings both in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond;
- spreading the message of Quakers and interpreting and developing the thought and practice of the Religious Society;
- undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
- funding the concerns that Quaker meetings in the area of the Area Meeting or beyond have adopted or agreed to support;
- providing for the pastoral care of individual Members and Attenders¹ including assistance to those in need and for education;
- maintaining and developing its Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world;
- administering and maintaining the organization of the Area Meeting and contributing to the support of Britain Yearly Meeting

2. This report covers the calendar and financial year ended 31st December 2018.

3. The Area Meeting was registered with the Charity Commission on 29th September 2009 with Registered Charity Number 1131894.

4. Address that can be used for communication with the Clerk to the Trustees.

Roger Jarvis
17 Moormead Close
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 2BA

¹ "Members" are those who have formally been accepted into membership of the Area Meeting, "Attenders" are those who regularly attend Meeting for Worship but are not Members. The Area Meeting has a general policy of not distinguishing between Members and Attenders.

5. Trustees in 2018:

Ian Chandler	served in 2018, continues to serve in 2019
Kim Noy- Man Jackson	served in 2018, service ended Dec. 2018
Roger Jarvis	served in 2018, continues to serve in 2019.
Frances Prestidge	served in 2018, continues to serve in 2019
Duncan Steven	served in 2018, service ended Sept. 2018

6. Key officers

Area Meeting Clerk

David Hindle

The role of Assistant Clerk of Area Meeting has not been made after 2011, the functions of the role are rotated between the Local Meetings hosting the Area Meeting sessions.

Treasurer

John White

Names and addresses of other relevant organizations or persons

Bank:

Triodos Bank
Brunel House, 11 The Promenade, Bristol, BS8 3NN

Examiner of Accounts:

Andy West

Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:

Friends Trusts Limited
173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Public Benefit statement

The principal benefit is that at least weekly each of the 5 Meeting Houses is open to the public for Meeting for Worship. The Meeting Houses are also made available as appropriate, sometimes at a subsidized charge, to suitable local community and interest groups and charities.

Serious Incident

There were no serious incidents which should have been reported in the previous year, but were not.

6. Risk assessment: the Trustees have considered a number of areas of possible risk, as follows:

Care of property The properties are appropriately insured, and Area Meeting Properties Committee have oversight of any significant alterations to property which local meetings propose and provide advice as needed on proposals.

Health and Safety The Local Meetings are responsible for assessing the safety aspects of the use of the buildings in their care or which they use.
The Trustees have incorporated oversight of this into a memorandum of understanding.

Financial probity The Area Meeting and its constituent bodies have no activities which constitute a major financial risk. There is a financial reporting system which includes independent examination of the Area Meeting's and its constituent bodies' annual accounts.

Investments The Area Meeting's funds are all in bank accounts. The placement of the funds is reviewed periodically.

Employment The Trustees have examined the employment practices in the Local Meetings with regard to legal requirements. New contracts have been employed by Welwyn Garden City Meeting. Letchworth Meeting has now employed a new contract. Model contracts for paid workers and agreements for volunteers are close to completion.

Child Safety A Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy for the Area Meeting was agreed in 2009 and a network of responsible persons for the Area Meeting and each Local Meeting has been implemented. A Safeguarding Handbook for the context of Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting was produced in 2010, and revised in 2016.

Objectives and Activities

1. The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends.

The main activity of the constituent Local Meetings is the right holding of public meetings for worship, and regular meetings for church affairs.

The Area Meeting itself holds meetings for church affairs and supports its constituent Local Meetings, including providing grants and practical support to develop the life of meetings, and of individual Quakers and attenders.

Other activities include:

- Sustaining faith relations. Nurturing relations with other Quaker bodies, with other denominations and with other faiths.
- Promoting the Quaker way of life, including promoting our beliefs and practices.
- Witness through action, which involves carrying out active programmes of work to address social problems including conflict resolution and reconciliation. This work is often in partnership with or by supporting other organizations.

2. The Area Meeting and its constituent Local Meetings decide how to use their funds to support Britain Yearly Meeting and other Quaker bodies, and also to support individuals and non-Quaker organizations whose objects and actions are in accordance with core Quaker values, including peace, truth, justice, and equality.

Achievements and Performance

1. At the end of 2018, the Area Meeting had 148 Members, and 120 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 3 Members by death, 1 by transfer out.. We also welcomed 3 new members by conviction, 1 was reinstatement so that his membership could be transferred.

2. The constituent Local Meetings held public Meetings for Worship as follows:

Meeting (location)	Frequency of public Meeting for Worship	No. of public Meetings for Worship in 2018	Estimated Average Attendance
Guilden Morden	Twice monthly 10.30am	24	5
Hertford	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	17
Hitchin	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	17
Letchworth	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	18
Stevenage	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	6
Welwyn Garden City	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	20
	Weekly Sunday 8am (not 1 st Sunday)	40	n/a

3. During 2018 the Area Meeting has continued to pursue policies of good governance and furtherance of our charitable objectives in compliance with its governing document. Fiscal oversight has been achieved at all levels by the receipt and acceptance of both the examined Area Meeting business accounts 2017, and also the receipt of the examined amalgamated accounts 2017 for the local meetings over which it has oversight. The proposed budget for 2019 was received and accepted. The financial timetable for 2019 was received, and Area Meeting quotas for 2019 (contributions from Local Meetings) were accepted. Pastoral and spiritual responsibility has been overseen by the appointment of Overseers and Elders. Development opportunities are always available for our younger members, while a wide range of courses have been attended by our more mature members in subjects designed to further our charitable and religious objectives, which were reported back on. Young Quakers were involved in a Participation Day held alongside Meeting for Sufferings. Friends of all ages can go to our summer camp which promotes the Quaker ethos and testimonies in a fun environment.

4. A total of 6 Area Meetings were held with an average attendance of 18.5 Friends. Reports have been received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings, our standing executive body between Yearly Meetings; and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. Triennial reports from our local meetings continue to be received. Hoddesdon Options Group which is driving the planned redevelopment of the Hoddesdon Site continues to report regularly to Area Meeting; oversight of this project has been achieved by having it as a continuing minute at each Area Meeting. A fraud case that involved one of our local meetings last year is still being pursued. Any correspondence received by the Area Meeting was reported on.

5. Area Meeting dates for 2019 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our local meetings) for 2017 was received; the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership. A Testimony to the Grace of God, as shown in the life and service of one of our deceased Friends was received by the Area Meeting; a Testimony being a living expression of our faith for the inspiration of others. An Area Meeting Peace Group was formed with the aim to as far as possible to ensure that local schools have a balanced approach to teaching and exposing children to ideas of war and peace. The insurance situation of our volunteers was clarified, and a data audit was carried out in line with GDPR 2018 regulations and a Privacy Policy accepted. A Presentation and Communication workshop was held.

The Hoddesdon Options Group continues to report regularly to Area Meeting. During 2018 the plans for this project are continuing to progress slowly. One of the aims of this project is to exercise our responsibility to a grade 2 listed disused Meeting House, and working towards a rejuvenation of its fortunes by breathing new life into it. Towards this end we are actively seeking planning permission towards redeveloping an adjacent plot containing the warden's cottage for eventual sale to provide funds for the renovation and upkeep of the Meeting House. A community audit has been conducted, and discussions are being held widely with community groups and other interested parties as to the nature of the Meeting House's eventual usage

6. During 2018 five trustees served. We see one of our functions as providing advice and counsel to Area Meeting in session. We occasionally flag up matters of concern to Area Meeting by minute. Trustees appoint representatives to all Area Meetings in session. New trustees are appointed by the Area Meeting following nomination from the Area Meeting Nominations Committee. The trustees presented to Area Meeting their annual report for 2017 to the Charity Commission, as well as their own internal report to Area Meeting. Trustees also have the opportunity to bring items to Area Meeting throughout the year. During 2018 all trustee meetings were quorate. Support is made available by Area Meeting to all trustees, and one trustee from our Area Meeting is also a trustee on Grand Union Quaker Camps.

7. Each of the Local Meetings had a formal or informal programme of developing the spiritual and social life of its members. These included, at individual Local Meetings:

- Fundraising Events
- New Year's Party, and Christmas Celebrations
- Shared lunches and breakfasts
- Quaker Study Group
- Meetings for discussion, and Afterword
- Food for Thought
- Reading group
- Becoming Friends
- Experiment With Light
- Regular Newsletters
- Friendly Bible Study

Local Meetings for Worship included the regular reading of advices and queries. Our Elders and Overseers kept in mind the spiritual and pastoral needs of all Friends and Attenders. Courses attended in connection with this work included Eldership, Mental Health in our Meetings, and Funerals. Regular visits are also made to a long standing member now in residential care. In their business meetings Local Meetings considered items prior to Area Meetings.

Local Meetings encouraged the attendance of Friends at a number of learning opportunities. These included at Hitchin Local Meeting the 'Food for Thought' discussion meetings that have been well attended, on subjects like Diversity of Belief among Quakers, Reflections on Worship, and The Post-Truth World. Afterword a time for reflection on ministry after Meeting for Worship takes place monthly. Local Meetings have also been involved with Becoming Friends courses, and the Woodbrooke on line resource Being Friends Together. One comment received in this context was, " (Becoming Friends) is providing a wonderful introduction to Quaker ideas and practices, and is deepening the friendships of everyone involved. Experienced Friends and newer ones are learning alongside."

Friends attended meetings on behalf of our Area Meeting including Britain Yearly Meeting in London.

8. Most Local Meetings had regular contact with Church and Community groups within their immediate areas and actively worked with others in our community. Examples of these are:

- Participating in Women's World Day of Prayer and Unity Services
- Hitchin Counselling Service
- The Collateral Damage Project
- Food Banks
- Celebrating Diversity Event during Inter-Faith Week

9. All the Local Meetings except Guilden Morden have Meeting Houses and other facilities which are available for use by the wider community. Welwyn Garden City has The Backhouse Room which is an additional separate meeting room. The availability of these premises is regarded as a form of service to the community, particularly when they are used by groups answering a social need or providing a cultural service. In some cases additional support eg staffing or facilities is provided to some of these groups. Examples of these in 2018 were:

- Music and dancing groups and clubs
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous
- Spiritualists
- Health and Well Being groups
- Business Buzz
- A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House
- Muslims(Friday prayers and Ramadan observance)
- Children's Art and Community Art Groups
- A number of social and cultural events with and for Syrian Families
- Liberal Jewish Synagogue.

In support of our commitment to the policy of sustainability being pursued by Britain Yearly Meeting, our Area Meeting has considered its response. One of our Local Meetings has in the past commissioned an energy efficiency review, to inform our decisions and chart future progress on this issue. Improvements to heating systems (including remote control), and insulation work has been carried out. One Local Meeting has appointed Bulb Energy, a green energy supplier, to supply their electricity, and a water meter fitted and a metered tariff applied for to raise awareness of the cost of water. Several Local Meetings have embarked on planting programmes, including the installation of a bird feeder in the garden, planter to the paved areas and hanging baskets to the building, and growing vegetables, herbs, and fruit, as well as flowers. Several trees have also been planted (some of the last was contributed by one of our user groups, the Liberal Jewish Synagogue). In the past several Meetings have had LED lighting fitted, and considered the idea of installing solar panels. The programme of insulation will continue next year.

The hiring of these premises remains a significant source of revenue for the meetings, however, charges may also be reduced or held to a level which encourages groups in difficulty. The development of facilities within and outside Meeting Houses are also seen to be closely related to outreach.

10. Quaker witness includes supporting Quaker organizations and also non-Quaker organizations which pursue aims in line with Quaker values, particularly (but not exclusively) historical Quaker concerns such as peace, justice, refugees, treatment of criminals, and emergency relief, all areas where "that of God in all people" is often not recognized.

As part of our support, Local Meetings have raised funds for Quaker and non-Quaker charitable bodies both on a regular basis and as special events or series of events. These include:

- Peacedirect
- Central work of Britain Yearly Meeting
- North Herts Sanctuary

Activities included collection of clothes and equipment for Calais Camp. Hertford Meeting hosted a lunch for Syrian refugees after a boat trip from Ware to Hertford, and held an hour's reflection as part of Lent Events on the theme of home, sanctuary and welcome. Individually Friends have supported the local resettlement of refugee families. Several meetings have supported Christian Aid Week. Hitchin Friends supported a Christian Aid quiz and supplied collectors for Christian Aid Week. Several meetings have been involved with activities to support local Churches Together groups. Welwyn Garden City Meeting participated in inter-faith work and Herts and Beds Welcomes Syrian refugees, contributing to study events, and hosting a number of social and cultural events. Hitchin Meeting devised an ecumenical service for Churches Together in Hitchin to commemorate the 100 days of prayer leading up to the centenary of the end of World War 1. Several meetings took part in the Collateral Damage Project to mark this event.

11. Local Meetings held or prepared to hold Children's Meetings during 2018. Several Meetings held all age Meetings for Worship during 2018, and most Meetings have monthly Children's Meetings: Topics have included sessions on Conflict Resolution, Things/People which inspire Me, Diversity of Families, and Making a Bug Hotel. A festive all age worship was held at Hertford in December, and one at Hitchin involved painting cobblestones for The Peace Garden with peace symbols and words.

Our Young People continue to inspire and add something special to Our Quaker Community.

12. Both Local Meetings and Area Meeting considered their outreach activities. Letchworth Meeting updated its website. Hertford Meeting opened a Quakers Instagram page, while Stevenage Meeting participated in a wreath laying ceremony as part of Remembrance Day celebrations. Stevenage Meeting House, and Welwyn Garden City Meeting Houses remain popular and well-used venues for local community, cultural, and religious groups. Stevenage Meeting House also served as a meeting place for Syrian families and their support Workers. Several Meetings opened their Meeting Houses for Heritage Open Days in September, and Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Bike 'n Hike, both these events resulted in people exploring the Meeting Houses who might otherwise never do so. Hitchin Friends participated in the Hitchin Festival, and Hertford Friends opened their Meeting House to visitors one Saturday morning per. month from April through to Heritage Open Day in September, and Letchworth included guided tours of their Meeting House for this event.

13. Friends have been active in ensuring the vibrancy and health of our religious society. During 2018 some Friends have continued to be exercised by membership being well over the age of 60 and difficulties in finding Friends to take on essential tasks of service to the Meeting. Some local meetings continued to look at creative ways of addressing the challenges this brings. Friends with wardens greatly appreciated the work of wardens during 2018 who look after our Meeting Houses, organizing hirings and contributing in so many ways to the life of our Meetings, including administration, outreach and our Quaker witness with energy and enthusiasm.

Financial Review 2018

Reserves Policy

The reserves policy for Area Meeting central funds is based on holding money in various nominal funds at Area Meeting level. We are in the process of running down Area Meeting funds as agreed by the Treasurer in consultation with Finance Committee. The level will be as follows:

Funds held for the following purposes	Amount £
Building Fund	25,000
General Purposes	10,000
Outreach	2,000 (allocations within the reserves)
Peace Witness	1,000 (allocation within the reserves)
Quaker Work	5,000(allocation within the reserves)
Camp Committee	7,000
Total	42,000

For the operation of Local Meetings it is expected that each of these should hold enough reserves to operate for 1 year and meet future building requirements. The level of funds for 2018 were:

Local Meeting	Amount £
Guilford Morden	1,000
Hertford	17,000
Hitchin	22,000
Letchworth	45,000
Stevenage	9,000
Welwyn Garden City	63,000
Total	157,000

Income and Expenditure

1. None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2018. At 31st December 2018, The Area Meeting had a total cash value of £212,322.
2. **Income:** Funds from members were £58,000 and from letting our Meeting Houses £108,000. Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £11,931. Interest received on cash balances were £749.
3. **Expenditure:** Our largest expenditure is normally on maintaining buildings (£117,000) in support of our role as a religious organization at a local level. In 2018 a significant amount (£29,000) was expended on grants to outside bodies, of which about 62.0% went to Britain Yearly Meeting in furtherance of the centrally organized work of the Religious Society of Friends.

The amount spent on administration within the Area Meeting in 2018 was £10,164.

4. **Investment Policy:** Our funds are generally held by or invested in organizations with good ethical policies such as Triodos Bank, Ecology Building Society, Co-operative Bank.

Key plans for the future

1. The Trustees are continuing to review their work and relationships, and hope to establish more formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding) as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies.
2. Following the laying down of Hoddesdon Meeting at the beginning of 2012, the Hoddesdon Options group continues to meet and report to Area Meeting on ongoing developments.
3. In the continuing environment of economic austerity, Local Meetings continue to support food banks and other initiatives.
4. Involvement with local initiatives to participate in Herts Welcomes Syrian Refugee programme
5. Local Meetings look to work on best ways to utilise what spiritual, financial, and people resources are available to nurture the life of the Meeting.
6. Plan our revitalisation and outreach strategy for the longer term, including encouragement of new, especially younger attenders
7. Continue to have an outreach presence at local events.
8. Improvements to, and continuing laying out of a Peace Garden at Hitchin Local Meeting.
9. Greater greening of our Meeting Houses.
10. How we can mark the 350th anniversary of Hertford Meeting House in 2020.