

Report and Letter to Friends in East Cheshire Area Meeting (ECAM) from East Cheshire Area Meeting Trustees covering the period July 2022 to June 2023

To All Friends in East Cheshire Area Meeting of the Society of Friends:-

Dear Friends,

Here is my Annual Letter and Report compiled from our Trustee Minutes, with reflections from Trustees and me. The Report covers some of the work of your Trustees during the period July 2022 to June 2023.

The purpose of this report is to help all Friends in our East Cheshire Area Meeting, within our eight Local Meetings, know more of the service of your trustees. I hope that it helps Friends feel they are in touch with our Trustees, and the work carried out on your behalf.

Trustee Meetings July 2022-June 2023

Trustee Meetings were held, 12th September 2022, at Marple - Blended, 5th December 2022 - Zoom, 8th March 2023- Zoom, 5th June 2023 at Frandley (in person -not blended).

Trustees and Friends present at Trustee Meetings

1. Friends and attenders who have served as Trustees or a representative for Local Meeting during the period July 2022 to June 2023:- Ann Lewis, Gill Alcock, Sue Pounder, Jill Maguire, Gavin Mendham, Howard Hilton, Brenda Curran, Pat Carlisle, Julia Clements , Susan Clark, Jane Barrett, River and Carl Clark
2. The Clerk thanks all the Trustees and Friends who attended to represent a Local Meeting for their work and support.
3. One Trustee was appointed from January 2023 and signed the declaration of interest, the Charity Commission website has been updated with those serving and removing names where service has ceased.
4. Trustees decided to use zoom for the darker months and meet in Meeting Houses for June and September.

Trustees and Responsibilities 2022 - 2023

5. Area Meeting Trustees service is to take responsibility (including in a number of cases legal responsibility) on behalf of ECAM for the right ordering of a number of functions that our Area Meeting undertakes. We are answerable to Area Meeting and in some instances BYM and the Charity Commission and ask Area Meeting to set policy and overall direction. In many cases local meeting Friends undertake the detailed service eg on Premises Committees. Trustee responsibilities include : Meeting Houses and other premises; safeguarding; insurance; finance; employment; health and safety; archives; and broadly the life of the Area Meeting, mostly recently in relation to diversity and inclusion/racial justice.
6. Whilst Trustees are collectively responsible as a group some Trustees take specific responsibilities:- Jill Maguire- Insurance; Brenda Curran-Area Meeting Treasurer; Sue Pounder-Area Meeting Safeguarding Co-ordinator; Ann Lewis Inclusion and Diversity; Employment Trustee :-Vacancy – covered currently by Brenda Curran; Health and Safety Trustee from 2023 by Jane Barrett and previously a vacancy covered by me for 2022; Clerk to Trustees – Gavin Mendham.

7. Insurance:- Jill Maguire has worked with Stockport Friends on the claims from December, a break in and water damage, a distressing time for Stockport Friends. Jill is now working on the annual Meeting House Insurance premium renewal.
8. Safeguarding:-Sue Pounder serves as the ECAM Safeguarding Co-ordinator. Sue keeps trustees informed with the progress of implementing safeguarding policy and awareness across Friends in ECAM. Sue provides essential knowledge to trustees and reports to BYM. Sue attended the BYM Safeguarding Forum and shared how to access training, for example from 31/8 or a Local Authority. It is encouraging to see positive steps and appointments of Friends to serve as a team around Safeguarding. The Area Meeting website has been updated and we thank Taylor Giacomini for her help.
9. Finance: Brenda Curran works as our Treasurer, managing the accounts, ensuring payments are made, reporting to Trustees and she prepares the Annual Report and Accounts for Area Meeting which are sent to BYM and the Charity Commission. Brenda liaises with all our Local Treasurers to offer support and ensure the accounts are collated in a timely way. Brenda has drawn to our attention that the impact of the “mini budget” last August, when our UK Finances suffered a sudden decline, this has had a negative impact on the value of our investments held for Area Meeting to a value of about 20%. This is important when we are considering the funds available to repair, refurbish or retrofit our buildings. This is a demanding role and we thank Brenda for her service.
10. Racial Justice Group: Ann Lewis offered to be a contact for a Racial Justice in response to a minute on this issue for action from BYM 2022. We agreed it was important for trustees oversight, shared with Area Meeting, as the lack of positive drives politically and divisive politics are at odds with the values the Society of Friends holds. Trustees felt that we need to keep learning, and Ann has promoted ways forward for reading, liaising with other groups, collective and individual action
11. Employment: Brenda Curran (in addition to be Treasurer!) has been attending the part of the Premises and Employment Committee for Stockport Meeting. ECAM Trustees are the legal employer of staff at Stockport Meeting House, and need to share the responsibility with Stockport Friends. This is a trustee vacancy – we need another trustee to attend these meetings. Our Friends in Stockport are experienced and run their affairs well. Brenda has assisted Cheadle Hulme Friends put in place Warden’s Volunteer Agreements and Residency Agreements, which are important to ensure the Wardens (as at Disley also) are NOT employees.

Meeting Houses and Premises

12. Our Carbon Footprints:- When Howard Hilton first asked Trustees to look at this issue, we were encouraged to take on two aspects, our own personal responsibilities in our lives and what we could do with our resources to ensure our buildings reduced the impact of our or hirers use on the planet. The details of our slow progress will be seen in our minutes. Some of our Meeting Houses have had an energy assessment and report conducted and produced. We have been advised of a wide range of measures and then we have the challenge of “where do we start and where do we finish”. The assessments show where energy is being lost, what insulation measures could be effective, whether to change to heat pumps or not and so on. Recently at Wilmslow Meeting Houses, we had an Air Tightness Test. This test is a valuable place to start, before Friends try any measures on a Meeting House or domestically. This test can give you, on a national numerical scale, how your building is performing in terms of energy use.
13. A challenge re Carbon Use Reduction:- Do you want to reduce your energy use and bills OR are you interested in carbon use? We could for example, reduce our energy use on a building,

by removing and renewing, plaster work, existing insulation, re floor and so on. But – in replacing all this we would use and waste volumes of carbon! So we have much to think about, and are not getting anywhere quickly – Sorry Friends but that is how it is for a number of us on Premises and Trustees currently!

14. Legal Issue: Easement at Frandley: Joe Godden, on behalf of Frandley Friends, found a Legal Firm to engage with an unusual issue, to ensure a legal framework was drawn up on behalf of a local landowner, Area Meeting and Friends Trusts. Friends in ECAM, are indebted Mike and Penny Old, who agreed to have the outlet pipe from the recently installed septic tank, serving the Meeting House and the Frandley School Room, onto their land. There has been much legal “ping pong” with documents under the guidance of London based solicitors to ensure the long term legal agreement is in place. We were greatly assisted by Stephen Wright, previously serving within Friends Trusts, in seeing the process through. The Deed is about to be passed to the Land Registry
15. Marple Friends: While many of our Local Meetings can feel at home in their place of worship, Marple Friends are preparing to consider where they will meet in the years ahead as it seems likely that the Marple Methodist Chapel will not be available to Friends. This is a challenge Marple Friends are facing and our thoughts are with them discerning their next steps.
16. Quinquennial Reviews:- Trustees appointed “Dabinett Surveyors” of Stockport to carry out the Quinquennial Reviews of our properties, 5 Meeting Houses, Frandley School Room and the Burial Ground at Whitley. These surveys are underway and Stockport Friends have received the report. These reports are important for our Local Meetings with property, to engage with the issues noted, plan and prioritize the maintenance and repairs needed.

Records and Archives

17. ECAM Friends are indebted to Charlotte Harrison, of Disley Meeting, who has taken up the role of our Archivist. It is good to have Charlotte working on our stored documents and cataloguing the materials in the Strong Room at Wilmslow. Charlotte has worked through the material on the individual Local Meeting shelves and has begun liaising with Local Clerks to help us all learn more of how our records should be kept and to return documents that are not needed to Local Meetings. Some older material will be sent to the Cheshire Archives.

Looking Forward – Issues for Area Meeting to Consider and Address

- A. ***End of Service : - ECAM should note that at the end of 2023 Gavin Mendham, Gill Alcock, Brenda Curran and Ann Lewis will lay down their service – there is an issue of continuity which is further expanded on the below.***
- B. ***Please note only - one name came forward as a trustee from January 2023***

Membership, Being Quorate and Taking Decisions

18. **Question:- Should Trustees be Members what about Attenders serving as Trustees?** I ask Friends to look at the Governing Document for ECAM which refers to Trustees as Members. Currently however willing attenders are, formal decisions can only be taken by Trustees who are Members
19. **Question:- Could Local Meetings, who put forward an attender to represent their Meeting at Trustees consider the role of that person?** I am keen that all our Meetings are represented, but what is the role of representatives? Have Local Friends have considered how Trustees function in order to be quorate and share responsibilities. The presence of representatives rather than trustees has an impact on being quorate, there is more pressure on Members not to miss meetings.

20. **Being Quorate:-**in order to be within right ordering, we need to have at least half the number of Trustees as Members present. Currently we have 7 Members, and I advise that we should have four present for decisions to be taken, from reading the Governing Document.

Trustee Numbers, Making it Manageable and Inclusive

21. **Trustees and Years Ahead?** :-We see the challenges of finding Trustees from our Membership, and noted the extra demands placed on those who agree to serve when we do not have sufficient Friends coming forward. Is there an unwillingness to serve as a trustee or do we lack capacity? A bit of both perhaps? How are the legal and religious affairs of East Cheshire Area Meeting to be conducted as the years move on, given that a body of Trustees is essential? If there is a lack of trustees what is the impact on those who agree to serve?
22. **Is it Equitable? Are ECAM Friends Aware?** I remind East Cheshire Friends that where Friends do not come forward to serve as Trustees, the tasks remain to be done. This may be an uncomfortable truth to face, that where a Local Meeting is not able to nominate a Friend to serve as a trustee, trustees in post have to take more responsibility.
23. **Covering Trustee Vacancies:-**During 2022-3 Brenda Curran has been covering for Employment as well as the important work of being our Treasurer. Fortunately, Stockport Friends, are diligent in their employment practices. But there is extra work for a trustee here. Health and Safety, has been another area, I covered this last year taking additional tasks to being Clerk. We are fortunate that Jane Barrett has come forward as a trustee and we are in process of handing over the H & S to Jane.
24. **The need for "handover" of trustees' responsibilities.** When I began being a trustee (2014) it was possible, to "understudy" a role. While one trustee took the lead responsibility another could shadow in a training capacity and be prepared to take that role when the lead Friend's service came to an end. We do not have a trustee for Employment currently, there is a training need now for this role. We lack the capacity to have trustee Friends to shadow the responsibilities individual trustees fulfil.
25. **In person at a Meeting House or on Zoom?** To maintain our trustee meetings in right ordering, I suggest we keep the Meetings at a Meeting House, (June and September) as "in person" as making a zoom connection from a Meeting House can be a challenge and we must be quorate. We believe it is valuable for trustees to meet in our Meeting Houses when we can.
26. **Timing of Meetings; During the Day or Evenings?** Trustees agreed that if it enables working Friends to attend meetings we would hold two meetings in the evenings, on zoom, December and March. Two meetings are at Meeting Houses during the day. Discernment can be an issue in the evening when Friends are tired. We have compromised balancing 2 evenings with 2 daytime meetings.

C. Job Descriptions and Clerking Trustees

27. **Evaluating the Clerk's Role:** I took a job description Sue Pounder gave me from another Area Meeting for Clerk to Trustees as a model. I split the tasks as "currently doing" and "would be better if". The model Job Description was beyond me! In addition to a job description for an Area Meeting post, we are all trying to be Local Members of the Society. If we can write shorter effective job descriptions it may help us feel better and work better as we go forward.
28. **Self-Evaluation of the Clerk's Role:-** I think that in most of the essential functions are in place:- the business meetings; dealing with minutes and follow up ;liaison between Clerks of Area and Friends in Local Meeting. I am less secure keeping up to date with information from the Society centrally and Charity Commission changes in policy. Perhaps I should have taken some Quaker Training for the role but I have relied on experience from as a trustee (from 2014 onwards) and

the examples of previous clerks. I learn from our trustees and representatives and find listening to the talk on the life in our meetings valuable and uplifting.

29. The Unexpected:- Clerks often get unusual issues to deal with, such as the Easement Process for Frandley Meeting and an approach by ITV to use a Meeting House for a Comic Horror production (refused in consultation with trustees).

Looking Ahead

30. Learning from other Area Meetings:- I have asked Hilary Topp, the Local Development Worker for her thoughts on the issue of Area Meeting Responsibilities and Trustees. Hilary has offered a zoom session where she can share knowledge from other Area Meetings of trustees work. Our Area Meeting Clerks and Trustees are hoping to join in for all or part of this session.

Questions to You All:- Perhaps Friends would set time aside at an Area Meeting?

Questions from numbered paragraphs:-

18- 20: Questions :- Should Trustees be Members what about Attenders serving as Trustees? Could Local Meetings, who put forward an attender to represent their Meeting at Trustees consider the role of that person? What is expected of the attender?

21. How are the legal and religious affairs of East Cheshire Area Meeting to be conducted as the years move on, given that a body of Trustees is essential? - How will we manage the transition of a group of 4 trustees coming to the end of their service and very few Friends coming forward to serve?

22.23.24 Questions:-Is it Equitable for a smaller group of Trustees to have to cover Trustee Vacancies? How do we handover the roles? Are ECAM Friends Aware of the impact of fewer trustees? What is our combined capacity for trustee work? Should Trustees be expected to increase their individual workload? How will we hand over our roles of responsibility?

In Friendship

Gavin Mendham - Clerk to Trustees - 5th June 2023