

To: All AM Clerks and AM Clerks of Trustees in the AMs:
Lancashire Central & North, Manchester & Warrington, East Cheshire,
North Wales, Hardshaw & Mann, and Pendle Hill
Cc: Local Development Workers Wendy Hampton and Hilary Topp
Quaker Youth Worker Jude Acton
From: Wirral & Chester AM Clerk and AM Clerk of Trustees

Teenage General Meeting

Dear Friends

We are writing to you to ask for your help in avoiding a serious problem with Teenage General Meeting (TGM). We cannot find enough committee members to run TGM, and we cannot find any committee members at all from the 3 largest AMs in the catchment area.

The participating Area Meetings of north west TGM are Lancashire Central & North, Manchester & Warrington, East Cheshire, North Wales, Wirral & Chester, Hardshaw & Mann, and Pendle Hill.

TGM here in the north west has been going for about 30 years. It was run in the 1990's and 2000's by Lancashire & Cheshire General Meeting. It mirrors other similar groups in London, Bristol, Gloucester and other parts of the UK. In 2008, at the demise of the General Meeting, responsibility for two committees of the former Lancashire & Cheshire General Meeting were allocated to two of the participating AMs:

Summer School Committee (in the care of Manchester & Warrington AM)
Teenage General Meeting Committee (in the care of Wirral & Chester AM)

Since then, the Trusteeship role for TGM has rested with Wirral & Chester AM i.e. for the last 16 years.

TGM is a very valuable part of the service that Quakers offer here in the north west. It runs three or four residential weekends a year using our Meeting Houses for accommodation. It is attended by about 20 or 30 teenagers, aged 13 to 17. There are sessions of discussion led by adult volunteers on Quaker topics and plenty of time for participants to discuss their own issues, often of a deeply personal nature. It is of vital importance in allowing young quakers to be with a group of like-minded people of their own age; those who have experienced the kind of problems that occur at school and at home and can lend a sympathetic ear. Such opportunities occur in the lives of young quakers all too rarely.

TGM weekends are run by TGM Committee supported by volunteer helpers recruited from the seven participating AMs. The trusteeship role is undertaken by Wirral & Chester AM. This includes matters such as ensuring appropriate Safeguarding and DBS checks are in place and trying to get Friends to man the weekends. Financial oversight is provided by the Wirral & Chester AM Treasurer.

Major problems are now occurring which threaten the continuing life of TGM. Firstly, it has proved very difficult over the last year to recruit enough Friends to satisfactorily run the weekends. Wirral & Chester AM's Nominations committee has had for some years the job of trying to get new Friends to serve on TGM Committee. They have sent many e mails to representatives in the other six AMs, and to current members of TGM Committee, and often have had no reply. Owing to both committee members and volunteer helpers retiring at the end of 2023, there are not now enough to man the weekends. The last weekend event, at Easter this year, was cancelled for this reason.

Secondly, there are now only 4 members on the committee instead of 6, none of them are from the 3 largest AMs, and retirements at the end of 2024 mean that number will drop to 2. That is not enough to successfully run TGM.

Thirdly, whilst efforts have been made to make sure all the seven AMs contribute financially to TGM, only 3 have made that contribution. Of these Wirral & Chester AM pay by far the greatest amount.

We wonder how we have got to a position where one of the smallest AMs in the north-west shoulders so large a part of the support work, and cost of running TGM?

Our AM has now thanked our Nominations committee for their work and released them from the task of seeking any further nominations for TGM Committee.

We have informed Wendy Hampton of these matters who is the Local Development Worker for the majority of the AMs within the TGM catchment. She has promised to give what help she can in securing Friends to serve on TGM Committee and volunteer helpers.

The matter has been discussed by Wirral & Chester AM's Trustees and they have recommended that the AM consider their position with regard to the running of TGM. At the Area Meeting on 8th May 2024, the following resolution was agreed:-

"We agree that, after 16 years, it is time for Wirral & Chester AM to pass on the responsibility for TGM committee to one of the other participating AMs; we will inform local development workers Wendy Hampton and Hilary Topp.

We ask the clerk of trustees and the AM clerk to inform one or more of the larger participating AMs (ie Lancashire Central & North, Manchester & Warrington, East Cheshire) that after 16 years we have decided to lay down the responsibility for TGM committee at the end of December 2024."

Thus, it will be up to another AM to take on the prime responsibility of acting as Trustee for TGM. However, we feel that the running of TGM should be a shared responsibility of all the AMs within the TGM catchment, and that all AMs participating in the benefits of TGM for our teenagers should now take on the work of providing volunteers, of getting an effective committee working again and helping to provide appropriate finance to run it.

Without this help we fear that, for all the undoubted good that TGM does, it will cease to exist.

In Friendship

Yvonne Dickson Clerk of Wirral & Chester AM

Tom Miller Clerk of Trustees