

This is a slightly changed version of a document prepared for their successor by a member of the committee on relinquishing the role.

What does the representative do?

The representative will be one of the Trustees of West Wilts and East Somerset Area Meeting, responsible for finance and property matters in our local meetings. The responsibilities of a Quaker Trustee are set out in chapters 14 and 15 of Quaker Faith & Practice (QF&P) which give helpful insights and commentaries. A more formal (but still very approachable) account is in the Trustee Handbook¹ given to all new Trustees. I won't repeat the content of the documents but offer some additional observations relating to the appointment of a new rep in our AM.

Why does WWESAM have Trustees?

West Wiltshire and East Somerset Area Meeting is a registered charity (number 1134534). Its activities are governed by Charity Acts under English law and of course by Quaker Faith and Practice. The law requires charities to have Trustees and - as is commonly the case among Quakers - the WWESAM trustee body is Finance and Property Committee (F&P). There is usually one representative on F&P for each Local Meeting (LM), so you will be one of six Trustees dealing with finance, property, employment, health and safety and safeguarding matters. Some LMs also have deputy Trustees who may attend meetings from time to time.

What sort of person can be a Trustee?

The person should be a Member of the Society of Friends²; in addition, a trustee must be a fit person to hold a responsible office. Once a Friend is proposed by the nominating local meeting, F&P carries out a probity check to establish the Friend's suitability. The nominee signs a Trustee Declaration (see reference document 9-3) and we take two references, one from inside the Society of Friends and one from outside. It bothers me slightly that there is no explicit reference to safeguarding in the Declaration, just the catch-all item 4.5. I know from recent advice given by the Charity Commission that they would regard us as negligent if we appointed a Trustee with a conviction for an offence against children or vulnerable adults since Trustees have responsibility for that in our Meetings yet we do not ask that question outright [for wider discussion some time].

1 The Handbook is available in full here <http://www.quaker.org.uk/sites/default/files/Handbook-for-Trustees-of-Quaker-meetings-2014.pdf>

2 The Trustee Handbook states "Trustees should be members of the Society of Friends. Although long-standing attenders may appear to be well qualified for this role, it is unreasonable to ask an individual to take on these responsibilities for a body that he or she does not feel able to join."

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What knowledge or experience should the person have?

Trustees do not need to have prior experience of business, finance, property or the law on first appointment. It is wonderful if there can be a wide range of experience and expertise across the committee, but with only six members and a small pool to draw on we would be very lucky if we had specialists in every aspect of F&P responsibilities. **A Trustee should be a conscientious citizen and a faithful Quaker**; anything else is a bonus. Being a Trustee is a rich experience which most people grow into and it can deepen understanding of Quaker stewardship and decision-making. Most Friends appointed to the role learned most of what they need by doing the job in a supportive environment which is firmly based on discernment and Quaker business method.

What guidance and support is given?

WWESAM F&P is a close-knit and effective body and a new trustee will be welcomed and supported. The new Trustee will be encouraged to read the Trustee Handbook already mentioned, pointers to Charity Commission guidance, recent minutes of F&P to show the range of topics covered and a set of the Reference Documents which are the basic policies of WWESAM. The most important of these policies is the Governing Document (GD), something that all charities must have so that they can express their charitable purpose. Quaker Governing Documents have to accommodate the fact that some legal requirements are difficult for Quakers to comply with e.g. the law regards F&P as the executive body, whereas the body in which Friends locally express their membership, testimonies and practical witness is Area Meeting in session. But we manage somehow and the GD helps us do so. A new Trustee will also have an early opportunity to attend a Woodbrooke or Friends House course on being a Trustee. There is much useful advice on the BYM website.

There is a short and very readable guide to working as a Quaker Trustee in a free downloadable publication called the Q-Bit from Quaker Social Action.³

How much work is involved?

F&P meets every other month, with the meetings scheduled to dovetail with the timetable of Area Meetings e.g. there will be one at the end of March and another at the end of April 2015 to prepare for June AM and so on. The meetings are not optional: all Trustees are expected to aim to attend every meeting. F&P meetings are in the evening from 6.15 (supper) to 9 pm or 9.30 pm at the latest. They take place in the home of each Trustee in turn, though that is of course not essential - Trustee meetings in our old Area Meeting were often held in the Meeting Houses because there were too many members

³ <http://www.quakersocialaction.org.uk/FAQs/q-bit>

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to fit in a home. Occasionally F&P forms a sub-group e.g. to look at a topic such as health and safety guidance. The Friends who join the sub-group might do some research, draft a short paper, meet once for an informal discussion, then report to the whole F&P. We appoint our Trustees for three years at a time. No-one should serve more than two terms (six years in all), and a trustee's term *must* end after an exceptional nine years. The work takes two or three hours a month in addition to the three hours of the bi-monthly meetings; most Trustees also attend the four Area Meetings a year. There may be Friends House or Woodbrooke conferences or courses to attend, too.

Does the representative need to be a computer user or car-driver?

It is helpful but not essential if Trustees use email. The agenda and papers for each F&P meeting come out the week before the meeting and are emailed round, as are Minutes after the meetings. Any WWESAM Trustee who does not use a computer will have a colleague who ensures that they receive everything by first class post. Between meetings there are sometimes urgent consultations; if a Trustee is not on email, a phone call with the Clerk of F&P is sufficient. A car is not essential.

Judith Eversley

March 2015

[Some changes by Chris Pollock November 2018]

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