



VIBRANCY IN MEETINGS PROGRAMME EVALUATION

PHASE 1: EARLY FINDINGS REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About Vibrancy and the evaluation

Vibrancy in Meetings (Vibrancy) is a three-year pilot programme that aims to enable local and area Quaker meetings to become more strong, confident, connected and sustainable. The programme is run by Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (Woodbrooke) and provides four development workers located in four pilot regions across Britain.

NCVO CES is conducting a three-year evaluation of the programme to investigate whether it is achieving the changes it intends to, and to explore the way in which it is set up, managed and received. This report is delivered at the end of the first phase of the evaluation to summarise the issues that led to the development of Vibrancy and describe early findings on the set-up of the programme and early work undertaken.

Early findings on set-up of the programme

- Overall the set-up of the programme has gone well and has generated learning about what works well in early contact with meetings.
- Vibrancy staff have been well inducted and feel supported, although they would value more contact with the steering group.
- Generally, the team have the equipment they need although IT has sometimes been an issue.
- Staff report working long hours.
- The programme might benefit from further communications with the wider BYM and Woodbrooke staff team about the purpose of Vibrancy and its developments.

Early findings on programme work so far

- Development workers have worked with an average of 17 meetings each.
- Support is being given to individuals more often than groups.
- About a third of the work is with area meetings, which is more than anticipated.
- In areas where the development worker attends a local meeting, most of the work has been reactive, responding to existing demand. In the one area where the development worker does not attend a local meeting, it has taken longer to generate interest and most of it has been proactively developed.
- Meetings are bringing a wide range of presenting needs, which are often hard to initially diagnose. The most common areas of need are around community and meeting for worship.
- The nature of the support given varies but is commonly focused on helping meetings to clarify their needs and then signposting them to the appropriate support. This is beginning to differentiate Vibrancy from other Quaker support.
- Development workers are beginning to feed useful suggestions from meetings back to BYM and Woodbrooke. However, there is no formal way of doing this or ensuring the issues are taken up and actioned.

Learning

In the early programme work, development workers have learnt about the needs of local meetings and how to identify them, particularly that the presenting need is often not the real need within the meeting.

Informal, face-to-face engagement has been key to building individual relationships within meetings and development workers have found that they have an important role in simply listening to Friends and building confidence within local meetings.

Development workers have learnt that understanding boundaries around their work is important, particularly in terms of signposting and not 'sorting out' for Friends in local meetings. There has also been an acknowledgement among development workers that this kind of work takes a long time to bring about change.

The initial period of the programme has generated some learning to be applied to the future evaluation plans. This includes: the need to be mindful of the development workers' workload; some changes required to the monitoring spreadsheet; the need to leave space in the work to capture support being given at area meeting level and to explore the effect of being spirit-led.

Early recommendations

For Vibrancy

Recommendation 1: Review the workload of Vibrancy staff and consider action to reduce travel, administrative or meeting-focused responsibilities. This could include sending a single representative to internal meetings and increasing flexibility around logging time and hours swapping.

Recommendation 2: Set up a formal process for feeding back needs and issues from local meetings to BYM and Woodbrooke staff. This could include monthly catch ups, while being mindful of the administrative load on the development workers' time.

Recommendation 3: Consider strengthening the contact between the development workers and Vibrancy steering group.

Recommendation 4: Create a plan for ongoing communications to BYM and Woodbrooke staff around the purpose and role of Vibrancy and its developments. This could be led by the Steering group, to manage the additional workload for Vibrancy staff.

Recommendation 5: Allocate more time to familiarisation with Quaker Life staff, offer and processes, as well as with other BYM staff providing services being signposted to, in any future induction processes for new development workers. Additional time spent with Quaker Life staff could still be of use to current development workers.

Recommendation 6: Invest in well-functioning IT equipment and access to IT support for any future regionally-based development workers.

Recommendation 7: Discuss the pros and cons of taking a reactive approach to support, as opposed to a proactive one, to ensure that this is taken as a considered decision on an ongoing basis.

For the evaluation

Recommendation 8: Further explore how necessary it is for development workers to be Quakers in order to perform the role effectively.

Recommendation 9: Further explore whether the advantage that some development workers have of being part of a local meeting in their area is sustained further into the programme.

Recommendation 10: Capture data on where development workers were particularly spirit-led in their work and what effect this was felt to have.

Recommendation 11: Ensure that data collection captures work at the area meeting level as well as local meeting level.

Recommendation 12: Check with development workers whether the classifications in the monitoring spreadsheet around needs and type of work are fit for purpose.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About Vibrancy

Vibrancy in Meetings (Vibrancy) is a three-year pilot programme that forms part of the support structure offered to Quaker meetings. It is provided jointly by the national body of Quakers (Britain Yearly Meeting) and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre (Woodbrooke) between March 2016 and September 2019. The work is funded through legacies to BYM and resources and facilities from Woodbrooke.

Vibrancy aims to enable local and area Quaker meetings to become more strong, confident, connected and sustainable. The project will also act as a two-way conduit for communication and support between Friends, meetings and the wider work of Quakers in Britain.

Through the programme, four development workers will be located in or near Quaker meetings in different parts of Britain.

1.2 About the evaluation

In October 2016 Britain Yearly Meeting commissioned NCVO Charities Evaluation Services (NCVO CES) to act as the evaluation partner for the Vibrancy in Meetings Programme. Working closely with Vibrancy staff, NCVO CES will conduct a three-year evaluation of the programme to investigate whether it is achieving the changes it intends to and to explore the way in which it is set up, managed and received.

There are three phases to the evaluation of the Vibrancy in Meetings Pilot Programme:

- Phase 1: November 2016 – May 2017: Set up and evaluation planning
- Phase 2: June 2017 – December 2018: Early and mid-term data collection
- Phase 3: January – December 2019: Final data collection.

1.2.1 Early data collection methods

In Phase 1, NCVO CES conducted the following data collection to inform this report:

- Site visits to the place of work of all four Vibrancy development workers to conduct a half-day face-to-face interview.
- A face-to-face interview with the national coordinator of the Vibrancy programme.
- Telephone interviews with three other BYM and Woodbrooke staff.
- A review of monitoring spreadsheets from development workers recording work taking place between October 2016 and April 2017.

NCVO CES was also provided with background documentation and research on the development of Vibrancy including:

- Engaging Young Adult Friends – what do we know so far? A report on the experiences of 18- to 35-year-olds with the Religious Society of Friends in Britain.
- A note prepared for Meeting for Sufferings, July 2013.
- A report to Norfolk and Waveney Area Meeting, 2013.

- Vibrancy in Meetings Initiative, Regional Workers – Options and Possibilities, October 2014.
- A short-term project proposal for a locally-based workers pilot.
- Changing Membership and Attendance paper for a meeting of BYM Trustees and Quaker Life Central Committee, 20 February 2016.
- Vibrancy in meetings research summary.
- Sharing our meetings' stories.

1.2.2 This report

This report has been produced at the end of Phase 1, along with an *Evaluation planning report*, which contains further detail on plans for Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the evaluation.

This report summarises the issues that led to the development of Vibrancy and describes early findings on the set-up of the programme and early work undertaken.

The remainder of this report is divided into four sections:

2. The need for Vibrancy
3. Early findings on implementation
4. Learning
5. Early recommendations.

2. THE NEED FOR VIBRANCY

Vibrancy has been developed to address a series of concerns about the future of Quakers in Britain, including specific issues facing local meetings and a desire for Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) and Woodbrooke to work more closely together to support Quakers.

These concerns are supported by research conducted by BYM in recent years. Experience of how these issues are occurring within the pilot regions and in the work between BYM and Woodbrooke were explored in interviews with Vibrancy development workers and other BYM and Woodbrooke staff for this evaluation.

2.1 Background

The membership of BYM is declining and the membership population is ageing. Tabular statement data shows a steady, almost unbroken decline in membership over the last 10 years (*Changing membership and attendance*, 2016). BYM staff and committees note that there are growing injustices in the world that need a strong Quaker voice. At the same time, staff and committees feel that more local meetings are asking for help in building strong, vibrant meetings with active witness. There is much support available from Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke, but it is not accessed as frequently as it could be and is sometimes felt to be removed from the local needs of local meetings.

Research was carried out by BYM in 2012 that aimed to better understand what makes a vibrant meeting vibrant. Sixty-eight local meetings were visited and 999 Friends gave their views on challenges and successes in their local meeting. Due to changes in BYM staff roles, the data has not been fully analysed, but initial analysis showed some common characteristics of vibrant meetings, which are:

- shared worship
- a confident, optimistic community
- active witness
- active engagement with the wider society
- well-managed and financially independent meeting
- a group that reflects communities in the area; and works in ways that help good communication and organisation
- appropriate and effective leadership.

These characteristics are supported by research conducted for the publication *Sharing our meetings' stories*. In 2014 a group of staff from Woodbrooke and Quaker Life and Friends from the Quaker Life Network initiated a series of visits to meetings around the country to hear stories about the life of their meeting. From this work, nine practices emerged as helpful in enriching the life of a meeting. These practices broadly reflect those above, but in addition specifically include:

- creating opportunities to share spiritual experiences
- being an all-age community
- welcome, encouragement and care
- a willingness to talk about conflict.

2.2 The needs of local meetings in Vibrancy areas

To explore current issues for local meetings in the Vibrancy regions, development workers were asked in our interviews to reflect on the issues being raised, having visited their local communities for six months. These describe areas of need that Vibrancy aims to address. Six core issues were identified that are faced by local meetings:

- small local meetings struggle to fill roles
- loss of mechanism to join up area meetings regionally leaving gaps in regional support
- lack of demographic variation among Quakers
- isolation of meetings
- use and maintenance of premises
- ineffective area meeting structures.

2.2.1 Small local meetings struggle to fill roles

The most frequently raised issue, common to all regions, was that some local meetings are too small to sustain themselves by filling the required roles. Those who do take on the roles are often subject to ‘volunteer burnout’:

People will come to a weekly meeting on a Sunday but Quakerism needs more than that ... Some people are left to do it all and once they find someone to replace them they disappear completely. (Development worker)

It was also raised that more and more people are coming to Quakerism later in their life and therefore do not have the knowledge needed to fulfil the roles or don’t have access to the support they need locally:

There are a lot of expectations of the roles and not a lot of local training. They don’t know how we clerk or hold Meeting for worship for business. (Development worker)

The 2012 research carried out before Vibrancy highlighted that an ill organised meeting achieved significantly less satisfaction than a meeting that was organised effectively. The data showed that where meetings are organised effectively this responsibility could be shared more widely as many rely on one or two key friends.

2.2.2 Loss of mechanism to join up area meetings regionally

In the past, area meetings came together into general meetings. Since this layer of the structure of Quakers in Britain was removed, it is felt that there is less regular interaction between Friends in different areas. For example, local meetings that are just 20 miles away from each other might never interact because they do not come together in the same Area meeting. It is felt that the Regional Gatherings that have been introduced do not fulfil the same function as General Meetings because they are one-off events rather than a structure that allows friends to ‘do things together over time’. Development workers reflect on the need for this connection between areas:

Now local meetings that have an issue have to go straight to BYM staff whereas before they could use the informal structures that developed around General Meetings to get advice or support from other meetings nearby. (Development worker)

In support of this issue, the area meeting Clerks' Conference in 2012, held at Woodbrooke, asked for better links between Area meetings and national structures, and for help with sharing of information about future agenda items and concerns. A 2016 report from BYM on engaging young adult friends also found that many young adult Quakers are not attached to a local meeting, due to a higher frequency of moving area, and many want regional and national events to be provided to aid spiritual exploration and community development (*Engaging Young Adult Friends – what do we know so far?*, 2016).

One of the Vibrancy regions, Wales and the Southern Marches, does have a regional structure with national responsibilities on behalf of BYM to 'represent and advance the life and witness of Quakers within Wales'. This offers the opportunity to later explore the effects of this regional structure on the work of the development worker in that region.

2.2.3 Lack of demographic variation among Quakers

The Membership of Britain Yearly Meeting is made up of an ageing population. Evidence supports this such as over the last 10 years the average age of Woodbrooke Course participants has risen from 59 to 62 (Changing Membership and Attendance, 2016). At the other end of the age spectrum, participation at Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) has shown a steady year-on-year decline since 2006. Development workers report that this is being felt on the ground in local meetings among both members and attenders:

There's the unspoken elephant in the room of ageing ... The demographic is ageing considerably and becoming less energetic ... Perhaps the biggest challenge for some local meetings, and for me working with them, is being realistic about the situation but staying upbeat and positive about approaches. (Development worker)

The ageing population is felt to be a particularly important issue in the South West because of the general demographic in the area, where many move to retire. It has also been raised by meetings in the South East where property is expensive and it is becoming harder for young people to purchase a home and remain in the area.

The ability to welcome children and families is seen as a barrier to changing this ageing demographic:

People don't know what to do with children. Instead of embracing them they're sometimes shunted off to a different room to be kept occupied, rather than being part of the group. (Development worker)

Quakers do not always recognise children and young people when they are there or have structures for their engagement. (Development worker)

A lack of diversity in other areas such as gender, class and ethnicity is also highlighted as an issue in some local meetings. One development worker argued that 'There is very little diversity in relation to any characteristic you can think of.'

Tabular statement data from 2014 shows significantly more female than male members and attenders in each of the Vibrancy regions, in some cases around 40 percent more.

2.2.4 Isolation of meetings

All but one region highlighted that the distance to meetings, or travel links, are an issue for Friends and local meetings. One development worker noted that ‘travel between towns here is difficult. It’s only really transport to London that works well.’

It can be hard for Friends to attend local meetings and social events when the population is dispersed in a rural area:

Some people travel about an hour to get to their local meeting. So it’s harder for them to socialise during the week and they are worried about their carbon footprint.

(Development worker)

Local meetings find it hard to have contact with one another or at an area meeting level. They can also feel quite disconnected from the central Quaker structures, finding it difficult and costly to travel to London or Birmingham.

In the Britain Yearly Meeting Trustees’ meeting minute (13 May, 2015) it was noted that this was where they could make a difference: ‘This [Vibrancy] is about rooting our local meetings so they feel part of the whole’.

2.2.5 Use and maintenance of premises

The upkeep and management of premises is a major issue for some local and area meetings. This seems to be a particular problem in the North West where a large number of meetings are held in historic buildings that are expensive to maintain.

A need is felt for more support for Friends managing or moving from property, which is now being explored and actioned with a staff member at BYM who has a new responsibility around property:

BYM should offer more support on moving premises, managing historic properties and helping Friends to understand what their responsibilities are and what they don’t have to take on. (Development worker)

If we could come up with a national agreement with a maintenance firm that Quaker meetings can opt into, that we will deal with your fire testing, your PAT testing ... These are things that can weigh heavily on some Friends ... there are some meetings that are really oppressed by finding and managing those small details. (Development worker)

The 2012 research that informed Vibrancy showed that where a meeting house is not causing conflict or undue stress within the meeting, it is generally an asset to the life of the meeting. However, where the energy is lacking, premises can become a strain on the meeting and a lot of energy can be expended on it.

2.2.6 Ineffective area meeting structures

It is felt that the area meeting structure does not work well for everyone and area meetings have been described by some as ‘long, dry and bogged down’. Lots of area meetings are ‘trying new things’, but often what has worked in one area might not work in another:

There's a danger that whoever is prepared to share their model (eg Northumbria) is either seen as having the solution for everyone or is inundated with requests for advice.
(Development worker)

2.3 BYM and Woodbrooke working together

Britain Yearly Meeting and Woodbrooke both serve the same community: Friends in local meetings. A crude summary of the difference between the work of the organisations is that Woodbrooke offers proactive training and Britain Yearly Meeting offers resources and advice and responds to queries or concerns. A staff member describes the difference in these terms:

Quaker Life (a part of BYM) deals with live issues. Woodbrooke offers more theoretical preparation and training about what might happen. There are some grey areas as sometimes someone will come on training because they have an issue. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

2.3.1 What is working well

There are many areas of overlap and joint working, particularly in training on roles and, generally, it is felt that the joint work that happens is strong:

Where we work together and there are established partnerships it works really well. Where there's good connections between the staff and each of us knows what we're doing. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

However, a key factor in the development of Vibrancy was the desire of Trustees and staff of both organisations to look at how BYM and Woodbrooke could work even more closely together and to be even more effective in that. Both organisations wish to consider whether their current ways of working really help meetings to be as vibrant as they can be and as they want to be:

The common thread is us both wanting to promote the wellbeing of Quakers in Britain.
(BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

2.3.2 Areas for improvement

Areas highlighted where there is room for improvement in joint working include:

- stronger connections between staff delivering similar work
- more regional or local delivery
- basing support on the needs of local meetings
- lack of clarity of structures and what support is available.

Stronger connections between staff delivering similar work

Both organisations offer support to local meetings and there are times when this support is not as joined up as it could be:

A few years ago, a conference was organised at Woodbrooke on a specific topic and a staff member that also works on that topic didn't hear about it until a few days before.
(BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

There is a desire to make even more and stronger connections, where possible:

It's about spotting the places where we're both working on something and offering something to Friends but we don't know what the other organisation is doing on the same area. We have some bits that are joined up. Let's join up the other dots. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

Vibrancy will not focus directly on building connections between staff at BYM and Woodbrooke, but it is hoped that both organisations working together on delivering support to local meetings through Vibrancy will help work to be more joined up.

More regional or local delivery

There is a general feeling among central staff and committees that Friends see the BYM support available as quite London-centric and Woodbrooke similarly localised:

Friend's House can feel distant and irrelevant and not everyone can travel to Woodbrooke. Some Friends see it as London-centric and would value more support locally. (Report to Norfolk and Waveney Area meeting)

It has also been noted that there is greater access for Friends in the north of England to Woodbrooke role courses when they're run at Swarthmoor Hall, which is located in the Lake District, than in Birmingham (*Notes to Meeting for Sufferings*, June 2013).

Although both Woodbrooke and BYM are expanding their online offering and run both 'on-the-road' course and conduct visits to local meetings, it is felt that even more of a regional and local presence would help Friends to feel better supported. The regional nature of Vibrancy is intended to address this gap and to ensure that the needs of local meetings are shaping the central support offered.

Basing support on the needs of local meetings

Although both BYM and Woodbrooke do make effort to tailor their support to the requirements of local meetings, there is a sense that more could be done to make the support fully needs-led:

One way to measure what they [Friends] want is what they book. It's probably something we need to work on, being a bit more responsive ... We would always have a conversation with the group to tweak the content to their needs. But what we don't do is say to meetings 'ring us up, tell us what you need and we'll respond'. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

It is an intention of Vibrancy that the development workers will inform BYM and Woodbrooke about Friends' gifts, needs and basic requirements to help both organisations to see the gaps and fill them.

Lack of clarity of structures and what support is available

It is strongly felt that there is a lot of support available for local meetings but it is not being accessed due to a lack of awareness or understanding:

There's some really good stuff there but the problem is in local meetings knowing it's there and how to access it. We've found that sometimes, even we are not sure where to look! (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

There's an extremely poor understanding about the services and structures [of BYM and Woodbrooke]. A few emails I've received lately indicate that people aren't sure what is available. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

My sense is its [Woodbrooke] well known and loved and treasured and cherished among Quakers who use it but it's not well utilised. It's a very small proportion of friends who come and make use of the learning offered. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

It will be a key role of Vibrancy to help local meetings to work out where they should go for support and to raise awareness of the support that is available to those who are not accessing it.

3. EARLY FINDINGS ON IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 Set-up of the programme

Summary

- Overall the set-up of the programme has gone well and has generated learning about what works well in early contact with meetings.
- Vibrancy staff have been well inducted and feel supported, although they would value more contact with the steering group.
- Generally, the team have the equipment they need although IT has sometimes been an issue.
- Staff report working long hours.
- The programme might benefit from further communications with the wider BYM and Woodbrooke staff team about the purpose of Vibrancy and its developments.

3.1.1 Steering group

The Vibrancy steering group is providing valuable support. Development workers would appreciate more contact with them.

A steering group has been set-up to support and guide the work of Vibrancy. BYM Trustees and Woodbrooke Trustees appointed five Quakers to the group and two senior staff members from BYM and Woodbrooke. The opportunity to serve on the steering group was shared in *The Friend*. As Vibrancy is a legacy-funded pilot project the strategy has been set and the steering group's role is to offer support for the work that is planned.

The group has held a business meeting quarterly since March 2016 and contributed to the appointment of the development workers. An evaluation sub-group of three steering group members has been set up responsible for appointing and overseeing the programme evaluators.

So far, the steering group has provided support directly to the national coordinator, which has been valued:

They [the steering group] act mostly as a sounding board and support for the national coordinator. (Development worker)

I'm really valuing their individual expertise ... In two of the meetings we have a reflective session and those have been very rich in terms of holding the spiritual underpinning of the work. (National co-ordinator)

Development workers have only had a small amount of contact with the steering group so far and hope for more in future:

They must be a wealth of knowledge of the expectations of the programme ... We've had very little to do with them. I thought we'd be working much more closely with them. (Development worker)

They're very keen to know what we do but I don't know what they do. (Development worker)

It was suggested that more information about the steering group could have been shared in the induction period:

We didn't have any access to the steering group people or documents when we first started. It was December or January before we met them. A week before we were going to meet we received all of the documents to do with the steering group. It would have been so much more useful to have them at the start. (Development worker)

3.1.2 Staff in post

The national co-ordinator of the Vibrancy programme came into post on 8 March 2016 and began setting up the programme and recruiting staff. Four regionally-based development workers took up post on 5 September 2016, working either from home, from a local meeting house or a local library. The development workers started delivering support to local and area meetings from the beginning of October 2016.

The development workers are contracted to work 26.25 hours per week each, split over four days per week, with the exception of one development worker who works three days per week. The national co-ordinator works 28 hours split over four days. There is no weighting of salary depending on location of the development workers, which could be considered in future.

Vibrancy staff are very much enjoying their roles:

It's an honour and a privilege to be allowed to do it ... It's a supportive environment and I feel trusted to do the job. (Development worker)

I love it so much. Apparently my face lit up when my friend asked me about it. I could just do it all the time ... the difficulty is not doing it all the time and stopping myself. (Development worker)

3.1.3 Faith of staff

Development workers felt that being an active Quaker is essential to their role.

All the Vibrancy programme team are active Quakers, although this was not a requirement for the role. The job description requires 'knowledge of, and sympathy with, Quaker values, structure and culture'. Several members of the team mentioned being called to the work because of their faith or talked about seeing the role as part of their life as a Quaker:

It gives me the opportunity to do what I was interested in doing anyway, not as a job but as a Quaker, with the added benefit of a salary ... I feel I've been released to do this work. (Development worker)

I felt strongly led to do this work because of my faith. (Development worker)

Several staff reported that being a Quaker felt absolutely necessary for the role, given the depth of knowledge of Quaker structures, processes and language required to support other Friends in

these areas. Understanding the subtleties around building relationships with local meetings (eg attending at a time when a meal doesn't need to be offered so as to limit any burden) was highlighted as particularly important. It was also felt that what the staff learnt by participating or developing their own local meeting helped them to understand the issues faced by other local meetings and that, in turn, their own local meeting was benefitting from their new knowledge gained from the role in Vibrancy:

We're all doing the same thing, you know. I'm doing the same thing as my colleagues and I'm doing the same thing as all the people in the meetings who talk to me or want me to help them with something ... It's like its heart-led for everybody. It's much more a community thing than a job where it's you coming from the outside to do something for them whereas this, I'm on the inside. (Development worker)

I think it would be almost impossible to do this job if I wasn't a Quaker. (Development worker)

This feeling of working from the 'inside' is something that could be supporting the work, and should be explored later in the evaluation as it could guide future recruitment practices.

Local contacts

Three of the four development workers attend a local meeting within the region in which they are working. It was felt that this gave them a 'head start' in terms of contacts and receiving invitations to visit local or area meetings:

When I came into post I already had meetings set up with people that I knew. (Development worker)

It's been easy for me to go to meetings where I know someone there already and they can introduce me as their friend, especially because this creates a kind of instant trust. I could also have more informal meeting with people, whereas others have had to go in as strangers. (Development worker)

By contrast, the one development worker not in this situation has found it harder to get started:

This [not attending a local meeting within the region] has initially been a drawback for me ... I'm catching up. The other development workers had a number of appointments in their diary before they started. I had to start, have the induction, then start writing to people. I don't have the advantage of anyone knowing me beforehand, but I don't have the disadvantage of that either! (Development worker)

However, one development worker highlighted the down-side in terms of a blurring of boundaries in supporting their own local meeting as a member while also being a Vibrancy worker:

I do talk about my Vibrancy hat so much that they're threatening to make me a Vibrancy hat so I can put it on! Sometimes I envy [the development worker who does not attend a local meeting in her region] not being in her area so it's clearer for her. (Development worker)

It is possible that this advantage of knowing local contacts will fade throughout the life of the programme, and is something that the evaluation could explore at a later point.

3.1.4 Induction

Vibrancy staff felt they had a very good and enjoyable induction that was sufficient for them to be able to get started in their roles:

It was amazing. Really thorough but still felt like it only just scratched the surface.
(Development worker)

The induction generally worked well for me and I felt prepared and ready for the job.
(Development worker)

In particular, staff highlighted time spent talking with BYM staff as being very useful to them:

I particularly enjoyed a day where we had lots of short meetings with BYM staff to find out what they were all doing. Some of them were absolutely brilliant at condensing what it is they could offer and I found the day highly informative. (Development worker)

Paul Parker took the time to sit with us for nearly two hours and just talk to us about the background of the project and share his experience, which was lovely. I have also benefited from conversations with other [Vibrancy] development workers. (Development worker)

A gap highlighted by all development workers was the limited time spent getting to know the Quaker Life staff, offer and processes. Although a meeting was held, it was felt that more time could be spent getting to know the work of Quaker Life, especially as the work could be closely related to Vibrancy, in terms of supporting meetings:

Vibrancy is most similar in role to Quaker life and most in danger of treading on their toes. To date we've only had one hour with them at the end of November. We've pieced together from various sources what Quaker Life do, but there are probably bits we're not aware of. (Development worker)

We should have got to know them better and I still don't feel like we know them really well in terms of what their volunteers do and what precisely we can ask them to do, how volunteers are trained, what the level of expectation is etc. (Development worker)

More generally, Vibrancy staff have felt that it would be beneficial to spend some more time getting to know members of staff at BYM who provide the services Vibrancy workers are signposting to so that they can form strong and supportive working relationships. Building these relationships is a particular challenge for remote workers:

We [Vibrancy workers and BYM staff] don't know each other well enough ... The difficulty is that neither we, the development workers, or they, the staff/volunteers have either the time or the budget to make space to get to know each other, explore the distinctive roles and get a good working relationship going. (Development worker)

There's a difference between what role someone is doing and the relationship with the person doing it. What we need more is the relationship. Particularly not being here [at

BYM]. We need to get a feel for someone to get confident to call them as we don't have the chats in the corridor. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

Trying to resolve queries over the phone or email is much harder and takes longer ... people are also more likely to forget a phone or Skype meeting than a face-to-face one or forget to notify me they can no longer make it. (Development worker)

In terms of induction with local meetings, it was suggested that some additional support in getting set up with local meetings could have been helpful to some. As previously reported, some development workers had more pre-existing local contacts than others:

If we were to do it again it would be helpful to have some meetings with area meeting clerks already sorted. (Development worker)

A staged approach to the induction period and building contacts with local meetings was also suggested:

With hindsight, it would have been better to say the first three months were getting up to speed with induction and then in the next three months roll out to each area with a gap of two months. I couldn't consolidate the relationships I was making in one area before the next were happening. (Development worker)

A final area for improvement in the induction is in technical support. Training on financial and HR systems was highlighted as a gap and in particular the transition to new IT systems presented a challenge to Vibrancy workers (see also section 3.1.6):

Some of the IT training didn't take place ... We had to teach ourselves ... [and] nobody realises how difficult it is when you haven't been shown. (Development worker)

Some aspects of the induction process have gone very well and should be retained if Vibrancy is rolled out to other regions in future, or new staff come into post. However, these areas for development should be taken into consideration in designing a revised induction process.

3.1.5 Working hours

All Vibrancy staff reported struggling to contain the work within their allocated hours and consequently working overtime. Some of this time is then taken back as time off in lieu, but the reality is that it is not always possible for staff to take all of this time back and still deliver the work required:

I take a portion of the time back in lieu, but not the whole lot. If I did I would never get anything done ... I never quite catch up on the backlog of emails or recording what I've done. (Development worker)

I'm doing a ridiculous amount more than that [26 hours]. I can't say during someone's visit that I've run out of time. It really feels like they should be full time roles. I don't mind if it goes over but it's not good for me in the long run. (Development worker)

I was constantly over my hours for the induction period and also finding it difficult to claim that time back. There's not enough time to actually do the job. (Development worker)

Several possible reasons were given for this level of work.

- **Attending meetings** in London and Birmingham, conferences or central committee meetings has a significant impact on time due to travel time:

Between September and December nearly every week we were in London or Birmingham. We were told it would change after Christmas but it was still a lot. It has calmed down a bit now. (Development worker)

The loading is heavy towards work that is inside the organisation, especially on meetings at BYM and Woodbrooke because of the travelling time associated with them. (Development worker)

I'm so short of hours to do the intense work at home concentrating that if I've used up six hours on a train I feel I've lost out. So I do travel in my own time. (Development worker)

- **Travel time** within regions is sometimes significant to reach a local meeting:

The distances here are big, which causes many problems. My areas are very rural in places. I stay overnight a lot. (Development worker)

- **Administration requirements** in the role are heavier than anticipated:

I feel the pull of those two things: the admin and all the meetings and stuff we have to go to ... the actual work is getting squeezed. (Development worker)

Going out to meetings is less than half my time. (Development worker)

- **The commitment of the staff** is driven by their alignment with their faith and the aims of the work:

I believe in the goals of the project, so I work over my hours. (Development worker)

Vibrancy workers felt that the system of having weekday core hours, recording any worked outside of that time and claiming them back in lieu is overly complicated and requires additional administration time. Given the nature of the work, which requires a lot of evening and weekend visits, it was suggested that more flexibility to just work the hours required, up to 26.25 per week, would be useful:

I don't understand why I can't just count 26 hours in the week. I spend so much time calculating how to swap out my hours. It would be easier if I didn't feel obliged to be in work on my core hours as the structure of having core days doesn't fit with the style of the job. (Development worker)

I spend at least two Sundays a month on the road. That's when local meetings want you to come to them. (Development worker)

The workload of the programme team is a concern at this early stage in the programme, with a risk of staff burn-out or staff turnover.

3.1.6 Facilities

Generally, Vibrancy staff feel they have been provided with the equipment that they need to perform the role. One development worker reported that 'Anything I would have needed they would have provided'.

However, all Vibrancy workers reported having difficulties with their IT facilities. For some this is a significant issue in their work and the support received from the central IT function was not sufficient to resolve it:

I had huge issues with Surface [an IT device]. Sometimes the machine would stay on updating and restarting for hours and days on end ... After some back and forth I had to sort it out myself and it seems to have done the trick but I lost a lot of time (Development worker)

Sometimes it takes me four times to log in. [Another development worker] had to take her computer in to Friends House because it was so bad she couldn't use it. (Development worker)

In very rural areas the wifi and telephone network connection is an issue that some Vibrancy workers must consider in their work:

There's no wifi or phone connection in the meeting house. If I need to tap into anything or call up anything to show someone then we need to go home. (Development worker)

Some development workers are not able to access emails on their work mobile phone, which is inconvenient for them as they are on the road frequently.

Several development workers reported finding the Staff Directory function on the Friends House intranet particularly useful for searching for colleagues and understanding who is responsible for each area of work.

3.1.7 Internal support and supervision

Team contact

Contact between team members is frequent and valued. The Vibrancy team hold a team meeting via Skype once a week, which is the main opportunity for development workers to share information, provide updates and ask questions. The meeting has an agenda which is alternated weekly: one week is focused on practical issues and updating on work done and the other is focused on sharing learning and improving practice. The team really value this time and their support of each other:

Our Skype meeting is very important. If I miss it I really feel it. (Development worker)

Our team meeting is meant to be an hour and quarter but it easily goes over to two hours as there's so much to share ... There's no 'shame corner' so you can ask silly things or admit to things. (Development worker)

We get on brilliantly as a team and are really supportive of each other. (Development worker)

Development workers then contact each other separately when required:

We email each other and speak on the phone a few times a week, as and when needed.
(Development worker)

There is rarely a day where you don't have some conversation with someone from the team either by phone or email. (Development worker)

Supervision

Formal individual supervision for development workers is provided by the national coordinator roughly monthly, along with adhoc support by telephone or email. The frequency of support requested by development workers varies by individual. Some report that they would be happy for it to be less frequent than it is due to working part-time, others would like to find time for more frequent contact. The national coordinator has responded on an individual basis and this flexible approach seems to be working well for both supervisor and the development workers.

I feel I can email or pick up the phone to the national coordinator whenever needed.
We've got to know each other and trust each other. (Development worker)

Relationships with BYM and Woodbrooke

Relationships between Vibrancy staff and BYM and Woodbrooke staff are generally good, and the support of senior staff from both organisations is particularly valued. Continued sharing of information about Vibrancy with BYM and Woodbrooke staff is important.

Development workers have frequent contact with staff at BYM and Woodbrooke and described them as 'very friendly' and responsive:

Everyone gets back to me and things don't just disappear into the ether. (Development worker)

It was felt that senior staff at both organisations clearly support the programme and that is reassuring to Vibrancy staff:

This programme is strongly owned by senior staff. I feel very strongly backed, which is nice. (Development worker)

The leadership at BYM and Woodbrooke are fully behind Vibrancy. (Development worker)

Mixed feelings about the perception of the programme by other staff at BYM and Woodbrooke were shared. It was generally felt that staff have been supportive and welcoming:

During inductions, new staff were really excited to see us. We were welcomed almost as heroes! (Development worker)

However, some BYM or Woodbrooke staff were not able to engage with Vibrancy due to their own work pressures. There was also some feeling that BYM and Woodbrooke staff might be unsure or anxious about the role of Vibrancy:

I think some BYM staff or volunteers aren't sure of the distinction between the role of the Vibrancy workers and the role of Friends House staff and volunteers that were already in place. (Development worker)

I find staff really friendly and helpful ... But it feels like some might wonder why the project is being done. (Development worker)

Vibrancy staff reflected that this may resolve itself with time and as connections between Vibrancy staff and other staff are built. It was also suggested that some further communications around the programme could be helpful. The national coordinator reflected that 'I think perhaps staff aren't hearing enough about what we're doing'. Another member of the Vibrancy team added 'and also about why we're doing it.'

3.2 Programme work so far

Summary

- Development workers have worked with an average of 17 meetings each.
- Support is being given to individuals more often than groups.
- About a third of the work is with area meetings, which is more than anticipated.
- In areas where the development worker attends a local meeting, most of the work has been reactive, responding to existing demand. In the one area where the development worker does not attend a local meeting, it has taken longer to generate interest and most of it has been proactively developed.
- Meetings are bringing a wide range of presenting needs, which are often hard to initially diagnose. The most common areas of need are around community and meeting for worship.
- The nature of the support given varies but is commonly focused on helping meetings to clarify their needs and then signposting them to the appropriate support. This is beginning to differentiate Vibrancy from other Quaker support.
- Development workers are beginning to feed useful suggestions from meetings back to BYM and Woodbrooke. However, there is no formal way of doing this or ensuring the issues are taken up and actioned.

3.2.1 Number of meetings being reached

Between October 2016 and April 2017 an average of 44 significant instances of contact with individual Friends were recorded by development workers in each region during this time, working with an average of 17 different local or area meetings. Significant instances of contact include work or actions such as visits, presentations, signposting or stand-alone telephone conversations, for example. Emails or telephone calls with individuals that are part of a wider piece of work together are not recorded.

Development workers have attended or been in touch with nearly all of their area meetings and visited about a third of their local meetings, so far. The exception is in the region where the development worker did not have any previous contacts, where visits have been closer to a quarter of local meetings, due to the need to build initial relationships first.

Development workers have differing numbers of local and area meetings and other meeting structures within the regions they are working in, summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of meetings in each region

	No. area meetings	No. local meetings	Other regional structures
Devon, Cornwall & West Somerset	3	29	(Dormant) Devon and Cornwall Gathering
North West	6	36	North West Regional Gathering
Sussex, Surrey & Kent	6	40	Sussex, Surrey & Hampshire border Regional Gathering
Wales & the Southern Marches	4	39	Meeting of Friends in Wales

3.2.2 Who they are working with

The development workers are working with individual contacts either equally frequently or more frequently than with groups (including local or area meetings, trustees or planning groups). Sometimes these individuals are clerks, elders or overseers, but often they are not:

There are individuals who are interested in a particular thing, who've been led to do a particular thing but they don't know how to go about it so it's really good to put them in touch with groups and information so they then have the tools to go ahead and work on the thing that they were interested in ... Sometimes the whole meeting isn't so interested but there are individuals who are particularly keen. (Development worker)

I didn't expect to spend so much time with the clerks but in fact it's very useful. I can be a neutral ear, a sounding board more than signposting. (Development worker)

More work is being done with area meetings than anticipated. An average of one third of all pieces of work (33%) has been delivered at area meeting level, as opposed to local meeting level. In Wales, an additional 10% of work is with Meeting of Friends in Wales. The proportion of work being delivered with area meetings is significantly higher than originally anticipated by the Vibrancy team. Possible reasons for this include:

- Discrete projects happen at area meeting level** (eg a prison group, an economic justice group) that require signposting or support to resources not usually accessed by Friends:

I helped with the presentations that the groups are doing. I used information from a handout I got from a member of BYM staff called 'why prison?' (Development worker)
- Letters were sent to the clerks of each area meeting** at the beginning of Vibrancy to introduce the development workers:

I'm not sure whether the clerks passed the letter on to their local meetings or not. (Development worker)
- Development workers have found area meetings to be an economical way to meet lots of contacts** from local meetings:

I find going to the area meetings really helpful because you pick up a lot quickly. I get so much information just by listening to how business is carried out, how Friends respond and conversations over lunch. (Development worker)

Going to Meeting of Friends in Wales meeting is a good way to network with contacts from all the four areas. (Development worker)

There has been some difference in the way work is delivered at area meeting or local meeting level. One development worker reported that it is easier to do development work at local meeting level because people know each other and are more relaxed:

In area meetings, there are only a few people from each local meeting and as a group people don't know each other as well so they're not as forthcoming, especially with problems. At area meeting I tend to focus more on telling them a bit about Vibrancy and eliciting what they do well and want to do more of. With local meetings, I say 'how is it going?' and they generally get round to 'this is terrible' and I say 'let's do something about that' ... There's more problem-solving with local meetings. (Development worker)

3.2.3 Proactive versus reactive contact

Most development worker contact with meetings so far has been reactive. It was decided at the launch of the programme that development workers would try to work mostly reactively rather than proactively. This was due to a concern that meetings might feel that they were being told they are not vibrant enough, if approached by the programme. Where any proactive work did take place it was framed as 'asking to be invited' to attend a meeting. The only proactive step that was taken by *all* development workers was to write to the clerks of each area meeting to introduce themselves.

In the three regions where the development worker attends a local meeting in their region, over 80% of work done so far with local and area meetings has been reactive to enquiry by those meetings or individuals, rather than sought out proactively by development workers (see section 3.1.3 for further information). In many cases, Friends had been recommended to engage with the development worker or had recognised the name of the worker on the Vibrancy literature and got in touch to invite them. Some Friends had also heard about the Vibrancy programme in general before the development workers were in post and had got in touch with the national co-ordinator to request a visit.

The area clerk had got in touch even before I started to ask for the Vibrancy worker to come. (Development worker)

In the first seven months of the programme, the development workers in those three regions have had almost enough work coming to them to not need to be proactive in seeking out meetings that need support:

I've got lots of people coming to me, so I'm going to go with the energy ... When I've been proactive I've regretted it as I've become overly busy. (Development worker)

There was more than enough need for my support among the meetings who have engaged with the programme, so I haven't had time to reach out to ones who haven't. (Development worker)

In the region where the development worker did not have any initial contacts, all of their work has been proactively sought, apart from one contact from a local meeting. This has meant that

the development worker has needed to spend most of the first six months trying to make connections and generate interest, encountering what felt like 'some indifference' to the programme from some local meetings in the process. Time-intensive but useful exercises such as 'attending a meeting for worship with no expectation further than getting a sense of the meeting' have started to pay off in terms of 'getting to know people'.

As the programme progresses, Vibrancy staff might wish to consider the pros and cons of working reactively, including directing energy where it is welcome versus possibly not reaching those in greatest need.

3.2.4 Method of first interaction

Whether the first contact with local meetings comes via email, letter or face to face varies by region, with no pattern across them all. However, a large proportion of contact follows from previous interaction with a meeting or individual. This demonstrates the importance of good relationships, something that the development workers already have or have invested in within the first six months of the programme.

Once you've met people they're more likely to keep the contact going. That's why face to face is so important ... it's a self-generating spiral of connections. (Development worker)

3.2.5 Presenting needs

Meetings are presenting with a wide variety of needs. It sometimes takes time for the real needs to emerge.

Development workers were asked to classify in their monitoring spreadsheet the needs that Friends present to them at first contact by the areas of Our Faith in the Future, by which the desired outcomes of Vibrancy have been grouped (see *Evaluation planning report*). The frequency of need by area is listed below, from most common to least common:

- community (27 instances)
- meeting for worship (23 instances)
- active values (17 instances)
- Quaker discipline (7 instances)
- visibility (6 instances)
- collaboration (4 instances).

Development workers were unable to classify one third of needs at the point of first presentation. This may indicate a problem with the classification system. However, it may be because early Vibrancy work has been around building relationships and awareness of Vibrancy or because it sometimes takes time to 'get to the real problems'. This will be explored by the evaluation.

When asked in an interview to describe in their own words the needs being presented to them, development workers frequently mention:

- The wish to hear more about Vibrancy and what is on offer.
- A desire to know more about where they are as a meeting, agree where they'd like to be and how to get there.

- Struggling to prepare presentations or workshops.
- Concern with being a small meeting.
- Issues with premises.
- The need to understand or engage with wider BYM structures.
- A desire to apply appropriate use of Quaker groups and processes.
- Feeling unsupported in roles or struggling to fill roles.
- The need to raise awareness or enthusiasm around issues of social justice.

3.2.6 Type of support given to meetings

The Vibrancy theory of change describes the work of Vibrancy as involving three main types of support to meetings:

1. Signposting.
2. Facilitation to help form ideas and plans.
3. Support for major projects.

According to information entered into the monitoring spreadsheet, the most common support that development workers have been offering Friends is facilitation of ideas or plans, which made up over 40% of the work. Signposting made up 20% of the support. Support for major projects is only 3% of work, which may be because these projects will likely be larger and require an establishment of trust with the development worker.

Development workers have found that a lot of their work falls outside of the classifications of facilitation, signposting or support for major projects. This may be because Vibrancy has been in a set-up phase, so there has been a lot of relationship-building and awareness-raising. A development worker commented that a lot of early work has been around 'getting to know' meetings. This will be explored with the development workers for future monitoring and the classification system reviewed.

When asked in interviews to describe the kind of work they are doing with Friends, in addition to signposting, facilitation or support for major projects, development workers frequently mention:

- giving a presentation
- suggesting ideas
- listening and encouraging
- passing on contact details
- discussions and reassurance
- agreeing future visits.

Development workers are clear that their role is not to know everything in order to advise meetings but to find out their needs and link them up with information or help:

As the Vibrancy worker we're meant to just gobble up everything. I realised it's not realistic to know everything just realistic to know how to find out everything.
(Development worker)

Sometimes I feel like I'm signposting myself. I have to look things up as well.
(Development worker)

This distinction between making connections to support Friends' needs or helping them to discover their own truth and actually delivering information is what sets Vibrancy apart from other support available from BYM or Woodbrooke:

A lot of meetings were expecting me to be like a Woodbrooke person and deliver what Woodbrooke offers, rather than signposting. There's a subtle difference between helping them to discern and actually delivering. I give all possible assistance short of actual help.
(Development worker)

Other [BYM and Woodbrooke] staff might feel like we're doing something that they're already doing ... but only time will show that what we're doing is eliciting needs. So, we may be doing a facilitation with a group, to see what their needs are in terms of services so that we can link them with the team or the person who's already providing that service but we need to investigate what it is that they need before [we can signpost]. So we might be using some of the same language but we're not providing any kind of training or workshops they would provide. We're doing a kind of investigating thing that may look like training or a workshop but it's not. It's just about learning what the needs of the group are and what they want to do. (Development worker)

3.2.7 Sharing needs between local meetings and BYM or Woodbrooke

A key role of the development workers is to act as a 'conduit in reverse', sharing the needs and experiences of local meetings with BYM and Woodbrooke so that both organisations can tailor their services accordingly. The role then extends to supporting staff at BYM and Woodbrooke to explore ideas or programmes which they are developing with local meetings. Development workers are starting to do this.

In the monitoring period (October 2016 to April 2017) nine instances were noted of issues or queries from local meetings that were relevant to BYM and Woodbrooke. They are:

1. **A suggestion** was made that a local meeting house could be used for hosting Woodbrooke courses. This was passed on to, and followed up by, Woodbrooke staff.
2. **An issue** was raised that a local meeting feels that their travel costs and time costs to reach London or Woodbrooke are larger than for other areas. This was discussed among the Vibrancy team and it was suggested that some more research is needed into costs and comparisons between regions.
3. **An awareness issue** was noted that local meetings do not always realise that there are specific *Woodbrooke on the Road* brochures. At the time of our site visits this had not yet been shared with Woodbrooke.
4. **A perception** was noted about Quaker Summer Camps not being widely publicised and whether this is because they might become too popular.
5. **A connection** was requested by a member of staff at Friends House who wanted to know whether any *Bridges not Walls* events were being planned in the region. It was suggested that an online reporting form for local meetings to record what they are doing in terms of social action or events might be useful.
6. **A clarification** was requested on some material that was sent out by Quaker Life. This was passed on to Quaker Life and responded to.

7. **A suggestion** was made that it would be helpful for meetings to have examples of documentation to use for property lettings, health and safety procedures and employment. This was fed back to the appropriate staff member at BYM and action is being taken.
8. **A suggestion** was made that existing and outgoing role holders need a space for them to let go of their role and be cared for to reflect on their own spiritual path as an individual and not as a role holder. A new retreat is being planned in partnership with Woodbrooke.
9. **A suggestion** was made for an electronic form to be built into the Quakers in Britain website for area meeting clerks to use in transferring membership from one meeting to another.

So far, these issues or suggestions have been passed on to an individual within BYM that is most appropriate or most connected to the work concerned. Where individual relationships are strong between development workers and other staff, this seems to have worked well and there are reports of changes being made as a result:

I've been working with [a development worker] around getting a sense of what the needs are in that area and working through the development worker to put something new on. Together we're working on a retreat for people coming to the end of Quaker roles to get rid of their baggage and return to their meetings refreshed. We're doing that because she [the development worker] has seen the need. We haven't to date done that off our own bat. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

However, there is currently no formal process in place for feeding back needs or issues on a regular basis or more widely than to individual contacts, and no single person responsible for ensuring issues get dealt with. There were reflections from some staff on how it would be of benefit to put in place a process for regularly passing on and reviewing this feedback:

At the moment it's quite an adhoc process. I've fed things back to staff members but we don't have a good process of collating these things at the moment. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

The contact so far has been as and when, and it would be good for Woodbrooke to regularise that. For instance, once a month having a phone conversation with each of the people and asking 'what's going on in your area?' One of the senses I'm getting in terms of the work we've done with Vibrancy has been 'here's an idea for an event' rather than 'here's a need and how can we meet it?' If we had that regular contact then the development workers could say 'I went to that meeting last week and this is what's going on for them'. We could say 'we've got a course coming up on that'. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

To further draw on the growing expertise of Vibrancy workers in a systematic way it was suggested they might be involved in BYM and Woodbrooke organisational planning processes:

We start our planning process with a meeting among programme staff to ask what the needs are of Friends and BYM. We need to involve the Vibrancy workers in that. Last time we held the meeting Rachel had only just been appointed so it wasn't the right timing. (BYM or Woodbrooke staff member)

The current workload of the development workers would need to be considered in additional participation in planning processes. One option might be that a representative could attend on behalf of all Vibrancy workers.

4. LEARNING

4.1 For the Vibrancy team

Vibrancy staff reported having learnt a lot in their relatively brief time in post, personally and in terms of how to deliver their work effectively.

4.1.1 The needs of local meetings

Meetings may have problems but still be thriving. For example, a development worker explained that a local meeting has had a significantly delayed building project. 'It has been a bit of a nightmare for them, but the meeting still seems to be thriving.'

Development workers have learnt how strong personalities can influence meetings:

I had underestimated the impact of strong, dominant personalities on local and area meetings. This is especially the case if they do not understand Quaker business method, they can really put the meeting off course ... I think a lot of energy is going in avoiding conflict. (Development worker)

The presenting need is often not the real need. Development workers are finding that the issues that Friends come to them with are not necessarily the root of the issue and the area in which they need the most support. For example:

A local meeting can come to you with something about roles but actually it's about conflict in the meeting. For example, sometimes they might want to do something on outreach but it's actually about community building. (Development worker)

The implication for future work is that time must continue to be spent with local meetings to find out what they really need.

4.1.2 How to work with local meetings

The nature of the engagement

Development workers have found that informal, face-to-face engagement is best, and that it is important to build individual relationships and to engage directly with people:

There is a pattern of having a few very basic interactions before Friends feel comfortable to start sharing how the meeting is with you. You need to get over the first part, being a stranger, to do the real work, this can be back-and-forth small stuff but it is valuable. (Development worker)

Most development workers have found that people in local meetings find it helpful to simply talk and the role of the development worker is to listen:

Quite a lot of people just want to talk things through, have another informed view of things, I just ask questions and listen mostly in these cases. (Development worker)

I came away from a meeting recently where I'd been listening generously to their story. They were thrilled I'd gone there. There was nothing I could offer but they felt that me

being there was really valuable. It felt like fairy dust. They feel validated and more confident and connected and strong. Because someone has come in from the outside that really does care about them. It's quite abstract and intangible but we can't miss the benefit. (Development worker)

Building the confidence of people in local meetings, or having confidence in them, is also a very important development worker role:

People need support initially to raise their confidence so that they can act. (Development worker)

Being seen to have confidence and to be alongside is enough sometimes. (Development worker)

Preparation for work with local meetings

Development workers talked about learning the need to be clear and firm with Friends on things such as date options and workshop requirements in advance. This, in turn, would help the local meeting to get the most out of the support. Doing some background research on the meeting before attending was also found to be helpful:

It is useful to know about numbers of roles and numbers of Friends. Ideally a conversation with a well-informed local Friend would best prepare you for this kind of meeting in advance. (Development worker)

Being clear on the remit of the role

Development workers have learnt where the boundaries of their role are and that they are focused on support and signposting for meetings and not necessarily 'sorting things out'. One explained that 'I need to keep reminding myself of the things that are not ours to do ... Even though signposting doesn't always feel very satisfying.'

This is particularly challenging where development workers are also members of local and area meetings in the region, so feel an urge to take action and do the work themselves. Linked to this, there is learning around how much can realistically be achieved by the development workers and even by the local meetings themselves:

Some work is just too big for individuals no matter how much support we offer. (Development worker)

Progress takes time

Acknowledging that this kind of work takes a long time to make change has been important learning for the development workers. Patience is required in both supporting meetings to reach decisions and in seeing the fruition of that work:

It takes time to get results. Relationship-building takes time but is crucial. (Development worker)

It's a slow burn. We are kindling and helping to set off the fire. (Development worker)

4.2 Learning for the evaluation

The initial period of the programme has generated some evaluation learning that should be applied to the future evaluation plans.

- **The need to be mindful of workload:** Although it is hoped that development workers can collect a significant portion of information, to reduce the burden on local meetings, the evaluation plan will need to consider the pressure on development workers' time, so as not to take them away from delivery of support.
- **The monitoring spreadsheet:** The monitoring spreadsheet did not suit all the development workers and will be reconsidered. It was reported by one development worker that storing information in this way felt like 'squeezing everything into a small hole'. Development workers would prefer to hold information about all of the work they do with a local or area meeting in one place, if possible.
- **Site visits can be helpful for development workers:** Development workers reported finding the process of being interviewed helpful for guiding their own self-reflection.

Thanks for the meeting yesterday, it was helpful for me to explain some of the things that are happening because it helped me with insights too. (Development worker)

It was really good to talk this through as it's helped me to realise some things myself. (Development worker)

- **Capturing area-level support:** Significant support is being offered at area meeting level. The evaluation will need to ensure that data capture allows for this to be represented.
- **Leave space for the spirit-led:** The evaluation steering group raised the need for capturing where development workers' action has been particularly spirit-led and the effect of this.
- **Clear communication about evaluation:** It is important to let Friends know that it is Vibrancy that is being evaluated and not the local or area meeting. Discussions with development workers have raised this as a consideration for communications around any direct contact with local meetings in the evaluation.
- **Flexibility:** The evaluation needs to be flexible, in particular so it can test questions relevant to any future Vibrancy succession plans.

5. EARLY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 For Vibrancy

Recommendation 1: Review the workload of Vibrancy staff and consider action to reduce travel, administrative or meeting-focused responsibilities. This could include sending a single representative to internal meetings and increasing flexibility around logging time and hours swapping.

Recommendation 2: Set up a formal process for feeding back needs and issues from local meetings to BYM and Woodbrooke staff. This could include monthly catch ups, while being mindful of the administrative load on the development workers' time.

Recommendation 3: Consider strengthening the contact between the development workers and Vibrancy steering group.

Recommendation 4: Create a plan for ongoing communications to BYM and Woodbrooke staff around the purpose and role of Vibrancy and its developments. This could be led by the Steering group, to manage the additional workload for Vibrancy staff.

Recommendation 5: Allocate more time to familiarisation with Quaker Life staff, offer and processes, as well as with other BYM staff providing services being signposted to, in any future induction processes for new development workers. Additional time spent with Quaker Life staff could still be of use to current development workers.

Recommendation 6: Invest in well-functioning IT equipment and access to IT support for any future regionally-based development workers.

Recommendation 7: Discuss the pros and cons of taking a reactive approach to support, as opposed to a proactive one, to ensure that this is a considered decision on an ongoing basis.

5.2 For the evaluation

Recommendation 8: Further explore how necessary it is for development workers to be Quakers in order to perform the role effectively.

Recommendation 9: Further explore whether the advantage that some development workers have of being part of a local meeting in their area is sustained further into the programme.

Recommendation 10: Capture data on where development workers were particularly spirit-led in their work and what effect this was felt to have.

Recommendation 11: Ensure that data collection captures work at the area meeting level as well as local meeting level.

Recommendation 12: Check with development workers whether the classifications in the monitoring spreadsheet around needs and type of work are fit for purpose.