

Case example 1

Cardiff local meeting

Support with managing and developing the meeting house

Cardiff local meeting received 'deep' support from the Vibrancy worker for Wales and the Southern Marches to review the day-to-day management of their meeting house and work on exciting plans for development of the property. The treasurer of Cardiff local meeting explained:

For several years we'd been looking at how to develop the meeting house. Plans had gone through various iterations but got stuck, as had the meeting's overall responsibility for the running of the property. Shortly after taking on a management company, the meeting disbanded the property and finance committee and replaced it with something that left a lot of responsibility for liaising with the management company on the lead individuals ... at the time we also didn't have a group that was tasked with taking the development plans further.

The Vibrancy worker (Helen) worked in partnership with the lead from the Property Support Pilot Project at Britain Yearly Meeting (Huw) to support the local meeting.

Setting up a steering group

Prior to Helen's and Huw's involvement, the South Wales area meeting trustees had had a fairly 'removed' relationship with meetings and their meeting houses. Trustees were supportive of change, but it had been down to the local meeting to initiate and manage it. The first thing Helen and Huw did was to attend a meeting of the area meeting trustees to suggest that a steering group be created to guide the work around Cardiff meeting house. Out of that one meeting, very quickly a steering group was set up with three area meeting trustees, three people from the local meeting and both Helen and Huw. Helen reflected that:

For the local meeting this felt a much stronger and more empowered group than what was in place before. The group are able to make decisions about finance and architects' plans, for example.

For the treasurer in particular this group was a great support as they had been taking on increasing responsibility for the running of the meeting house, including liaising with the management company.

I felt very isolated and responsible as treasurer and I'd lie awake at night worrying about the meeting



house finances. For me personally it made a huge difference to have the steering group. I'm now part of a group I really love working with and it has completely changed the way I work and am supported in this role.

The group also enabled the meeting to have a better link with area meeting trustees around this topic:

We now have a much closer relationship with trustees and trustees have taken a more holistic view of their responsibility for the area meeting's buildings.

Once the steering group was up and running, other task-related groups were created to support specific areas of work. This included the fundraising group, which became actively involved in bids, such as one with the Welsh Government resulting in £250,000 for development.

Developing plans

Helen and Huw co-facilitated a series of workshops for the steering group, area meeting Trustees and others responsible for property. The co-clerk of South Wales area meeting really valued being able to draw on Huw's expertise, paired with Helen's local touch:

The workshops felt a really good development ... Just being able to draw on Huw's expertise, with Helen facilitating that, has been really helpful.

Huw then arranged a 'study tour' for three members of the steering group to visit several other Quaker centres to see how they were run and whether their learning could be applied to Cardiff's situation.

Helen's role was as an informed facilitator. At times she listened and encouraged the group and at other times she gave hands-on support, finding documents, putting them in touch with people or helping with content for the website. She made 'connections between conversations that she's had in different places, picking up where there's similar interests or issues and pointing people in the direction of

each other.' For example, Helen liaised with Paul Parker, recording clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting, and Paul Grey from the Friends House hospitality company, and arranged for them to visit Cardiff local meeting to share their experience of running a building and to discuss the idea of Cardiff hosting a hub for support to local Quaker meetings. Helen extended this conversation by suggesting that the steering group liaise with Meeting of Friends in Wales to gather their views on the situation:

We went to Friends in Wales to tell them about what we were planning in Cardiff and to see if they would welcome the idea of having a hub for Quaker support there.

Better management of the meeting house

The management company that had previously been taken on, in anticipation that income would grow, was costing more than the meeting could afford because the income was not increasing. One of the initial jobs for the steering group was to review the viability of the contract with the management company and draw up a new specification for something that would be more suitable. They then budgeted for, advertised, interviewed and appointed a new management team, which the treasurer felt was a big step in the right direction:

Overall, it's working much better. Our income has increased and our finances are on a sounder footing. We still have nowhere near the reserves we should have for the meeting house, so we're still exposed, but things are improving.

Future development of the meeting house

In terms of the future development of the meeting house, the meeting had planning permission to extend the ground floor – 'Plan A'. The vast majority of the money to carry that work was secured through grants, appeals and fundraising activities. However, that plan was on hold because the site next door was due to be demolished and there was a planning application for an



18-storey residential development in its place.

We felt that our original plan for development would be compromised if this building went up ... We've spent a lot of time and effort in putting together our representations around their planning application. We've also come up with a Plan B ... We're now looking to see if we can find a development partner to develop our site and build us a better, more sustainable, meeting house, ideally with social housing there. So we're hugely busy and it's far more complex than any of us thought!

Looking to this possible future of a new meeting house, the steering group wrote a business plan and was considering a new visioning exercise to involve the meeting in thinking about what they wanted the Quaker activities in a new building to achieve.

As we're continuing to develop the plan for our physical presence, we're thinking about how that supports the wider purposes of the Quaker community in the capital city of Wales. Making the Quaker community in Cardiff more engaged in the wider community is all part of our thinking for the new meeting house.

What made this successful?

A big part of the success of Helen's support to Cardiff local meeting was down to the partnership that she was able to make with Huw. Helen reflected that:

Huw was able to bring specialist property management expertise to the group and I was able to complement this with local knowledge, on-the-ground support and examples of how other meetings had managed their property in other parts of Wales.

For Friends:

It was Helen and Huw working together who were instrumental in the change. Clearly other people played their part but, without their intervention at that point, we wouldn't have moved on in the way we've moved on.

There was an acknowledgement that Helen's contribution as a Vibrancy worker in this meeting house development project was in a facilitative role:

We know we mustn't become too dependent on having Helen's time in her Vibrancy role because she may have to switch her emphasis in her work to something else.

At a time of exciting development for the meeting, Friends were now feeling 'more confident' and 'more involved in the future of their own meeting house.'

We've been hugely well supported at exactly the time we needed it.



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