

Case example 3

Wrexham, Reigate and Blackburn local meetings

Sharing roles and tasks

In common with many local meetings, Wrexham, Reigate and Blackburn were all struggling to fill roles. Some Friends were also finding it hard to fulfil tasks within roles. Their respective Vibrancy workers gave ideas, information and encouragement to help Friends deliver their service to the meeting in new ways.

Wrexham: taking responsibility, sharing tasks

Wrexham local meeting did not have enough people to fill elder and overseer roles. They had tried 'muddling along' for a while and then bringing eldership and oversight issues to the business meeting, but this had not worked for them. Their co-clerk reflected:

We realised early on that it would make our business meeting very cumbersome, so we wouldn't be able to do it like that.

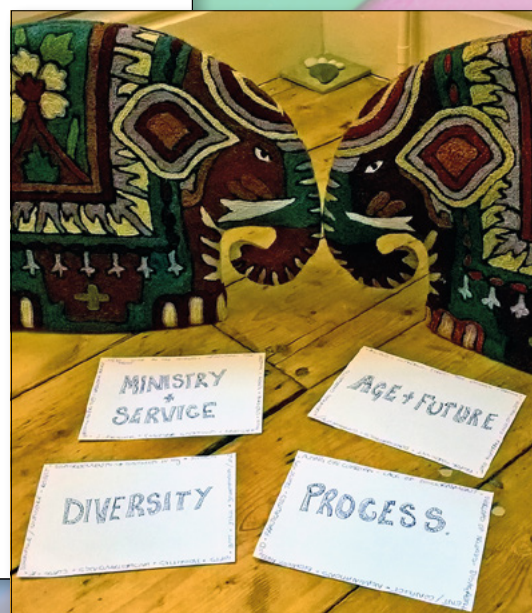
Friends decided that they wanted to explore a system of shared eldership and oversight instead; they then invited their Vibrancy worker, Helen, to visit them in North Wales to help them to 'take it forward' and 'do it properly'.

Helen facilitated a session for the meeting that included an explanation of different models of eldership and oversight, including corporate and traditional ones. The co-clerk particularly appreciated how Helen had done her research, which made the session a good experience:

She talked to other people from area meeting and she also met with the co-clerk and me on the evening before to go through what she was thinking of doing and checking that she'd understood things properly. But unless you knew, you wouldn't have understood the work and prep that had gone into it. It was carried lightly so it was an enjoyable experience for all.

Helen used stories to bring the session alive, including the well-known poem of 'Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody' about shared responsibility, which made those in the meeting realise that 'we've really got to get a grip of this or nobody would do anything'.

Wrexham's co-clerk felt they 'changed considerably' as



a result of the session. Unexpectedly, the first main difference was that they felt 'comforted':

We often don't value what we do have. There were bits in that session where Helen pulled out that even as a small group there are more of us that take on the tasks than in other meetings – a higher proportion. We started to feel good about ourselves in a way that we don't always.

In practical terms, the group decided to have labels for tasks at times when the meeting came together. The co-clerk explained how it worked:

We put a label out and people pick it up to say they'll be the doorkeeper, or they'll shake hands at the end of meeting or they'll read from advices and queries that day.

By doing this, they were not only ensuring that tasks got done, but also encouraging new people to step forward:

We've got someone who picked up the shaking hands label who'd never done anything like that before. So it prompts others to take on new tasks. Us trying to share the tasks out is a bit like the model of the geese: we take turns to fly at the front while others benefit from the slipstream.

Reigate: shared clerking

Reigate local meeting also needed to find a way to share a role, this time the clerking role.

We had trouble with the clerking role and, for the last five years, someone has been coming over from Dorking local meeting to help us out as clerk. Understandably, and in terms of Quaker good practice, she needed to pass the role on.

In a small meeting of approximately 13 Friends, six of whom were prepared to take

a more active role, no one wanted to take on the 'formalities' of the clerking role, but they wanted to keep the meeting going. They invited their Vibrancy worker, Carrie, to support discussions about how to manage the running of the meeting.

Carrie facilitated a session where she led the group through different possibilities and explored with people what preconceptions they held around the role of clerk:

She was enabling us to first of all see what the essence of the role was and secondly to explore ways we could carry out the functions without necessarily being hidebound by the apparent bureaucracy and rules that appeared to us.

Following this session and a further visit from Carrie, the meeting developed a clerking team of four people. This included a nominal clerk that Britain Yearly Meeting has recorded as the clerk of the meeting, but the role is carried out by 'a team of four of us that actually do the clerking'. One of the added benefits of this was that the meeting was able to 'engage people in a role that they wouldn't have done before'. But the biggest result was that 'what we have done so far [with the clerking team] has allowed us to continue, with our small numbers'.

A member of the new clerking team felt that the long-term nature of Vibrancy support continued to give them a 'boost':

I would have been very sad had Carrie come in, done what she'd done and then gone off somewhere else. I really valued the fact that when I bump into her informally at other Quaker things she's there to talk to informally. It prompts me to think, 'What have we done since then?'

He also felt that Carrie's input helped them to see that there were other ways to manage the Quaker business method in their small meeting:



The issue is that Quakers are very open and very flexible in all sorts of ways but their business method is quite alien to a lot of people, including me. It's a very slow way in which decisions are taken. I understand the theory; however, when you're trying to get things done quickly it's a difficult process to absorb and embrace. That's at the heart of what we were trying to address with Carrie.

Blackburn: splitting the tasks of Treasurer

Blackburn local meeting had a Friend in the role of treasurer, but the role became too large for one person to manage. The treasurer described how it was for him:

I was feeling overloaded. When I took over as treasurer I took on a link with people using the building. I ended up being the coordinator for all the lettings. In combination with treasurer duties, it was all getting too much. We couldn't see how things could be split. I was reluctant to let someone else take over from me on part of the job.

The Vibrancy worker for the North West, Wendy, facilitated discussions around the issue, bringing in a wider perspective from other meetings as well:

She helped us to see that it could be done, because she was aware of other meetings that had separated lettings from treasurer duties, and encouraged us to think about things seriously.

The meeting decided that another Friend would take over the management of the lettings and that the treasurer would continue with the remaining duties of the role. This immediately reduced the workload of the treasurer, which had a knock-on effect for him:

The job was getting in the way of family life, so it's also eased things at home for me.

A year down the line, the role continued to be more manageable for the treasurer and an unexpected benefit was that the individual who took over the lettings was 'developing the role in a way I hadn't thought of doing', so it was working even better for the meeting:

She's looking at the lettings from much more of an outreach point of view, engaging new people in the lettings ... It's also been really good to engage her because she's 20 years younger than I am!

What made this Vibrancy work successful?

For each of these meetings, the Vibrancy worker acted as a facilitator, an enabler and a supporter to Friends' changing roles and responsibilities. The work to change was done by the meetings themselves, but they needed the nudge to take action:

What happened to us was very simple. Really, we knew what we had to do before we asked for help. It was the encouragement and support we got in taking that step that was important.



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