**Potential Area Meeting**

**Complaints and Disputes - draft**

Elders and Overseers have a particularly important role in maintaining the community of every Quaker meeting, (*Quaker faith & practice*, chapter 12) and this includes giving guidance as to appropriate and inappropriate behaviour within Meetings for Worship and also towards other members of the Quaker community.

Where a member or attender is considering making a complaint we hope that members of the meeting who may be aware of the difficulties follow the guidance provided on pages 293 -300 of “With a tender hand” by Zélie Gross.

All safeguarding issues should be referred immediately by the person first made aware of the issue to the local meeting safeguarding rep deputy. In cases when she/ he are not available or are not appropriate the referral will be to the Area Meeting Safeguarding Coordinator or Deputy. Trustees hold the ultimate responsibility for safeguarding matters.

All other complaints and concerns from Members and Attenders about relationships with other Friends, arrangements for worship and related matters will be addressed in accordance with procedures in *Quaker faith & practice* (*Qf&p*) by Elders and Overseers. If they cannot be resolved at the Local Meeting the procedure at *Qf&p* 4.23 should be followed. In the event of a dispute involving a member about a final decision of the Area Meeting the procedure is set out at *Qf&p* 4.25.

Issues relating to Employment and Room Hire will be addressed in accordance with the Local and Area Meeting policies and procedures.

Any other complaint made by any person in connection with a local or area meeting should be in writing, clearly stating the nature of the complaint and to what extent the complainant wishes any matters raised to be treated as confidential and forwarded to the clerk (who will usually be the Local Meeting Clerk unless the issue relates specifically to an Area Meeting event).

The overseers, elders, local or area meeting clerk or safeguarding team will receive the complaint and:

* Consider whether the complaint should be referred to be addressed on any of the procedures above.
* Meet, or otherwise be in touch, with the complainant and take any steps which may be appropriate.
* In the event that the issue is not resolved and does not fall into the categories above pass it to the clerk to trustees who will take such action as is considered appropriate
* A written record of the complaint, any subsequent meetings or communications and any action taken should be made and signed by all present, and retained with any relevant meeting minutes and an outline forwarded to the clerk to trustees. It needs to be explained to the complainant that it is not always possible for the record and meeting to remain confidential. In some instances it is possible to remove the name of the complainant.

Throughout the processes above Friends will seek to be caring, supportive of all involved and compassionate while not shirking from speaking plainly when appropriate, and to follow the advice of Zélie Gross (op cit).

We will always aim to resolve all complaints and ensure that the complainant feels appreciated and cared for, however it may not always be possible to resolve every complaint.