

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AREA QUAKER MEETING RAPID RESPONSE GROUP

THE FOLLOWING INDICATES THE FUNCTION OF THE RAPID RESPONSE GROUP, AS SET UP BY G&N MM (updated MM to AM and PM to LM 28.10.2010 – E.M.W.)

PURPOSE OF THE GROUP

1. A Fast Track Response Group will enable Area Meeting to make rapid statements or responses where necessary without having to wait for the next AM. It is **not a substitute** for external corporate matters (including concerns) being sent to AM from LM's **where the time scale allows** the normal procedure to be adopted. (See Appendix A for a summary of MfS advice.) It is not envisaged that situations requiring a fast response time between Meetings will arise frequently. Once per annum?
2. The Group's field of work should normally be kept within the AM area. Also see QF&P 3.27. and **all statements or responses will be firmly based on our Quaker principles and testimonies as expressed in *Quaker Faith and Practice*.**
3. The task of the Group is to prepare external statements/representations/responses on AM's behalf for publication to the appropriate recipient. It is organised so that it can act quickly once matters including concerns has been properly tested by LM's
4. The Group's function is not to make statements or representations on behalf solely of one individual, and it should be remembered that sometimes the greatest impact is made by many individuals writing separate letters. Help and advice is available in the following pamphlets from Friends House:- ***Corporate Public Statements*** - The appended Table from Meeting for Sufferings, ***Writing to MP's effectively, Quaker Faith and Action*** both of them free and ***A plain Quaker guide to political action*** by Christine Peake (former Parliamentary Liaison Secretary) price , £2.50. Also ***Letting the Light Shine - A Quaker Guide to using the media*** by Simon Risley, £3.50.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Group will include a convener and about 5 Friends who have experience and/or skills in making representations to public institutions etc, They would be ideally drawn from as many meetings as is practical or possible.

GUIDANCE

for those Wishing to Bring Urgent External Corporate Matters (including Concerns) to the Area Meeting Fast Track Response Group

PROCEDURE

1. The proposers should discuss the matter with their LM Clerk. This will ensure that efforts are not duplicated and that the matter has the backing of others in the LM., so that when the statement is subsequently reported at AM it has LM support. Also, it is right that any concern should be tested amongst several others rather than just those of like mind.
2. It is good practice for LM's to contact the relevant Yearly Meeting department to establish what may already be in train in developing a corporate public statement or response before going on public record on their own account. If appropriate, the proposer should also ideally discuss the matter with the relevant person on the Political Activity Database in the LM.

3. The proposer sets out a coherent brief. A suggested format is shown below. It is not the job of the Group to spend time investigating possible alternative ideas. That is the duty of the proposer. The Group will have more than enough to do to get the statement or representation ready for publication and it is unreasonable for the proposer to expect others to do the ground work.
4. The proposer sends the brief to the convener of the Fast Track Response Group who will check whether any further information is required.
5. The brief will be photocopied and sent to the Group or preferably e-mailed or faxed if the proposer has this facility. It is important that a written brief should be available prior to telephone consultation as there is a need to consider all statements carefully. Unless the circumstances are absolutely exceptional this procedure will always be followed.
6. It is the responsibility of the Group to decide whether to take the LM tested matter or concern forward in advance of the next AM, and, if so, to agree the statement or representation for publication. It will consider the length of the statement, the meaning of the wording, and to whom it should be sent.
7. Once the public statement or representation is agreed and issued, Friends are to send copies themselves to whom they think suitable - e.g. their local MP/Press/TV. This will increase the impact.

THE BRIEF

The brief needs to be brief (!) but also needs much thought. It should be typed or clearly written for easy reading when photocopied for circulation.

To avoid delay the brief should contain:

1. A heading or title. The name, (e-mail) address and telephone/fax number of the proposer and the date.
2. A suggested form of words for the statement or response. It is often better if this has been considered by more than one person.
3. Suggestions as to how the statement could be issued (e.g. letter and to whom, article or advertisement and where to be placed). After consideration by the Fast Track Response Group, the final copy will normally be signed by the AM Clerk on behalf of AM.
4. If appropriate, the name of an expert in the field whom the media can contact. The proposer should approach and get agreement from that person to act in that capacity. Those who are on the Parliamentary Liaison Sections Political Activity Database may have that expertise or the Fast Track Response Group may be able to help as it builds up a list of such Friends in the AM.

Appendix A MfS Advice

Corporate Public Statements. Representations and Other Ways of Publicising Friends Concerns.

There is a range of ways open to Friends of publicising their concerns: Corporate Public Statements, Private letters to Government, Embassy, Church Body etc, Open letter to the same Letter to the press, Press release, Delegation to visit public bodies, Signing statements or letters initiated by others, Briefing MPs, Submissions to government departments, Responses to consultations and finally Briefings for Friends who may take individual action. (MfS has produced a Table.)

1. It is rarely a simple case of choosing one method; often a number of initiatives need to be woven together in a strategic response. The more carefully planned the strategy is, the more likely it is to have some effect in the world. Without careful targeting and timing any one of these devices may have little impact. In the case of corporate public statements, their wording will often also form the basis of letters: government submissions and briefings for individual friends writing eg to their MP's. The combination of a newsy press release and a well constructed public statement is likely to be more effective than a statement on its own.
2. At times we will have to balance the importance of Friends Testimony with the need to cooperate with other bodies.
3. Corporate statements should be used sparingly if their force is not to diminish with over-use.

Criteria used by Meeting for Sufferings:

If PMs wish MM to forward a concern to MfS then PMs will be mindful of the criteria for judging when a new corporate public statement by MfS is required.

These criteria are:

that there is

1. no corporate public statement on the issues already in existence or it is too general for the specific situation.
2. clear evidence of how a corporate policy statement will support and encourage Friends in their local witness.
3. a challenge to our **basic testimonies** by a national or global event or crisis.
4. pressure from both Friends and from other churches or faith groups to develop a testimonial basis for approaching **new ethical choices facing humanity** e.g. on genetic modification as a threat to the integrity of creation.

The characteristics of a well considered corporate public statement are:

1. It arises from Quaker experience.
2. It makes clear the spiritual insight or moral basis for the Quaker position.
3. It appreciates the dilemma for both or all parties.
4. It demonstrates a good understanding of the constitutional or legal basis for action.
5. It suggests an alternative conceptions framework; and
6. It proposes constructive practical moves which the parties can consider.

* The above criteria are an abridgment of paras 2.1 to 2.7 of the 17th November 1998 paper by MfSC on Corporate Public Statements.