



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

VENUE: Council Chamber, Llandrindod Wells

DATE: 10 December 2010

PRESENT: Professor M. Wynn Thomas (Chair)

Local Authorities

Councillor B. Towyn Evans (Ceredigion)
Councillor Alwyn Gruffydd (Gwynedd)
Councillor Nigel Steele-Mortimer (Flintshire)
Councillor Jim B. Criddle (Caerphilly)

WJEC

Mr Alun Treharne

National Library of Wales

Mr R. Arwel Jones

Friends of the Welsh Books Council

Mr Tegwyn Jones
Dr Brynley F. Roberts

The Council's Panels

Mr David Barker (Chair of the Children's Books Panel)

Vice-Chair

Mr Gareth Davies Jones

Honorary Secretary

Mr D. Geraint Lewis

Honorary Treasurer

Mr W. Gwyn Jones

Co-opted Member

Mr Ioan Kidd

Staff

Mr Elwyn Jones (Director)
Mr Arwyn Roderick (Head of Finance, Business and Information Technology)
Mrs Moelwen Gwyndaf (Head of Administration)
Mrs Marian Beech Hughes (Senior Editorial Officer)
Mr D. Philip Davies (Head of Information Services)
Mr Neville Evans (Distribution Centre Manager)
Mr Richard Owen (Senior Grants Officer)
Mr Sion Ilar (Senior Design Officer)
Mr Tom Ferris (Head of Sales and Marketing)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Morfudd M. Jones; Messrs Gwilym Fychan; Keith Morgan; Eurfryn Davies; David W. M. Rees; Ron Page; Mrs Ann Keane; Ms Gillian Evans; Messrs Gwydion Hughes; Alun P. Thomas; Alan Watkin; Steve Hardman; William Howells; Neil Bennett; Rhys Bebb Jones; W. Gwyn Williams; Dr Hywel Owen.

1 CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the members to the meeting. He extended a special welcome to Neville Evans, Manager of the Distribution Centre, and Tom Ferris, Head of Sales and Marketing, who were present for the first time.
- 1.2 Warm wishes were conveyed to Mrs Ann Davies, Receptionist at Castell Brychan, who had returned to work following an illness, and to Afan ab Alun who was receiving medical treatment.
- 1.3 Best wishes were extended to Miss Menna Lloyd Williams on her retirement at the end of November, and thanks were paid to her for her leadership during her time as Head of the Children's Books Department.
- 1.4 Apologies were received from Councillor Gwilym Fychan (Powys) who was unable to attend the meeting due to family illness.

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Half Yearly Meeting, held on 24 June 2010, were confirmed.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Support for the Welsh-language Press: Golwg 360

The Director reported that Wavehill, an Aberaeron-based company, had completed their review of the on-line news service, and that the report was currently available on the Council's website. He outlined the rigorous process followed by the company in collecting the views of readers and prospective readers.

It was noted that the report praised the work of Golwg 360, referring particularly to the following:

- the standard of the journalism, which compared favourably with the BBC's news service
- the opportunities for further development and for attracting new readers

It was further noted that the Grants Panel had asked the company to prepare a business plan and development scheme, in time for the next meeting of the Panel in March 2010.

3.2 Additional Funds: Editorial Posts

The Director reported that 23 posts in 7 publishing houses had been filled, with one other post in the pipeline.

To date, the Council had made contact with Tŷ Newydd Writers' Centre, Llanystumdwy, and with Bangor University, to discuss various means of collaborating.

Training, in the form of courses and a mentoring scheme, was being provided under the leadership of Mairwen Prys Jones, with the long-term aim of promoting the sales of books.

Concern was voiced regarding the possibility that the editors would eventually become copy editors, but the Vice-Chair emphasised that the main focus was on creative editing.

In response to a query regarding the possibility of extending the scheme to include editors of magazines, the Director said that the hope was that they and the Council's external editors could be offered training at a later date.

3.3 Friends of the Welsh Books Council

Tegwyn Jones, Chair of the Friends, reported that a pack containing a copy of the newsletter *The Friend / Y Cyfaill* had been distributed during November.

He further noted that the Steering Committee of the Friends had met on 2 October, when it was agreed to support a scheme to promote reading amongst boys, by sponsoring a pack of books to celebrate World Book Day.

In order to try and increase membership, which remains at around 350, the committee was keen to appoint a Membership Officer; they will also consider holding the Annual Meeting in a different location in order to try and encourage new members to join.

It was reported that a meeting of the Friends had been held in Aberystwyth during October, with Professor M. Wynn Thomas interviewing the author Nigel Jenkins about his work.

Tegwyn Jones thanked Lyn Léwis Dafis and Moelwen Gwyndaf for their support.

4 **SCHEMES TO PROMOTE READING**

The Director reported that a number of important developments had been achieved this year, and that the Council had co-operated closely with the Assembly's Education Department in order to support the National Literacy Plan.

He drew attention to the World Book Day activities, which included a lecture delivered by the Minister for Education, Leighton Andrews.

The Vice-Chair noted that this was an indication of the Assembly's confidence in the Council, and he thanked the officers for their work.

5 **GRANTS 2011/12**

The Director presented the probable situation regarding grants for 2011/12, noting that the shortfall of £5,000 experienced this year had been restored to the budget.

6 **MEMBERSHIP OF THE COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND PANELS**

In accordance with the Constitution, the Head of Administration presented a list of the members of the Council, the Executive Committee and the various Panels. It was explained that all representatives of the Local Authorities were members of the Council and that they were represented in rotation on the Executive Committee. The Chair thanked the Councillors for their support.

Following a recent meeting of the Nominations Panel, a paper was presented outlining the latest situation regarding membership of the panels. The paper was commended.

He also reported that Dr Rhidian Griffiths had resigned as a co-opted member. It was agreed to consider a new name during the Half Yearly Meeting.

7 REPORTS ON DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITIES

7.1 Information Services

Phil Davies, Head of the Books Council's Information Services, reported that a new version of gwales.com had been made 'live' since the Half Yearly Meeting, thereby providing an improved service to customers, including over 12,000 registered users.

He explained that the new version of gwales, whilst using a modern, fresh design, nevertheless retained the popular elements such as details of New Books, Forthcoming Titles, Special Offers, Reviews and lists of Bestsellers.

He also explained how the methods of searching the website had been strengthened and how, under a new section, 'Readers' Recommendations', users are able to suggest titles suitable for other readers. The provision is available in the user's chosen language, and it is possible to make use of all the website's features in either English or Welsh.

He noted that the Department was wholly dependent on the publishers to send information to them by electronic means, and he thanked them for their willing co-operation. A further improvement to the system, soon to be implemented, will allow the department to transfer data directly to the website without the need for re-typing.

Phil Davies also mentioned the following further developments to the Council's corporate website, which is also under the auspices of the department:

- Using Google Analytics in order to analyse the use made of the gwales website had provided the Council with very useful statistics.
- Gwales currently has over 400 followers on Facebook, and information about campaigns is regularly placed on Facebook. An advertisement placed on Facebook for a month was seen by 200,000 people.

It is now possible to send an enquiry electronically to the Books Council website and gwales staff; the system recognises the type of enquiry received, and transfers the message directly to the appropriate department.

7.2 Sales and Marketing / Distribution

Tom Ferris, Head of Sales and Marketing, referred to some of the changes introduced in the Department since he joined the staff of the Council a little over a year ago; he voiced his admiration of the work of the publishers, particularly in the field of Welsh-language books.

He noted that the 100 book spinners managed by the Department showed an increase in sales; there was also an increase in sales in National Trust locations. He also referred to the close co-operation with Waterstone's and WH Smith, with both companies showing an increase in sales over recent months.

He noted that the Council had faced a considerable challenge with sales 4% down on the previous year; several factors had contributed to the downturn, including the increase in sales of English-language books from Wales through distributors in England.

The Department had, nevertheless, been very busy in the period leading up to Christmas, with 79 book-signing sessions being arranged during November, and 35 further events being arranged for December. Unfortunately, the inclement weather had had a detrimental effect on several of these events.

He referred also to the latest developments in the field of e-publishing; although e-books did not at present represent a high percentage of book sales in Wales, it would certainly increase during forthcoming years. The Council was eager to ensure that the Distribution Centre and booksellers would continue to be a central part of the sales chain in the field of e-books as in the case of printed materials.

He paid thanks to Department staff for their hard work, restating their commitment to providing the best service possible to publishers and booksellers in Wales.

7.3 Children's Books Department

Moelwen Gwyndaf, Head of Administration, reiterated the Chair's warm wishes to Menna Lloyd Williams on her retirement; she also thanked the whole team for their enthusiasm and excellent cooperation.

She referred to the Department's main activities, which had occurred before the end of the summer, such as the Welsh-language and English-language Books Competitions, the Tir Na n-Og Awards and the Mary Vaughan Jones Award, which is presented every three years.

She reported that the Welsh-language Children's Laureate scheme had been particularly successful this year, due to the enthusiasm of the present incumbent, Dewi 'Pws' Morris, who had already held 50 workshops. She noted the intention to continue the scheme and discussions are already being held to finalise arrangements for the next two years.

She gave an account of the Department's work in coordinating the national T. Llew Jones memorial day, held on 9 October. A special celebration was held at the author's old school, and very successful events were held throughout Wales in schools, libraries and bookshops; there was also a positive response to the competitions for schools.

It was noted that the work of preparing the annual catalogue of children's books – *Catalog Llyfrau Plant* – was going ahead and that it would be published at the beginning of the year.

8 PRESENTATION OF THE FINANCIAL REPORT 2009/10

The Honorary Treasurer, Mr W. Gwyn Jones, presented the 2009/10 accounts. The Treasurer thanked Mr Arwyn Roderick and his staff for their work in preparing the accounts, and to LIŷr James and company for auditing them.

9 PROBABLE FINANCIAL POSITION 2010/11 AND ESTIMATES 2011/12

The Treasurer presented the estimates for 2011/12 and they were approved.

10 PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

In presenting the Annual Report, the Director noted that the previous year had been a challenging one for the Books Council as it faced a very difficult period as regards sales; there had, however, also been some important developments.

He noted that one of those far-reaching developments had been ensuring additional money to support Welsh-language publishing, thereby making it possible to appoint new creative editors in the publishing houses. He further reported that new guidelines for the English-language revenue publishers had been presented and it was hoped that these would lead to an increase in sales.

The Director was also pleased that the Council had been able to protect the publishing grants, in a period which had seen cuts in the public sector. Unfortunately, the Council itself was facing a cut in its funding, and although staff changes would be helpful in the short term, it would be necessary to hold a review of the Council's staffing structure in addition to the plans of the various departments.

The Director thanked the staff for their work during the year; he also thanked the Chief Officers and the members of the Council for their support.

Mr R. Arwel Jones paid thanks to the Director and the staff for their work.