



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

VENUE: Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth

DATE: 3 July 2015

PRESENT: Professor M. Wynn Thomas (Chair); Mrs Rona Aldrich; Mrs Gwenda Easton; Mrs Lorna Herbert Egan; Ms Bethan Gwanas; Mr W. Gwyn Williams; Councillor Fiona Gordon.

Staff: Messrs Elwyn Jones; Arwel Evans; D. Philip Davies; Sion Ilar; Dr Huw Meirion Edwards; Dr Lucy Thomas; Ms Helena O'Sullivan; Mrs Emma Davies.

APOLOGIES: Messrs Alun P. Thomas; Gwydion Hughes; W. Gwyn Jones; Dyfrig Ellis; Dafydd John Pritchard; T. Hywel James; Chris Edwards; Professor Aled Gruffydd Jones; Ms Marian Delyth; Mrs Susan Jenkins; Mrs Carol M. Edwards; Councillors Alun Lenny; Wyn Ellis Jones.

1 CHAIR'S MATTERS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. He extended a special welcome to those who were present for the first time, namely Mrs Lorna Herbert Egan (Chair of the Children's Books and Reading Promotion Panel), Mrs Gwenda Easton (on behalf of Meilyr Rowlands, Estyn), Ms Bethan Gwanas (Vice-Chair of the Friends), Dr Huw Meirion Edwards (Head of the Editorial Department), and Mrs Emma Davies (Head of the Finance Department).
- 1.2 Condolences were expressed with the following on their recent sad losses:
Eiry and Geraint Williams on losing a father and father-in-law at the beginning of January;
Menna Lloyd Williams (former Head of the Children's Books Department) on losing her mother;
The family of the late Gareth Davies Jones, Vice-Chair of the Books Council, who died in mid-February;
The family of the late Emeritus Professor R. Geraint Gruffydd (former Vice-Chair of the Council in the early 1980s);
The family of the late Dewi Morris Jones (former Head of the Editorial Department, who gave over thirty years' service to the Books Council);
The family of the late Kynric Lewis QC (former Honorary Counsellor of the Council);
Gwyn Jones, Honorary Treasurer of the Council, on losing his mother-in-law, aged 100 years.
- 1.3 Councillor Myfanwy Alexander was congratulated on the publication of her novel, *A Oes Heddwad?* in time for the Meifod National Eisteddfod.
- 1.4 Angharad Wyn Tomos (Manager of the Reading Promotion Schemes) was congratulated on her engagement over Christmas.
- 1.5 Best wishes was conveyed to Bethan Gwanas, who would be having hip replacement surgery in the near future.

- 1.6 Best wishes were conveyed to two members of staff who would be retiring over the summer period, namely D. Philip Davies (Director of Information Services) after almost 28 years' service, and John Rees Davies (Assistant at the Distribution Centre) after 23 years' service. They were warmly thanked for their contribution and sterling work for the Books Council over the years.
- 1.7 Thanks were paid to Angharad and Mererid, daughters of the late Roger and Catrin Puw Davies, for a contribution in memory of their parents given as sponsorship towards the Book Day lecture, delivered this year by Jackie Morris.
- 1.8 Members were reminded of the need to declare an interest and to retire from the meeting at the appropriate times.

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 28 November 2014, were confirmed.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Following the recommendation of the Chief Officers, Mrs Rona Aldrich was elected to the post of Vice-Chair of the Council, following the death of Gareth Davies Jones. Further to the decision, Professor Jane Aaron was elected Honorary Secretary.

Nominations were invited for co-opted members of the Executive Committee and the Council. Two names were presented, to be confirmed by the Council at the afternoon meeting, namely the Rev. Lyn Léwis Dafis and Dr Cathryn Charnell-White.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Tender in respect of English-language Magazines from Wales

The Chief Executive explained the background to the tender in respect of English-language magazines from Wales, noting the Council's concern that some titles were not reaching their potential audiences, thereby leading to questions regarding value for money. After advertising the tender in the summer, interviews were held in December at which four-year contracts were awarded to five magazines – *Planet*, *New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *Agenda* and *Wales Arts Review*. As part of the contract, an emphasis was placed on increasing income and giving value for money, together with developing a digital platform.

Members of the Interviewing Panel were thanked for their work and it was felt that the process had placed these magazines on a much more secure platform to face the future.

3.2 Welsh-language Magazines Tender

The Chief Executive reported that the Council had commissioned Andrew Green to hold a review of the field of Welsh-language magazines, and his recommendations had been fed into the process of preparing the tender that was advertised early in the summer. A sub-Panel of the Welsh-language Publishing Grants Panel, chaired by Gerwyn Williams, was established to carry out the process.

The closing date for applications was 2 July, and it was reported that the Council had received a number of applications, including some from new companies.

Interviews will be held early in September, with the new franchises coming into force in April 2016.

3.3 Children's Book of the Month Scheme / Cynllun Llyfr y Mis i Blant

Following a period of consultation and discussion with booksellers and publishers, it was reported that the Council had launched a new scheme to promote children's books from Wales in both languages, namely the Children's Book of the Month Scheme/ Cynllun Llyfr y Mis i Blant. The scheme was launched with an adaptation of a book by David Walliams – *Nana Crwca* (Atebol) – and the response from booksellers was very favourable. This also led to further discussions from the Welsh-language perspective regarding selecting original publications alongside adaptations.

It was noted that the field of children's books, in both languages, had been given considerable attention by the Council in recent times, following the report prepared by Mairwen Prys Jones.

4 THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

4.1 Executive Plan 2015/16

The Chief Executive presented a copy of the Executive Plan to the members' attention, noting that he would be reporting further on the Plan in the afternoon meeting. The plan had been drawn up in consultation with the civil servants, and Hywel Owen and Siân Evans were thanked for their assistance. It was further noted that the plan had been approved by Ken Skates, the Deputy Minister.

Rona Aldrich referred to the importance of including sales as part of the Welsh Government's targets, and to the Council's relationship with booksellers.

4.2 Financial Award Letter

Following the Executive Plan being approved by the Welsh Government, the Council had now received the Financial Award Letter noting the Council's funding for the year. The award was in accordance with expectations, and included a further cut of £100,000 in the funding for the current year.

It was also noted that the Council had received an Award Letter from the Department of Education in respect of the reading promotion schemes.

4.3 Welsh Government Report: *Review of Support for Books From Wales* – Martin Rolph Report, November 2014

The Chief Executive noted that he had, in the previous meeting, presented a verbal report outlining the recommendations of the Rolph Report, noting that the report referred to at the time was a draft copy. The final version of the report had been included with the committee papers.

Without revisiting the same content, he noted that the Council was extremely pleased that the report clearly noted the fact that the Council was the most suitable body to lead in the field of publishing, and that it offered value for money. Particular reference was made to the voluntary contribution made by members of all the Council's panels and committees.

It was explained that this was an internal Welsh Government report, and in accordance with the relevant procedure it had not been translated.

Gwyn Williams added that the report reflected well on the Council's work, but nevertheless care would have to be taken regarding the recommendation referring to restricting the freedom to transfer funds from one scheme to another.

4.4 Themed Years

It was noted that the Deputy Minister had announced a 'themed years' scheme as a promotional tool for the arts portfolio, namely Adventure (2016); Legends (2017) and the

Sea (2018). This development was welcomed by the Books Council, in the hope of seeing cooperation across all departments of the Welsh Government.

5 GRANTS AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

5.1 Grants 2015/16

Emma Davies, Head of Finance, presented a paper outlining the grants in respect of the 2015/16 financial year, showing a further decrease in the Council's Budget. The details were in line with the information contained in the Award Letter.

5.2 Financial Position 2014/15 and 2015/16

Emma Davies reported that the books were now closed in respect of the previous financial year, and that she was in the process of preparing the accounts. She noted that discussions with the Welsh Government regarding the next financial year were about to begin and that she was holding regular meetings with heads of department to discuss departmental budgets.

6 REPORTS ON DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITY

6.1 Sales and Marketing

Helena O'Sullivan, Head of the Council's Sales and Marketing Department, reported that the recent period had been a very busy one, with the end of the financial year and arranging various schemes in preparation for the summer. The current period continues to be very difficult in respect of sales, with a number of booksellers seeing a substantial decrease in their sales. She reported a 7% fall in sales through the Distribution Centre compared with the previous year; this, however, was to be expected as all primary schools in Wales had, in the previous year, received an injection of extra funding from the Welsh Government to enable them to buy books of their choice.

It was further noted that the Department was making every effort to increase sales, and was working closely with publishers and booksellers to arrange events in the company of authors. Support was also given to a number of booksellers to enable them to sell books at certain festivals, and the Department worked with Siop y Bont, the local bookshop, at the Urdd Eisteddfod, and with the organisers of the Hay Festival to exhibit books there. As a step to promote cooperation with the English-language publishers, they were invited to a meeting to discuss matters of interest. The meeting was a great success and it is intended to hold another in the autumn.

The promotional schemes were assessed, and it was noted that the Children's Book of the Month Scheme/Cynllun Llyfr y Mis i Blant, had been launched, with 60 shops taking part.

The Department had already produced and distributed the Welsh-language books supplement, *Llyfrau'r Haf*, and the *Summer Reads* supplement would follow soon.

6.2 Distribution

Arwel Evans, Head of the Distribution Centre, reported that the Christmas period had been busy from the point of view of distributing books to shops, and although the distribution company Yodel had faced some difficulties, it had been possible to maintain the service over this period.

He further noted that the Council continued to benchmark the service, and it was pleasing to note that 97% of all new books received are counted and added to the database within a period of 24 hours. The level of the Centre's debtors had been kept to 0.97%, compared with a target of 2%.

It was noted that the Centre had recently been developing its stock ordering systems, and this had facilitated the work of the staff.

6.3 Editorial / Design Services

Sion Ilar reported that the staff of the Design Department had been working closely with publishers again this year, mainly on producing book covers, with a few volumes being designed from cover to cover. He noted that the aim of the department was to maintain the standard currently expected by booksellers and readers, and that they aimed to lead by example and by offering assistance to publishers. The Department had also been busy working on internal material for various departments within the Council.

He referred to D. Geraint Lewis's wish to retire as Chair of the Design Panel and thanked him for his staunch support over the years.

Dr Huw Meirion Edwards noted that his first six months as Head of the Editorial Department had been very exciting as he had been given the opportunity to work on a wide range of titles, from creative works to factual volumes, in both Welsh and English.

In the year in which the centenary of T. Llew Jones, the poet and children's author, will be celebrated, he had worked on new editions of his most popular novels, together with *Y Gân Olaf*, a unique volume of the work of the late Gerallt Lloyd Owen.

7 READING PROMOTION SCHEMES

Phil Davies presented a report on behalf of Angharad Tomos, noting that a full report on the reading schemes was included in the minutes of the Children's Books and Reading Promotion Panel.

Since that meeting, arrangements for some of the 2016 Book Day schemes were already in hand, including holding a flagship event in Swansea. It was also noted that Meilyr Rowlands, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales, will be delivering the Book Day lecture in 2016.

Due to the financial constraints, it was noted that four Quick Reads / Stori Sydyn titles will be published next year, two in English and two in Welsh. The relevant publishers were already working on their plans.

Following the success of the Summer Reading Challenge in 2014, the Deputy Minister will be launching this year's Challenge at Cefn Mawr Library, Wrexham, on 10 July, in the hope of encouraging more volunteers to support the scheme.

8 PRESENTATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of the following Panels were presented and confirmed:

- 8.1 Chief Officers' Panel, 4 June 2015
- 8.2 Nominations Panel, 31 March 2015
- 8.2 Publication Grants Panel (Welsh-language), 12/13 March 2015
- 8.3 Publication Grants Panel (Welsh-language), 18/19 June 2015
- 8.4 Publication Grants Panel (English-language), 3/4 February 2015
- 8.5 Children's Books and Reading Promotion Panel, 3 June 2015 – including an appendix on the Book Club and the decision to wind it up and concentrate on other schemes to promote children's books from Wales in both languages.

9 RECENT APPOINTMENTS

A report was presented on the appointments made since the previous meeting:

Lowri Ebrillwen Davies – Administrative Assistant (Information) (internal appointment)
Jennifer A. Evans – Administrative Assistant (Sales and Marketing)

10 ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE HALF-YEARLY MEETING

Members were thanked for attending the Executive Committee, and it was noted that the Half Yearly Meeting would follow at 2 pm.