



CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

ANNUAL MEETING

VENUE: Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth

DATE: 28 November 2014

PRESENT: Professor M. Wynn Thomas (Chair)

Local Authorities

Councillor B. Towyn Evans (Ceredigion)
Councillor David W. M. Rees (Pembrokeshire)
Councillor Huw R. Davies (Caerphilly)
Councillor Huw Thomas (Cardiff)

Welsh County Librarians

Mr T. Hywel James

CILIP Cymru/Wales

Mrs Carol M. Edwards

The Welsh Academy

Mr Dafydd John Pritchard

The Friends of the Welsh Books Council

Ms Marian Delyth

The Council's Panels

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

Vice-Chair

Mr Gareth Davies Jones

Honorary Secretary

Mrs Rona Aldrich

Honorary Treasurer

Mr W. Gwyn Jones

Co-opted Member

Mr W. Gwyn Williams

Staff

Mr Elwyn Jones (Chief Executive)
Mr Arwyn Roderick (Head of Finance)
Mrs Moelwen Gwyndaf (Head of Human Resources)
Mrs Marian Beech Hughes (Head of the Editorial Department)
Mr Arwel Evans (Head of the Distribution Centre)
Dr Lucy Thomas (Head of the Publishing Grants Department)
Mr D. Philip Davies (Director of Information and Promotion)
Mr Sion Ilar (Head of the Design Department)
Mrs Helena O'Sullivan (Head of Sales and Marketing)

Officers

Mrs Delyth M. Phillips

Mrs Sharon Owen

Ms Anwen Pierce

Mr Dyfed Evans

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ioan Thomas; Wyn Ellis Jones; Chris Bithell; Alun Lenny; Stuart Egan; Anita Hobbs; Graham Davies; Messrs Alun P. Thomas; Gwydion Hughes; Chris Edwards; Dr Hywel Owen; Mrs Susan Jenkins; Mrs Emma Davies (Head of the Finance Department).

1 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. He extended a special welcome to Councillor B. Towyn Evans, who had recently been unwell.
- 1.2 Condolences were conveyed to Mrs Moelwen Gwyndaf (Head of Human Resources) who had lost her mother in October, and also to the family of the late Emlyn Evans, formerly of Gwasg Gee, who had recently passed away.
- 1.3 Mr Ioan Kidd – a former member of the Executive Committee and the Council – was warmly congratulated on his success in winning the Book of the Year Award in July, for his novel *Dewis*.
- 1.4 Good wishes were conveyed to Siriol Jones, a member of the Distribution Centre staff, who had recently undergone surgery.
- 1.5 Warm wishes were conveyed to four members of staff who will be leaving or retiring before the end of the year, namely Moelwen Gwyndaf (Head of Human Resources), Arwyn Roderick (Head of Finance – following assisting during a period of maternity leave), Marian Beech Hughes (Head of the Editorial Department) and Emyr Wyn Evans (Caretaker at Castell Brychan). They were thanked for their notable contribution and their sterling work for the Books Council over many years.
- 1.6 Members were reminded of the need to declare an interest and to retire from the meeting as necessary. Their attention was also drawn to the declaration of interest forms to be completed by all members.

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Half Yearly Meeting, held on 27 June 2014, were confirmed.

3 MATTERS ARISING**3.1 Child Poverty Strategy – Progress Report**

The Chief Executive reminded members that the Council had, some two years ago, drawn up a Child Poverty Strategy which had since been approved by the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Department. The strategy referred to the Council's role in providing books suitable for children from various backgrounds, and for a number of reading promotion schemes. The Council prepares an annual progress report for the attention of the Culture Department, and the current report has been approved by them. It was further reported that the report had been discussed in the Chief Officers' meeting, and they wished to bring the report to the attention of the Department of Education and the Department of Health, in addition to the Department of Culture.

3.2 English-language Magazines from Wales

Following conducting a wide-ranging review of the field of English-language magazines from Wales last year, chaired by Tony Bianchi, it was noted that the recommendations had now been incorporated in the tender document; they included increasing circulation, digital developments, and setting a financial gearing ratio of 2:1 in the context of financial funding. Thanks were paid to the Welsh Government's officers for their assistance in interpreting the European state aid guidelines.

The tender was advertised early in the summer; several preliminary enquiries were received, and seven applications were received. Interviews will be held on Monday, 8 December.

3.3 Friends of the Welsh Books Council

Marian Delyth reported that the Friends had recently held a successful meeting to discuss the field of children's books, at which Professor M. Wynn Thomas interviewed a panel of experts. New officers had been elected on the Friends' Steering Committee, which will meet in the near future to address the possibility of arranging a membership drive.

It was noted that the latest membership pack had been distributed to members.

3.4 Celebration Volume

The Chair reported that most of the articles were already in hand, and that the commissioning group would meet soon to discuss the format of the book.

3.5 Celebrations to note the Centenaries of Dylan Thomas / T. Llew Jones

The Chief Executive noted that, in the previous year, the programme of events to celebrate the centenary of Dylan Thomas's birth had been widely publicised; Lucy Thomas referred to a number of English- and Welsh-language books about the life and work of the author and poet which had been produced with the aid of publishing grants.

The Chief Executive also noted that the Council – in co-operation with the Society of Chief Librarians, Wales – had produced a catalogue listing books pertaining to the life and work of Dylan Thomas.

In 2015, the Council will be supporting events to celebrate the centenary of the author and poet T. Llew Jones, and the Council will be represented on the author's Memorial Fund Committee.

4 **REVIEW OF THE BOOKS COUNCIL'S WORK**

The Chief Executive noted that, since the previous meeting, the Welsh Government's Culture Department had announced its intention of holding a review of the Council's work as part of a programme to monitor organisations funded by the Government.

The main aim of the review will be to consider whether the Welsh Government should support the field of publishing in Wales, and whether the Council is the most appropriate body to undertake this work; consideration will also be given to providing value for money. Martin Rolph, who had been appointed to undertake the review, had already visited the Council, giving particular attention to the work of the Grants Department, digital developments, and the contribution of the Distribution Centre to the industry. It is understood that he had contacted several stakeholders to ask for their opinion. At the end of the process, the Chair and the Chief Executive had attended a further meeting with Martin Rolph in Cardiff.

Although the report has not yet been published, the Books Council were given an opportunity of commenting on the draft version. The report showed general support for the Council's work, and stated clearly that the Books Council is the most appropriate body to operate on behalf of the Welsh Government. Although the report states that there is no specific reference to the publishing sector in the Welsh Government's programme of work, it nevertheless recognises

that publishing, in both Welsh and English, contributes to several key fields such as education, culture, employment and the Welsh language.

The report notes that the Council's administration is appropriate, and that it has a good relationship with stakeholders. The commitment of volunteers to the Council's work, through its various committees, is commented upon. Details are given of the Council's grant remit letter from the Welsh Government, and the need for more research into market trends – which would be helpful to the Council when planning for the future – was noted.

The Chief Executive was of the opinion that the Welsh Government intended to publish the report.

The Chief Executive also noted that Huw Brodie, Chief Civil Servant for Culture and Sport, would be retiring in the new year, and thanks were paid for his invaluable help and support.

5 GRANTS 2015/16

The Head of Finance presented a paper noting the grants received for the 2015/16 financial year.

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

In accordance with the Constitution, the Chief Executive presented a list of members of the Council, the Executive Committee and the various Panels. He noted that representatives of the local authorities were members Council, and were represented in rotation on the Executive Committee. Thanks were paid to those who had served the Council in 2014, noting that their contribution and support were greatly appreciated.

All members were asked to complete the Register of Interest forms.

7 PRESENTING THE FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2013/14

The Honorary Treasurer presented the accounts for 2013/14 to the attention of members. He thanked Llŷr James and the staff for their work in auditing the accounts, and thanked Arwyn Roderick and his staff for preparing them. He particularly thanked Arwyn for his co-operation over many years, and wished him well in his retirement.

8 LIKELY FINANCIAL POSITION FOR 2014/15 AND ESTIMATES FOR 2015/16

The Honorary Treasurer presented papers noting the likely financial position for the current year and estimates for the forthcoming year. He noted the increasing pressures arising in the wake of the financial cuts the Council had recently faced. He also noted the concern felt by members regarding the current financial situation and the Council's commitments to serve and support the publishing industry in Wales in both languages. Councillor Huw Thomas noted that it would be advantageous for the Council to be given a three-year funding cycle, as it would make it easier to plan its services well in advance.

9 PRESENTING THE 2013/14 ANNUAL REPORT

In presenting the annual report, the Chief Executive noted that it was most pleasing to see an increase in sales through the Distribution Centre at the end of the financial year. This had been partly achieved thanks to the Welsh Government's investment in a scheme enabling every primary school throughout Wales to purchase books.

He referred also to the review of the field of Welsh-language children's books, undertaken by Mairwen Jones, and noted that the Council was already implementing some of its recommendations. During the summer, the Welsh Government's Department of Culture held its own review of the Council's work, and although the report has not yet been published, it praised the service provided by the Council and the good relationship it has with stakeholders.

Last year was largely dominated by events to celebrate the centenary of Dylan Thomas's birth, with the Council supporting the occasion by facilitating the publication of a number of volumes in both languages. It was, however, stressed that ensuring publicity for books from Wales was an uphill struggle for publishers, particularly in the English press.

The financial position is, naturally, a matter of great concern for the Council, and it is feared that it will not be possible to continue supporting the full range of services if further cuts are made to the budget.

Councillor Towyn Evans proposed a vote of thanks to the Chief Executive and the staff for their sterling work throughout the year, and he congratulated them on their success.