



CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

HALF YEARLY MEETING

VENUE: Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth

DATE: 3 July 2015

PRESENT: Professor M. Wynn Thomas (Chair)

Local Authorities

Councillor Joy Rosser (Rhondda Cynon Taf)

Councillor Fiona Gordon (Swansea)

Councillor B. Towyn Evans (Ceredigion)

Welsh Government

Dr Hywel Owen – observer only

ESTYN

Mrs Gwenda Easton

Friends of the Books Council

Ms Marian Delyth

The Council's Panels

Mrs Lorna Herbert Egan

Honorary Secretary

Mrs Rona Aldrich

Co-opted Member

Mr W. Gwyn Williams

Staff

Mr Elwyn Jones (Chief Executive)

Mrs Emma Davies (Head of the Finance Department)

Mr Arwel Evans (Head of the Distribution Centre)

Mr Phil Davies (Director of Information and Promotion)

Dr Lucy Thomas (Head of the Publishing Grants Department)

Ms Helena O'Sullivan (Head of the Sales and Marketing Department)

Dr Huw Meirion Edwards (Head of the Editorial Department)

Mr Sion Ilar (Head of the Design Department)

Mrs Delyth G. M. Phillips

Mr Owain Thomas

Mr Dyfed Evans

Mr R. Arwel Jones

Miss Emma L. Evans

Ms Sharon Owen

Mrs Medi Jones-Jackson

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ioan Thomas; Chris Bithell; Stuart Egan; David W. M. Rees; Alun Lenny; Wyn Ellis Jones; Brian Mansbridge; Messrs. W. Gwyn Jones;

Alun P. Thomas; Gwydion Hughes; Dafydd John Pritchard; Hywel James; Chris Edwards; Mrs Carol M. Edwards; Mrs Susan Jenkins; Ms Bethan Gwanas; Professor Aled Gruffydd Jones.

1 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. He extended a special welcome to those who were present for the first time, namely Councillor Joy Rosser (Rhondda Cynon Taf), Dr Huw Meirion Edwards (Head of the Editorial Department), Mrs Emma Davies (Head of the Finance Department) and Mrs Medi Jones-Jackson (Children's Books and Reading Promotion Officer).
- 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 publishing her novel, *A Oes Heddwad?* in time for the Meifod Eisteddfod.
- 1.4 Angharad Wyn Tomos (Manager of Reading Promotion Schemes) was congratulated on her engagement over Christmas.
- 1.5 Best wishes were 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, 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. 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 as necessary.

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Meeting, held on 28 November 2014, were confirmed.

3 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Following the recommendation of the Executive Committee in the morning meeting, Rona Aldrich was elected Vice-Chair to follow the late Gareth Davies Jones. Further to the decision, Jane Aaron was elected to the post of Honorary Secretary.

Members were reminded that the Council had invited nominations for co-opted members of the Executive Committee and the Council. Two names had been presented to the Executive Committee in the morning, namely Rev. Lyn Léwis Dafis and Dr Cathryn Charnell-White. Both names were approved.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Executive Plan 2015/16 / Financial Award Letter

The Chief Executive presented the plan to members, noting that this document would steer the work of the Council for the current year. Thanks were paid to the civil servants for their assistance in drawing up the plan, and it was noted that Ken Skates, the Deputy Minister for Culture, had made positive and constructive comments. The Council was pleased that the report had been approved, and that the Financial Award Letter for the current year had been received.

The Chief Executive further noted that the implications of the current financial situation were reflected in the Plan, with the Council doing their utmost to maintain and defend the industry. Nevertheless, all the Council schemes were under scrutiny, and information had been given in the meeting of the Executive Committee that the Book Club would be coming to an end. Other schemes to maintain sales of children's books will be developed.

Despite the current financial situation, the Council continued to place an emphasis on developing the industry, and reference was made to the changes in the field of magazines in both English and Welsh, the new Children's Book of the Month scheme, and the various digital developments.

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

3.3 Strategic Plan

To complement the Executive Plan, it was reported that the Council also wished to prepare a Strategic Plan setting out its vision and aims for the forthcoming period. Although the financial position would have an effect on the plan, it would – as in the case of the Executive Plan – include an emphasis on developing the industry.

Internal meetings had already been held to start discussions, and work will continue over the summer to draw up a draft document. The recommendations will be discussed by our partners in the industry at the appropriate time.

3.4 Developments in the field of magazines

The Chief Executive presented a summary of the process followed in respect of the English-language magazines tender. Members were reminded that the Council had held a review, chaired by Tony Bianchi, and that the report's recommendations had been fed into the specifications of the tender advertised last year. Strong applications had been submitted, and interviews were held in December, following which support was awarded to five magazines, namely *Planet*, *New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *Agenda* and *Wales Arts Review*.

Detailed discussions ensued on how best to distribute the money in order to support a range of magazines, and members were of the opinion that the panel had made meaningful and wise decisions, taking into account the requirements of readers, the challenge facing sales, and value for money. The franchises came into force in April this year, for a period of four years.

It was noted that a similar process was in the pipeline in respect of the Welsh-language magazines, and that Andrew Green had held a review of the field. The tender was advertised at the beginning of the summer, with 30 June being the closing date for

applications. A sub-Panel of the Welsh-language Publishing Grants Panel, chaired by Gerwyn Williams, had been established to award the franchises which would come into force in April 2016.

3.5 Celebration Volume

The Chair reported that all the articles were now in hand and that he had started on the work of editing the texts. A decision will have to be made soon regarding the final format of the volume.

3.6 Reading City Scheme

The Chief Executive noted that he had presented a report last year to members of the Executive Committee, but that he wished to give members of the Council a more up-to-date account. An initial meeting had been held in Swansea with representatives of the University and Swansea City Council to discuss the possibility of holding a Reading City campaign there. It was agreed to make further enquiries with specific groups and to draw up an application for Lottery funding.

An outline application has been presented to the Lottery, and supplementary material has also been included. The Council hopes to receive confirmation that the application will, in the near future, move on to the next step.

3.7 Library of Wales Series

Lucy Thomas presented a report on the Library of Wales series, that ensures that some of the classics of English-language literature from Wales are available for readers. The first volumes were launched in 2006; to date, 42 books are available with *Carwyn*, by Alun Richards, being the latest in the series. This book, a biography of the late rugby coach, Carwyn James, has already sold over 1,000 copies within a period of six months.

LT added that the WJEC had included the title *Poetry*, a selection of poems by some of Wales's most notable English-language poets, on the GCSE syllabus.

3.2 Friends of the Books Council

Marian Delyth, on behalf of the Friends of the Books Council, reported that the Steering Committee had met recently, and Ion Thomas had been elected Chair. She further noted that the committee was eager to increase the membership, and to encourage young authors to join.

She noted that the latest issue of the Friends' newsletter, *The Friend / Y Cyfaill*, had recently been published and would shortly be distributed to members.

She added that the Friends would be hosting a reception at the Books Council's stand at the Meifod National Eisteddfod, and the annual meeting would be held in Aberdare where there would be a discussion on the life and work of Alun Lewis, the author and poet.

7 GRANTS AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

7.1 Grants 2015/16

Emma Davies, the Head of Finance, presented a paper noting the grants received in respect of the current financial year. These included funding from the Culture Department together with the Education Department.

8 PRESENTATIONS

8.1 Digital Platforms

Referring to his imminent retirement, Phil Davies expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to work for an establishment which had done so much to develop the publishing industry in Wales. He noted some of the main developments he had witnessed in the 28 years working for the Books Council; they included a number of

successful marketing campaigns, such as publishing the children's books catalogue and establishing *Gwledd y Nadolig*, the Christmas books supplement.

As Head of the Information Department, he had been responsible for developing the digital provision – a field which was not in existence when he joined the Council, but which is now a vital part of its work.

Delyth Morgans Phillips gave a presentation on the latest developments in the digital field, and demonstrated an example of the publishers' work preparing interactive Apps for readers.

8.2 English-language Books from Wales for Children

Lucy Thomas gave a presentation on recent developments in the field of English-language books from Wales – developments which have been possible despite the financial cutbacks. She opened her remarks by referring to the contribution made by Pont Books, and noted that the Council had been fortunate to receive specific funding from the Welsh Government to enable it to develop the field.

As a result of that funding, Atebol had been able to produce a series of factual books for children, and Firefly press had been established specifically in order to publish volumes of fiction for children aged 7–9 years. Within a short space of time, Firefly has achieved a great deal, holding events in some of the leading books festivals, and attracting positive publicity in a number of magazines and newspapers. Although the initial funding has now come to an end, the Council is still able to support Firefly with grants for individual books.

8.3 Research Partnerships

Arwel Jones, Publishing Grants Officer (Welsh-language) presented three research schemes that were the result of partnerships between the Books Council and Bangor and Aberystwyth Universities. These schemes (KESS and Access to Masters) focused on various aspects of the publishing industry in Wales: the effect of the increase in funding for the publishing grants (2003) on the Welsh novel; the reading habits of young people aged 15–25 years, and the use made of social media in the context of Welsh-language magazines. He noted that the Council was not in a position to undertake similar research without establishing partnerships, and he hoped it would be possible to continue this cooperation in the future.

The Chair paid thanks to the staff for their most interesting presentations showing the wide range of the Council's work and the specialist services offered to support the publishing industry.