



## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

VENUE: Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth

DATE: 1 July 2016

PRESENT: Professor M. Wynn Thomas (Chair); Mrs Rona Aldrich; Professor Jane Aaron; Messrs Chris H. Macey; Richard Bellinger; Robat Arwyn; Mrs Lorna Herbert Egan; Councillor Stuart Egan; Councillor Chris Bithell; Councillor Dai Jones.

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

APOLOGIES: Messrs Alun P. Thomas; Gwydion Hughes; T. Hywel James; Gareth Griffiths; Rev. Lyn Léwis Dafis; Dr Daniel G. Williams; Ms Bethan Gwanas; Ms Marian Delyth; Mrs Carol M. Edwards; Dr Cathryn Charnell-White; Councillor Ioan Thomas; Mrs Emma Davies.

### **1 APPOINTMENT OF A CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

(Members of staff were not present during this item)

The Chair referred to a letter he had received from the Chief Executive noting his wish to retire at the end of January 2017. He thanked members for approving the arrangements to appoint a successor by delegating the task to the Appointments Panel on behalf of the Executive Committee.

### **2 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

- 2.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, and extended a special welcome to those who were attending for the first time, namely Councillor Dai Jones (Powys), Mr Richard Bellinger (Chief Librarian of Bridgend County Borough Council), and Mr Robat Arwyn (Chair of the Welsh-language Publishing Grants Panel).
- 2.2 Condolences were expressed with the following on their recent losses:  
Mr T. Hywel James (Chief Librarian of Gwynedd) on losing his son, Rhidian, in January;  
Mr Ion Thomas (Chair of the Friends of the Books Council) on losing his father in February;  
the family of the late Professor Emeritus Gwyn Thomas – a former member of the Books Council's Publishing Grants Panel who died in mid-April.
- 2.3 Councillor Stuart Egan was congratulated on being elected Mayor of the Vale of Glamorgan 2016/17.
- 2.4 Angharad Wyn Sinclair (née Tomos) (Reading Promotion Schemes Manager) was congratulated on her recent marriage, and best wishes were conveyed to Elin Prysor Williams (North Wales Trade Representative) on her marriage the following day, 2 July.
- 2.5 Delwyn Gwalchmai (Assistant in the Distribution Centre) was congratulated on the recent birth of his first grandchild, and Dr Lucy Thomas (Head of the Publishing Grants Department) was congratulated on becoming an aunt for the first time.

- 2.6 Thanks were conveyed to Angharad and Mererid, the daughters of the late Roger and Catrin Puw Davies, for the gift in memory of their parents as a contribution towards the Book Day lecture, delivered this year by Meilyr Rowlands.
- 2.7 Members were reminded of the need to declare an interest and to retire from the meeting at the appropriate times.

### 3 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Minutes of the previous meeting, held on 4 December 2015, were confirmed.

### 4 MATTERS ARISING

#### 4.1 The Council's Financial Settlement

The Chief Executive presented a report on the discussions held following the initial announcement made by the Welsh Government of a cut in Council's budget. He noted that the Council was very grateful to the politicians for listening to the arguments and for amending the original decision. He paid special thanks to Ken Skates and Edwina Hart for their support.

As part of the discussion process with the publishers, it was reported that meetings had been held with the publishers in receipt of grants; although those meetings had been difficult, under the circumstances the discussions had been both mature and constructive. The Council also appreciated the support given by authors, and the fact that several of them had arranged a meeting in Cardiff to present their case to the politicians. It was very heartening to see the English- and Welsh-language contingents working together and speaking with one voice.

It was noted that there is a continuing need to emphasize the Council's work and its role in supporting the Welsh Government's work programme.

Rona Aldrich congratulated the Council on their work in securing a favourable settlement, whilst at the same time realising that the organisation would be faced with a further period of financial hardship.

#### 4.2 Schemes @LlyfrDaFabBooks

The Chief Executive noted that the @LlyfrDaFabBooks scheme had replaced the Book Club which was terminated last year, and it reminded everyone of the Council's commitment to the field of children's books. The scheme had already made a good start, with several author tours arranged with schools and libraries. To date, author tours had been held with Meleri Wyn James, Dan Anthony and Angharad Tomos. Arrangements are also in hand for tours with the successful Tir na n-Og authors. It was noted that booksellers had reacted favourably to these visits.

There had been an opportunity to attract some sponsorship from education and library services in certain areas, and it is intended to follow this up in other areas in order to support the scheme.

#### 4.3 Swansea Reading City Scheme

Members were reminded that the Council had developed an application to the Lottery Fund in support of an ambitious scheme to promote reading in the Swansea area, in partnership with the local authority and the University. Although the application reached the second stage of the process, it was not successful on this occasion. It was noted that there had been a positive response to the scheme's aims and to the process of consulting with readers, but that there was insufficient consultation with non-readers.

The partners were naturally disappointed, but they were invited to discuss the application with Lottery officers in a meeting to be held in mid-July.

#### 4.4 Celebrations to note the Centenary of Roald Dahl

The Chief Executive noted that the Council was always eager to take advantage of special celebrations to promote the work of authors, and that this had already been done successfully recently with regard to Dylan Thomas, T. Llew Jones and Alun Lewis.

In the wake of the celebrations to note the centenary of the birth of Roald Dahl, the Council had once again taken the opportunity to promote the field of children's books by arranging a road show as part of the Book Day activities. The Council had also been invited by Ken Skates to arrange a story-writing competition for the schools of Wales.

#### 4.5 Meeting of the Society of Chief Librarians

Recently, Helena O'Sullivan and the Chief Executive accepted an invitation to attend the quarterly meeting of the Society of Chief Librarians, and they took the opportunity to discuss the Council's work and the collaboration with public libraries. There was a discussion on the challenges facing us, with the emphasis on selecting, ordering and promoting books.

A constructive discussion ensued, and it was agreed to air some issues in follow-up meetings. It has already been arranged for Helena and Elwyn to meet Richard Bellinger, Bridgend, to discuss the book ordering systems.

Richard Bellinger noted that the meeting had been very useful from the point of view of the librarians, and that he was looking forward to the next meeting.

## 5 THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

### 5.1 Operational Plan 2016/17

A copy of the Operational Plan was presented for the attention of members, noting that it had been approved by Ken Skates and Edwina Hart before the Assembly elections.

### 5.2 Financial Award Letter

The Chief Executive was pleased to report that the financial award letter had been received from the Welsh Government, and had been signed and returned.

### 5.3 Meeting with the Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers

It was explained that the titles of Welsh Government ministers had changed following the election. The Council remains within the Economic Development portfolio, under Ken Skates, and officers are also eager to meet with Kirsty Williams who is in charge of Education. An invitation had already been sent to Alun Davies, who has responsibility for the Welsh language, to visit the Council.

### 5.4 Review of the Field of Publishing and Literature

It was reported that the Welsh Government had commissioned a review into the field of publishing and literature, chaired by Professor Medwin Hughes. The Council had an opportunity to present written evidence for the attention of members, and M. Wynn Thomas, Lucy Thomas and the Chief Executive gave a further presentation during their visit to Castell Brychan. It is understood that the report will be presented to Ken Skates in September.

It was reported that the members of the Review Panel had discussed the on-line news service that is funded by the Council, and they had agreed that it would be appropriate for the Council to proceed immediately to advertise the franchise for the period 2017–2020.

### 5.5 Department of Education, Welsh Government

The Chief Executive noted that the Council had recently held two very useful meetings with the Welsh Government's Department of Education. In the first meeting there was an

opportunity to meet with the Commissioning Department to discuss their publication programme and present teachers' responses to the materials. The second meeting was held with officers of the Curriculum unit, where the opportunities for the publishing industry to prepare educational resources for the new curriculum were discussed.

## 6 GRANTS AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

### 6.1 Grants 2016/17

The Chief Executive presented a paper noting the grants that had been received in respect of the 2016/17 financial year, together with details of the capital grant received last year. It was noted that the capital grant had been received following Edwina Hart's visit to the Distribution Centre, and that the work was nearing completion.

### 6.2 Financial Position 2015/16 and 2016/17

The Chief Executive reported that the Finance Department was working on the 2015/16 accounts after closing the books at the end of the financial year. It was also noted that the Council was keeping a close eye on this year's expenditure; he thanked the various departments for their cooperation and said that the estimates for the forthcoming financial year were being prepared.

Councillor Chris Bithell thanked the Chief Executive for the report, noting that organisations throughout Wales realised that a challenging period lay ahead, and that it was appropriate for the Council to prepare estimates on this basis.

## 7 REPORTS ON DEPARTMENTAL ACTIVITY

### 7.1 Sales and Marketing

Helena O'Sullivan, the Council's Head of Sales and Marketing, reported that the sales of books through the Distribution Department had fallen by 8% during the financial year, and that the Council was naturally paying attention to analysing the sales figures.

What became clear was that sales within the field of textbooks/factual books for children had decreased by 33.52% (£148,561) – with a number of these books being sponsored directly by the Welsh Government's Education Department. (Without this fall in sales of educational books, the reduction in the Centre's sales would be 3.5%.) It was very pleasing to note that the sales for the first quarter of the year had increased by 10.97%.

Since the last meeting, the Department had been very busy over the Christmas period, and in that time the Book of the Month scheme had raised some interesting points. For the second year running, Waterstones started the year by selecting a Welsh-language book as their Book of the Month, namely *Fy Nghariad Cyntaf* (Cariad Pur). In June, Alys Conran's new novel, *Pigeon* – together with *Pijin*, Sian Northey's adaptation of the same book – were selected as Book of the Month in both languages. In June, Waterstones selected the same book in Welsh and English for the scheme – *Enwau Tafarnau Cymru / Welsh Pub Names*.

Cwlwm y Cyhoeddwyr held a very successful festival at Galeri, Caernarfon in April, and the Council worked in close cooperation with them to arrange for Siop Palas Print to sell books at the event.

It was reported that the Council had worked with Siop Lyfrau Lewis at the Urdd Eisteddfod in Flint as well as attending the Hay Festival.

The Sales Conferences were held on 21/22 June and 14 publishers were welcomed.

## 7.2 Distribution

Arwel Evans, Head of the Distribution Centre, reported that keeping a close eye on debtors remained a priority; he was extremely pleased that they had succeeded in keeping the sum overdue to 0.74% of the receipts for the year (compared with 0.97% last year). This was quite a feat, considering that the target was 2%, and he thanked all the booksellers for their cooperation.

He noted that 60,000 books had been sent out in December, representing 21,000 titles. Yodel, the distribution company, succeeded in distributing 98.94% of the 2,000 parcels sent in December within 24 hours of them leaving the Distribution Centre.

It was reported that the Hay Festival and the National Urdd Eisteddfod had been held over recent weeks; 4,000 books were distributed to the Hay Festival, and 8,000 books to the Urdd Eisteddfod. 58% of the books distributed to Hay were sold, as were 38% of the books distributed to the Urdd Eisteddfod.

Following the annual stocktake in January, it was noted that the percentage of changes was higher in 2015 as a stocktake had not been held the previous year because of the work involved with collecting books for the DfES scheme. This year, the percentage was back to its normal level of 4.38%.

It was reported that the work by OBR Construction on sealing the Distribution Centre's roof had now been completed, following receipt of additional capital grant funding from the Assembly Government.

## 7.3 Editorial / Design Services

Sion Ilar reported that the Design Department had worked on 100 titles during the year, and with the assistance of a small number of designers and illustrators it had been possible to offer a high standard of service to the publishers.

The Department had an opportunity to work on the National Eisteddfod prize-winning titles and the titles on the Shortlist for the Book of the Year. They had also been extremely busy with the Council's internal work, which included various catalogues and marketing leaflets.

It was reported that a meeting of the Design Panel had been held on 29 June 2016 with three new members present. One of them was Professor Jane Aaron (Chair), who was appointed following a long period of service given by D. Geraint Lewis. The other two new members to join the Panel were Angharad Morgan (Siop Inc, Aberystwyth) and Elinor Wigley (a teacher at Ysgol Penweddig, Aberystwyth). The work of the Department was warmly praised, and it was pleasing to see a whole year's output displayed together in one place.

Huw Meirion Edwards reported that the previous six months had been as busy as the same period last year, with the work being just as varied. Since January, the Editorial Department had dealt with 91 typescripts from 14 publishers. All the material for children and young adults had been edited internally, together with a large proportion of the books for adults. Over recent months, as the number of typescripts for the summer books increased, the Department has been grateful for the contribution made by a small team of external editors who continue to produce work of a high standard which is always completed on time.

So far this year, 127 reviews have been commissioned and edited for inclusion on the Gwales website, and the internal work has ranged from the Catalogue of Books for Children and Young Adults, published in the form of a CD-ROM, to publicity material to celebrate the centenary of Roald Dahl.

The number of novels this year is striking – amongst the titles are a new novel by Tony Bianchi, *Sol a Lara*; *Iddew* by Dyfed Edwards; Myfanwy Alexander's second novel, *Pwnc*

*Llosg*; Alun Cob's timely novel, *Mametz*, and Ifor ap Glyn's first novel, *Tra Bo Dau*, with the latter two titles recently reaching the bookshelves; about to be published also is Aled Islwyn's novel, *Plant y Dyfroedd*. Sian Northey produced two novels – *Rhyd-y-gro* and *Pijin*, an adaptation of Alys Conran's first novel, *Pigeon*, with the English and Welsh versions being published simultaneously by Parthian.

Amongst the new biographies are several literary memoirs: a volume by Idris Reynolds in memory of the popular poet Dic Jones; a biography of Eluned Phillips by Menna Elfyn; and Alan Llwyd's latest weighty tome on the work of Gwenallt. Each of these will see the light of day over the coming months.

It was reported that the volume to celebrate the Books Council's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary is well under way, with the initial editing work having been completed before Easter; to date, the typescript (65,000 words) has been translated by Rhidian Griffiths for both versions of the text in Welsh and English.

#### 7.4 Information Services

The Chief Executive reminded members that the Information Department is responsible for collating and distributing information about new books and books in the pipeline. He noted that 1,152 new books had arrived at the Distribution Centre last year, and that some 38,000 titles are now listed on the Gwales website.

He noted also that the Department was responsible for listing the e-books published; to date, 1,600 e-books in English and Welsh are available to the public through the Books Council.

## 8 **READING PROMOTION SCHEMES**

The Chief Executive referred to the Council's reading promotion schemes as the fourth strand – together with the core services, the Distribution Centre and the publication grants – and noted the importance of developing readers side by side with the work of developing the industry.

He explained that the Department of Education funds these projects (the Council's core funding comes from the Economic Development Department), and noted the importance of securing funding from various sources.

He noted that the schemes, which included the Book Day activities, the Stori Sydyn/Quick Reads titles, and the Summer Reading Challenge, had all been extremely successful over the years and had raised the Council's profile amongst readers and a number of different partners. It was noted that there is a prominent place for these schemes in the Strategic Plan.

It was noted that Angharad Sinclair would give a presentation on the schemes in the afternoon meeting.

## 9 **PRESENTATION OF MINUTES**

The minutes of the following Panels were presented and confirmed:

- 9.1 Chief Officers' Panel, 16 June 2016
- 9.2 Publishing Grants Panel (Welsh-language), 15/16 March 2016
- 9.3 Publishing Grants Panel (Welsh-language), 14/15 June 2016
- 9.4 Publishing Grants Panel (English-language), 8/9 February 2016
- 9.5 Children's Books and Reading Promotion Panel, 26 June 2016

**10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business.

**11 ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE HALF-YEARLY MEETING**

Members were thanked for their presence in the Executive Committee, and it was noted that the Half-yearly Meeting would follow at 2 pm.