

Writers' Guild of Great Britain

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Held on Friday 4 June 2015 from 10.00 a.m.
At the Bermondsey Square Hotel, Bermondsey Square, Tower bridge Road,
London, SE1 3UN

1. Quorum: the Chair of the Guild, Roger Williams, welcomed members to the Meeting and confirmed it was quorate with at least 28 full members present at the start of the Meeting.
2. Standing Orders Committee Report: Piers Beckley confirmed the Committee had met and agreed the agenda should go ahead as circulated.
3. Appointment of Tellers: Olivia Hetreed and Nick Yapp were appointed unanimously with no abstentions.
4. The minutes of the previous AGM were proposed for approval by John Wilsher and seconded by Gail Renard subject to the following amendments: Piers Beckley's name should be deleted from item two as he was not the Chair of the Standing Orders Committee; reference at the end of page 8 to Susanna Saary should be amended to read Susannah Saary.

The motion was approved 29 votes in favour with no votes against and no abstentions.

Piers Beckley requested that the minutes for the AGM be circulated to members for review within a couple of weeks of the meeting. The General Secretary said the minutes from the previous meeting were made available to members a full month prior to the meeting and that was ample time for review.

5. The Chair's Report

The Chair referred members to his report in the Guild's Annual Report and said there was not much he wanted to add but wanted to emphasize the success of the Guild over the previous year.

He said the Guild currently occupies the best offices it has had and thanked the staff for their work to re-establish the Guild's services after its move. RW said the Guild had negotiated good deals in television and theatre and said the BFI Lock Box Scheme, Digital Payments and changes to the management and administration of the Pension Scheme to reflect changes in the law had all contributed to improvements for writers.

Referring to other achievements he advised the Meeting that the Guild's archive would be held at Warwick University. The logo and website of the Guild had been updated and remarked on all the services and support provided to writers by just

2 full-time and three part-time members of staff and a great deal of volunteer help. He thanked the membership and staff for all that they have done.

The Chair expressed concerns that the work of the Guild in all likelihood will get harder given anticipated changes to PBS broadcasting in the UK and ongoing cuts to Arts' funding. The Chair confirmed the membership of the Guild stood at about 2200. Bernie Corbett, General Secretary, ("BC") explained this figure was made up of 1260 full members, 24 Affiliates, 806 Candidate members, 101 life members and 1 honorary member bringing the total to exactly 2192. The Chair noted the Treasure's comment that these figures were very reliable now the membership system was being administered in-house and thanked the staff for the extra work this must have created.

8. Treasurer's Report

Andy Walsh ("AW") referred members to his report at page 8 of the Guild's Annual Report and said he would return to the detail in connection with other agenda items. In response to a question from the floor regarding outside funding that had been lost. AW said the Foundation was expecting the reduction in income that has happened and as it is independent it is responsible for its own funding.

He considered the amount of subscriptions collected by the Guild would increase as a result of the membership system being brought in house.

In response to a question from the floor, AW explained the significant difference in amounts stated for legal representation. He said a number of lines of expense previously stated separately had been amalgamated.

The Meeting thanked AW for all his work and he in turn thanked everyone who had contributed.

A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report was proposed by Piers Beckley and seconded by Katharine Way and was carried unanimously 28 votes in favour with no vote against and no abstentions.

In response to a question from the floor the Chair said the Guild was very aware of the need to increase staff numbers if funding became available. AW recapped on how the Guild operates through its Committees, the Executive Committee, the Officers and the Craft Committees.

7. Adoption of Accounts

Motion to adopt the Accounts was proposed by David James and seconded by Wally K Daly and was carried unanimously with 35 votes in favour, no votes against and no abstentions.

8. Re-appointment of Auditors

Motion to reappoint Gillespie Inverarity & Co was proposed by Katharine Way and seconded by David James and was carried unanimously with 35 votes in favour with no votes against and no abstentions.

9. The Official business of the meeting was paused as RW welcomed Sioned Wiliam, BBC 4's Commissioning Editor for Comedy who addressed the meeting

The Chair reconvened the meeting and invited members to break for lunch after which the agenda was continued.

10. The General Secretary's Report.

BC referred the membership to his report in the Guild's Annual Report. He commented that the Guild had had a very successful year and wanted to look ahead at challenges he believed the Guild would face in coming years but added he believed the Guild was in a healthy position to face those challenges. He spoke about the various challenges facing the BBC: from charter renewal and possible changes to the license fee; reduction in drama budgets for BBC2 and 3; and reduction in drama budget for radio. He encouraged the membership to add its collective voice to warn against further cuts to the BBC.

He also referred to the disparity that exists between the pay received by writers in different craft areas. For example theatre writers generally benefit from better pay rates than radio writers despite the fact that radio writers access much wider audiences with their work.

BC thanked the officers, EC and Committee members who donated their time and efforts to support the Guild. He also thanked the staff for all of their hard work and the incredible job that they do for the Guild. He said he was keen to encourage people to take part in the work of the Guild and hoped the Guild would continue with its success in the coming year.

In response to a question from the floor the General Secretary gave more detail on the issues he believed face the BBC.

In response to a question about membership, BC said the rolling programme of recruitment activity had tailed off and he encouraged everyone to give some thought to how this can be reinvigorated.

The Meeting then discussed various issues and considerations relating to membership and what the Guild needs to do to sustain and increase membership numbers.

11. Free is Not an Option.

Bill Armstrong ("BA") recapped on the progress made by the Guild on this campaign and commented that it was a testament to what a small Union could do. He emphasised the importance of the membership recognising that what the Union achieves is directly down to what the membership does for itself. There is no "them" only "us".

He said the Guild had developed guidelines that would be published in the next few days that set out what it is reasonable to expect writers to do for free. The next step would be to get producers on side.

The guidelines include a “ten point” guide on how to ask for payment for work done. If the membership doesn’t do things for itself nothing will be done. The meeting returned to the earlier agenda item.

BA talked about the two page “right to pitch document” that the Guild had developed with the help of Robert Taylor.

BA thanked the staff and members who had helped with this work and said that MP’s had also shown interest.

The meeting discussed the issues. RW thanked BA for his presentation and the meeting gave a round of applause.

12. Annual Report.

The Chair suggested to save time that each Craft and Regional Committee should speak to its report and for each a proposer and seconder should be identified. A vote would be held at the end of each report taken by a show of hands rather than a count to establish if there is a majority in favour.

Books: The General Secretary advised that as a result of James Skivington moving to Ireland there was a vacancy for the Chair of the Books Committee. Piers Beckley proposed and Sue Teddern seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Children: Emma Reeves was unable to attend the meeting and no questions were tabled. Katharine Way proposed and Gail Renard seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Film: Olivia Hetreed added to her report with reference to a recent visit to the Edinburgh Film Festival. She said the Festival had been rated very highly as regards its inclusion and acknowledgement of writers.

OH raised the issue of the treatment of writers and the problems of bullying, isolation and humiliation. She suggested it should form the basis of a future Guild initiative.

The meeting discussed issues connected with bullying and humiliation of writers and also questions relating to film funding in Scotland.

Ming Ho proposed and David James seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Radio: Katharine Way had nothing to add to the report included in the Guild’s Annual Report. In response to a question from the floor on the monitoring of diversity in radio to mirror what had been done in television she said the Guild does review programme listings to identify writers’ gender. David James proposed and Sue Teddern seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Television: Katharine Way thanked BA for his work on Free is Not an Option and his work on Doctors writers' pay. Susannah Saary proposed and Katharine Way seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Theatre: Richard Pinner thanked Nick Wood for chairing the Committee. He encouraged nominations for the theatre awards. David Edgar said how impressed he was at the collegiate atmosphere Nick Wood had created. He commended the work done by the Committee and Guild members. David James proposed and Jan Woolf seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve of the report.

Video Games: David James proposed and Jamie Rhodes seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

East Midlands: Piers Beckley proposed and David James seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

London South East: There was a request from the floor for more online regional activity rather than only events. Katharine Way proposed and Susannah Saary seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

North West: Ming Ho proposed and David James seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Scotland: Jen Toksvig proposed and Sue Teddern seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

South East and Devon: Piers Beckley proposed and David James seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

South West & Wessex: Chris Jury extended his apologies that he has had to step down from the Committee. Jen Toksvig proposed and David James seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Wales: Ming Ho proposed and David James seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

West Midlands: Nick Yapp proposed and David Edgar seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the report.

Yorkshire and the North East: Gail Renard proposed and Jamie Rhodes seconded and there was a clear majority of votes to approve the Yorkshire and North East regional report.

13. Motions:

The meeting was reminded of the rules in the Guild's Rule Book relating to process for the consideration of "motions" at an AGM.

a) AW spoke to the proposal to increase the amount paid in each subscription band saying the Guild needed to raise more money to ensure it can continue to maintain its work and achievements in the future. The Chair opened the matter to the floor. It was further suggested from the floor that there should be an advantage given to members who pay their subscriptions all at once rather than monthly or quarterly. BC acknowledged this would be an attractive thing to do and there would be no need for a Guild rule change to enable that to happen.

It was noted that the best way to increase income is for the Guild to recruit more members. It was also noted that while the Guild would increase income by increasing its members this would also increase workload and factoring more support for staff would have to be borne in mind.

It was suggested from the floor that as the Guild had a large number of Twitter followers they could be encouraged to join the Guild perhaps on the same basis as the labour party has charged people a few pounds to vote in the upcoming leadership election. There was a suggestion from the floor that the website could be set up to allow people to make donations. It was also noted that people join the Union when they see it doing things and this should be borne in mind when the Guild discusses how it can raise income through increasing membership.

The Chair said as these points are being recorded in the minutes they can be put to the EC for consideration.

AW said it was expected that the increase in subscriptions would raise £6,000 extra each year.

The Meeting moved to vote on the amendment with 28 votes in favour, no votes against and no abstentions.

The Meeting then moved to vote on the motion with 27 votes in favour, one vote against and no abstentions and so the motion passed with at least a two-thirds majority.

b) AW said the proposed increase to the basic charge would need to be applied through all the bands. He said this would make the changes easier to administer and create consistency for all members.

The Meeting moved to vote on the motion with 32 votes in favour with no votes against and no abstentions.

c) Election of General Secretary

BC left the Meeting while this item was discussed.

Richard Pinner introduced the motion explaining it would bring the Guild in line with updates in the law. He noted there was a typo in the wording circulated. The amendment should read "entitled *to* continue in office". The Meeting discussed the ramifications of not agreeing the amendment and BC having to step down.

The Meeting moved to vote on the motion 31 votes in favour, no votes against and no abstentions.

BC rejoined the Meeting.

14. Results of elections and announcements of vacancies

BC said there were few vacancies this year because there had been a large change over in 2013 but these terms would end in 2016. This year, BC said, officers would hold tenure for one year. Two deputies, Tim Stimpson and Richard Pinner and Andy Walsh as Treasurer had been re-elected. In addition Manon Eames had been re-elected unopposed to Chair the Wales regional committee.

Grant Foxon had been elected unopposed to Chair of the N.W. (Manchester) Regional Committee.

Vacancies remain to chair the Books and Theatre and S.W. (Wessex) Committees.

These would be re-advertised in the next bulletin in the hope the positions could be filled in time for the next Executive Committee meeting in September.

RW then vacated the Chair in favour of Gail Renard who had been elected unopposed.

15. Election of Standing Orders Committee

Jamie Rhodes, Anthony Pickthall, Gary Thomas and John Wilsher all volunteered.

16. President's Closing Remarks

Olivia Hetreed ("OH") thanked everyone for coming and echoed BA's comments that the Guild is about "Us" not "Them". She asked and the Meeting applauded the Officers and Staff of the Guild for all their work to support the Guild.

OH remarked that the last Guild event she spoke at was the Awards ceremony that took place after the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris. OH referred to Barack Obama's response to the attack. Perhaps more powerful than his words were the pauses and OH was prompted to reflect on the power in words and in silence. She reminded the meeting that writers are the masters of words and that writers should use their talents to make a difference.

17. Any Other Business

- (i) Microphones were requested for the next meeting.
- (ii) It was requested that amendments to motions should be discussed before the motions themselves to avoid confusion.
- (iii) It was noted that members of the WGGB are able to join Writers' Guilds of America and obtain rebate on the initiation fee but the WGGB does not have an equivalent fee. It was asked if this could be considered to create a benefit for WGA who join the WGGB.
- (iv) There was a request to expand the remit of the Books Committee to include digital publishing too.

- (v) It was requested that the question of transmedia is addressed through the Guild's Committees to capture writing that covers various craft areas.
- (vi) Writers were encouraged to engage with disabled performers in developing their work.

The meeting ended at 5.30pm
