

Culture Committee CC 14-02 (p1)

Date : 3 July 2002

Time : 9.30 - 12.00pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly

WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

Background Notes for Members of the Culture Committee,

3 July 2002

Also relevant: Annual Report 2000/01

Corporate Plan 2002/03 – 2004/05

Website www.wbc.org.uk

1 ROLE OF THE WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL

.1 The Welsh Books Council is an independent, national body with charitable status, based in Aberystwyth. Founded in 1961, the Council was funded by local authorities (the only contributors in the early years) and the then Welsh Arts Council. The Arts Council's responsibility was gradually transferred to the Welsh Office from 1990 to 1996.

.2 The Books Council exists to support the publishing industry in Wales (including authors, publishers and booksellers) and to promote interest in books of Welsh interest and in reading generally. Although a number of bodies in the fields of education and the arts are concerned with aspects of publishing, the Books Council is the only body in

Wales concerned with the whole spectrum of publishing, from the author's manuscript to distribution and sales promotion. Much of the Council's efforts have been directed towards improving standards of book production and publication in Wales, in both Welsh and English.

.3 There are three main aspects to its work:

- services to the book trade – ranging from readers' reports and editing and designing manuscripts to providing a wholesale distribution service
- activities to promote reading and literacy – organised by the Council's Marketing and Children's Books Departments
- distribution of grants to publishers (the Publishing Grant) to help publish Welsh-language books, magazines and other related material for children and adults.

2 FUNDING

.1 Although the Books Council is a non-statutory body, it submits an annual Corporate Plan for the approval of the Assembly and is dependent on grant-aid to carry out its core functions. Until recently, this grant came from a number of sources: the Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh local authorities (on an individual basis) and the Welsh Language Board.

The complicated and uncertain nature of the funding was due, to a large extent, to the Council's success. As the Council grew and developed, its funding developed in a complicated and haphazard fashion and it became increasingly difficult to maintain the existing arrangements during recent years, and especially following local government reorganisation in 1996.

This problem was recognised by the Culture Committee and the minutes of the meeting of 24 January 2001 state that 'there was a consensus that the current system is overly bureaucratic and needed revision during the 2002/3 funding round'. The Task and Finish Group set up by the Minister to look into publishing (October – December 2001) came to the same conclusion and the Minister has since taken steps to rationalise and simplify the Council's funding routes. From April 2002 the main funding comes from the Welsh Assembly Government as follows:

2002/03	
Core funding	£859,000 + £42,000 (ACCAC)
The Publishing Grant	£873,000

The Council has also been particularly successful in recent years in attracting funds for additional projects. The total sum for 2002/03 is £213,256.

.2 Separately from its publicly-funded work, the Books Council has other activities which are self-funding on a commercial basis. The principal such activity is the operation of the Distribution Centre in Llanbadarn Fawr on the outskirts of Aberystwyth. The Centre supplies booksellers across Wales and further afield, offering a 24-hour delivery service to all outlets in England and Wales. The Centre covers its costs from the difference in the discount allowed by the publishers and the discount granted to booksellers (10% on the retail price in the case of consignment stock held on behalf of the main Welsh publishers).

.3 The Books Council's total operating costs for salaries, administration and activities (excluding the Publishing Grant) amount to almost £1.8 million. 41% of these costs are met from the Council's own resources (i.e. income raised by the Council's Departments including its wholesale Distribution Centre). A further 12% is raised in additional project funding from a number of sources. The remaining 47% is provided by the core-funders, the Welsh Assembly Government.

3 HOW THE COUNCIL IS GOVERNED

The Books Council is governed by its Council and Executive Committee. The Council has representatives from a wide cross-section of literary and cultural organisations together with all Welsh local authorities. (It is important to note that the new funding arrangements do not affect local authority representation on the Council's committees.) Much of the detailed work is undertaken by panels and sub-committees which report directly to the Executive Committee. No members of the Council or its sub-committees receive any remuneration other than expenses. Council meetings are open to the public.

The Council's Chairman is Dr Lionel Madden, former Librarian of the National Library of Wales. The Director is Gwerfyl Pierce Jones. The Books Council has a staff of 45.5 (FTEs), most of whom work in a number of specialist departments which provide services to the trade. The largest Department (14) is the self-funding Distribution Centre.

4 SOME RECENT KEY DEVELOPMENTS

.1 Task and Finish Group on Publishing

Members of the Culture Committee will be aware of the report of the Task and Finish Group on Publishing referred to above, and chaired by the Deputy Minister, Delyth Evans, at the request of the Minister, Jenny Randerson.

The Books Council was grateful to the Minister for deciding to give specific attention to publishing, and also to Delyth Evans for the thoroughness of the exercise and for succeeding in reaching a consensus on the way forward, both within the Group and among the sector generally.

As members are aware, the Minister has accepted the report and its recommendations and has announced an additional sum of £250,000 towards beginning the process of implementing the recommendations.

The Books Council is committed to leading efforts to implement the Group's recommendations during the coming year.

.2 Publishing in English

One of the points made in the report of the Task and Finish Group was 'that the Assembly should give attention in the future to matters associated with the publishing industry in its entirety, in English and Welsh.' It also referred to the 'overlapping between the role of the Arts Council and the work of the Books Council . . . [and] that the current sharing of responsibilities is a result of history'.

Shortly after the Group completed its work, the Arts Council produced a consultation paper: 'Funding Literature: A Structural Review'. This paper recommends transferring the Arts Council's main responsibilities for Literature to two organisations: the Welsh Books Council and the Academi, with the Books Council taking over the Arts Council's provisions for publishers.

If the recommendations of the above document were to be implemented, the Books Council would have responsibility for distributing grants for English-language publications as well as those in Welsh (note that the Books Council's services are already for books in both languages; the Publishing Grant, however, is restricted to Welsh-language publications). The implications of this paper are far-reaching: if the recommendations were to be accepted there would be an opportunity for the first time to develop the publishing industry in its entirety and in a strategic way.

.3 Research and Development

During 2001 the Books Council succeeded in attracting grants from the Assembly's Economic Policy Unit in order to prepare comprehensive reports on two key fields, with the aim of developing the book trade in Wales:

- Information Technology in the fields of marketing and distribution
- E-publishing.

The reports have been published and distributed widely, and two open meetings were

held where the reports were discussed. Once again, it was heartening to see a strong desire on the part of the sector to take advantage of new opportunities, and there was a consensus in support of the next steps to be taken. The Council's next Corporate Plan will include some of these elements.

.4 Promoting sales

Some of the latest developments are as follows:

- The Council has committed itself to cooperate with various sections of the trade in order to create a joint marketing strategy for the future.
- A Marketing Officer (Overseas) was appointed in April with the aim of promoting books from Wales in foreign countries.
- Nearer home, we continue to work closely with Literary Publishers Wales, a consortium of publishers, in order to try and develop the market for English literature from Wales.
- The *gwales.com* website continues to be developed. During the past year, reviews of over 600 books have been placed on the site. From now on, it will be possible for readers to include their comments on any book included on *gwales.com*. Another matter under consideration is the possibility of selling directly through *gwales.com* as well as through bookshops.
- Efforts continue to extend the number of sales outlets, e.g. supermarkets. Parallel with this, support is offered to small independent bookshops to extend their circle of customers.

.5 Promoting reading and literacy

Promoting reading and literacy are central to the Council's mission, and although the pressure is on more and more marketing in order to boost sales, the need for encouraging the habit of reading, in all sectors of society, cannot be overemphasised.

The Council was glad of the opportunity to coordinate the work of the Year of Reading in Wales 1998/99. Since then, project funding has been received in order to arrange an annual Book Day, and that work continues to go from strength to strength. This year, the Minister for Education and Life-long Learning announced that the grant for this activity will increase from £50,000 to £75,000 in order to increase the partnerships which contribute towards the activities and the success of the occasion. One example of such a partnership is last year's Reading Carnival for libraries, organised by LaunchPad – a Trust based in England – and it was heartening to see every library authority in Wales taking part.

Within the Council's core funding this year, a pilot scheme was arranged to encourage reading amongst young people, especially boys (*Llyfrau sy'n Taro Deg*) and a pilot scheme was arranged jointly with three library authorities to establish reading groups.

5 SUMMARY

Although the Books Council is one of a number of organisations which has specific responsibilities for books and publishing in Wales, the Books Council is the only body in Wales concerned with the whole spectrum of publishing and is the only national body in Wales committed to working alongside other agencies to promote reading and literacy in all sectors of society.

The Council's long-term vision can be summarised as follows:

- to help ensure a wide selection of books of the highest standards, in both English and Welsh, to meet the needs of all sectors of society in Wales in an ever-changing environment
- to actively promote reading and literacy so that all sectors of society and all ages become aware of the rewards of reading, in terms of improved skills for work and personal development, and also for pleasure
- to strengthen the infrastructure of publishing and bookselling in Wales so that small businesses (SMEs / MSMEs) may become larger dynamic enterprises
- to encourage and assist publishers and booksellers to utilise modern technology to market books effectively electronically, thus reaching a global audience which in turn will help strengthen Wales's image abroad
- to encourage and assist publishers to investigate new methods of publishing so that innovative developments complement traditional methods.

Events during the last year have given a real boost to the publishing sector and to the Books Council as an organisation, and we are very grateful to the Welsh Assembly Government for the commitment that they have shown to this important work. It is our privilege and responsibility to strive for continued improvements and developments and to work strenuously with our partners, in the public and private sectors, to create a vibrant and successful publishing industry in Wales, in both English and Welsh.

FACTS AND FIGURES

These are some statistics relating to activities in 2001/02.

- **SALES**

645,647 items were sold through the Welsh Books Council's Distribution Centre in 2001/02, amounting to £3,750,666 (gross). Although total sales represented a decrease of 10% on last year's figures, this was not unexpected as last year's total included the exceptionally high sales of the new interdenominational hymn book, *Caneuon Ffydd*. The foot and mouth crisis also affected the year's sales.

Sales through the Council's Distribution Centre have increased steadily over the past decade and the turnover has doubled since 1990. Titles are distributed to over 800 outlets on behalf of 350 publishers.

- **EDITORIAL SERVICES**

The Editorial Department dealt with 215 manuscripts on behalf of 22 publishers.

- **DESIGN SERVICES**

The Department provided design services for 122 titles from 13 publishers.

- **SERVICES TO SCHOOLS**

Sbondonics and Sbri-di-ri Book Clubs

26,857 titles were sold to 17,044 buyers through the two Welsh-language book clubs for Primary School children.

Schools Project

The Council's four Schools Officers visited a total of 914 schools and collected orders amounting to £400,645.

- **OUTREACH SCHEME**

Booksellers arranged 311 sales opportunities under the Outreach Scheme and £110,854 worth of books were sold.

- **DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLISHING GRANTS**

With a total grant of £623,704, the Books Council distributed publishing grants to 210 books and 9 magazines.