



Delyth Jewell MS  
Chair  
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee

10 May 2024

Dear Delyth Jewell,

I write on behalf of the Welsh Executive Council of the National Union of Journalists, which I chair.

We are writing to you to raise our concerns which have arisen from the recent Books Council of Wales (BCW) decision to stop funding to *Planet: the Welsh Internationalist* magazine and *New Welsh Review*.

We are aware that both *Planet* and *New Welsh Review* have written to you in detail on this matter.

In August 2023 the NUJ signed an open letter as part of the Save Welsh Magazines Open letter campaign alongside 173 signatories including the Society of Authors Wales, WalesPENCymru, Cymdeithas yr Iaith and the Association of Welsh Writing in English. This letter highlighted how desperate funding conditions for magazines and websites had become following successive cuts and more demanding and time-consuming targets, and the impact of this on working conditions.

Successive cuts and worsening grant levels and often more stringent funding conditions have become normalised, creating a precedent leading to a race to the bottom in working conditions for employees and low contributor fees. In the case of *Planet*, this had led to the halving of their BCW core grant from £93,892 in 2008 to £45,000 and low wages and even longer unpaid overtime hours for staff who were directors.

Subsequently at the end of last year, the BCW decided to no longer offer funding to *Planet* and the *New Welsh Review* as part of the results of the new 2024-2028 grant franchise for English-language magazines. The removal of the funding from the two magazines which happened to be most prominent in the campaign has deepened the extent to which magazine and website publishers feel demoralised and undermined.

We are also aware of a letter from the BCW dated 20 December 2023 which has raised further concerns including the comment that some of the magazines made the case that their business model was no longer sustainable even if the grant had been increased. Both *Planet* and *New Welsh Review* have raised the point that BCW's definition in the letter regarding 'sustainability' is vague and was not communicated to applicants during the application procedure.

The publications have also stated that it is not the case that "This [unsubstantiality] would have remained even if the grant had been increased." In the case of *Planet*, in the most recent grant applications, they broke down how the upper amount applied for of £75,000 would have been sustainable. In the case of both *Planet* and *New Welsh Review*, they believe they satisfied the 'gearing ratio' grant condition of 2:1 set out in the BCW's guidelines.

While we appreciate that the BCW received applications worth £400,000 for a grant pot of £180,000 and is itself under pressure from cuts, it was later revealed that the sum of £95,000 – less than both *Planet's* or the *New Welsh Review's* funding requests - had been committed by the BCW for a brand-new English-language literary magazine that has yet to be launched and which hadn't applied to the competitive tender in 2023.

As a consequence of the decisions and as the core funding from the BCW ceased from 1 April 2024, the February 2024 issue was the final *Planet* issue with the loss of 3 part-time jobs and livelihoods (1.8 FTE employees). *New Welsh Review* has also lost 3 part-time jobs as a result of needing to wind up the company.

A strong Wales – visible, accountable and diverse – needs a strong media and the Welsh magazine and periodical sector to continue fostering publications in both languages and building cultural connections and providing platforms for vital dialogue. A strong and diverse media can act as voice, conscience and consciousness and remains the most effective means by which the nation can converse and shape the future together.

We also remain concerned that in campaigning for fairer funding conditions for magazines – including in a very detailed and heartfelt editorial published in November 2022 - this contributed in any way to funding being removed and if this will lead to other funded publishers becoming fearful of speaking out openly in the public interest about funding conditions and ever more demanding targets.

In June 2022, the NUJ wrote to the then Deputy Minister for Arts and Sport to express our concern about the decision of the Books Council of Wales to award a grant of £100,000 per year over four years to Newsquest for the establishment of a new Welsh language news website. At the same time the funding of the existing Welsh language news website Golwg 360 was halved.

It is NUJ policy that while we support the Welsh Government funding new media outlets, we believe that such funding should be channeled via a Wales Media Institute incorporating Welsh industry representatives including the NUJ. This is set out in the report [Of and For Wales: towards a sustainable future for public interest journalism](#) published in July 2023.

The NUJ would be extremely happy to attend the forthcoming Committee session on 15 May 2024 to give evidence if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**Nick Powell**  
**Chair, Welsh Executive Council**  
**National Union of Journalists**