

AGM MINUTES

Minutes of the 34th Annual General Meeting of the Association for Heritage Interpretation held at 09.00 on 11 September 2009 at Birchwood House, Cardiff.

Committee members present: Aaron Lawton in the Chair, Carl Atkinson, Eliza Botham, James Carter, Susan Cross, Philip Haysom, Maureen La Frenais, Cathy Lewis and Jo Scott. Susannah Stevenson acted as minutes secretary.

The meeting was quorate.

Item 1 Welcome and apologies

Aaron Lawton extended a welcome to all. Apologies were received from Ruth Taylor, David Masters and Bob Jones.

Item 2 Minutes of the 2008 AGM

Minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2008 had been circulated. Steven Richards-Price proposed that the minutes for the 2008 AGM be accepted as a true record. Dave Pemberthy seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Item 3 Chair's report

Aaron Lawton presented his report which had been circulated. He highlighted a number of achievements and challenges for AHI over the preceding year.

Attention was drawn to the restructured committee and the success of the previous conference and events programme. He addressed the increased professionalism and effectiveness of AHI's communications through its journal, newsletter and website. Improvements in the effectiveness of AHI's advertising and marketing were also mentioned, along with the ongoing deliberations into the role of training and professional development for interpreters.

The changes in AHI's administration and the resulting increase in workload for the committee were highlighted. The recent decline in AHI membership was also addressed, along with the measures being taken to deal with reduced revenues due to the current economic climate.

A debt of gratitude was extended to AHI's past president, Laurel Sanford, who passed away this year. The chair concluded by giving wholehearted thanks for the work done by individual Committee Members and other volunteers.

Michael Glen proposed that the Chair's report for 2008-9 be accepted. Verity Walker seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Item 4 Treasurer's report and presentation of accounts

Philip Haysom presented his report and the accounts which had been circulated.

Expenditure in the preceding year had exceeded income due to planned investment in services along with reduced income in a number of areas. This brought AHI's cash reserves to below an optimal level, making it a priority for

the committee to prevent any further depletion and to gradually rebuild reserves through increasing income and reducing costs.

Philip Crome enquired about the differences in administration expenditure between the years 2008 and 2009. Aaron Lawton explained that the Vital Spark international conference had distorted the accounts and increased a variety of additional one-off costs. Michael Glen pointed out that the additional costs created by the Vital Spark conference had been reimbursed by its funders.

Philip Crome proposed that the Treasurer's report and accounts for 2008-9 be accepted. Andrew Jenkinson seconded the motion, which was passed unanimously.

Item 5 Other officers' reports

The other officers' reports had been circulated but presentation of these was subsumed within presentation of the Chair's report.

Item 6 Resolution to change subscription rates

Aaron Lawton recommended the proposed increases in subscription rates on the basis that it had been three years since the last increases, that they are in line with inflation and increased costs, and that the higher subscriptions represent good value for money bearing in mind the improved services provided.

Stephen Gillett enquired as to the impact of the increase on reserves. Philip Haysom explained that it could contribute around £2,500 per year.

Eliza Botham enquired as to how the AHI membership rates compared with those of other comparable organisations. Aaron Lawton explained that informal benchmarking had been carried out, but direct comparisons were difficult due to differing levels of provision and professional status, and that the committee considered the increases fair due to the time elapsed and improved services.

Andy Ford asked if the additional revenue was to be used to rebuild reserves or to re-invest in services. Philip Haysom explained that it was to be used for both – firstly to increase reserves and then for service improvements. Aaron Lawton added that no significant new investments would be made until reserves had been restored to around £15,000.

Verity Walker highlighted the financial pressures experienced by self-employed members compared to those from institutions, and the consequent risk of losing some self-employed members. Aaron Lawton pointed out that corporate rates had been raised more than individual rates to reflect the difference in sensitivity.

Jane James suggested that there might be more encouragement given for members to progress through the membership categories. Carl Atkinson explained that the committee was aware that the benefits of the various individual membership categories were not currently clear and that a review was ongoing within the committee to address this issue.

Carolyn Lloyd Brown drew attention to the complex fellowship application form which she thought could be made more accessible to facilitate members moving to this level. She also suggested it might be less academically focussed. Carl Atkinson emphasised the need to strive towards professional competency. Verity

Walker suggested the possibility of using peer comments and client references to generate balanced feedback. Carl Atkinson raised the issue of how AHI ought to be looking at the evidence provided by those applying for fellowship status and its relationship to accreditation. Aaron Lawton explained that membership categories and application forms were currently under review by the committee.

Alan Randall suggested that the committee look into facilitating good value professional indemnity insurance as a way to encourage self-employed people to join the Association. Aaron Lawton agreed that this was a good idea and a majority present indicated their support.

Philip Crome raised an issue separate to the membership fee increase. He suggested that guidance in relation to tendering, typical consultancy rates and contract values would be helpful for self-employed members. Aaron Lawton stated that the committee had discussed the possibility of creating a code of professional conduct and commissioning guidelines, also that a proposed online discussion forum would provide opportunities for the sharing experiences in relation to tendering. Alan Randall added that a code of conduct would be very helpful when bidding for contracts. A majority was in favour of establishing a code of conduct for interpreters.

Stephen Gillett proposed that membership subscriptions for 2010/11 should be increased as detailed in the AGM papers. Carolyn Lloyd Brown seconded the proposal which was passed unanimously.

Item 7 Resolution to elect Honorary Fellows

Aaron Lawton explained that Honorary Fellowship is the highest honour AHI can bestow on a member, it being a recognition not only of a distinguished record in interpretive practice, but also of a significant and sustained contribution to the profession.

Bob Jones headed the Forestry Commission's Design and Interpretative Services for over 25 years and was responsible for its unrivalled contribution to good and innovative practice in interpretation. He has been a staunch supporter and contributor of AHI and was recently awarded an MBE for his services to forestry.

Michael Glen has been providing high quality interpretive planning and creative writing services since 1985 as principal of a number of consultancy practices. Michael has been involved with AHI continuously since its earliest years and kept AHI's day-to-day affairs on track as its Administrator for more than eight years.

Andrew Jenkinson proposed that on the occasion of Bob Jones retiring from the Forestry Commission and Michael Glen stepping down as AHI administrator, that they be elected as Honorary Fellows in recognition of their services to heritage interpretation and to the Association for Heritage Interpretation. Alan Randall seconded the proposal which was passed unanimously.

Michael Glen expressed his heartfelt thanks to the AHI committee and members.

Item 8 Election of officers

Maureen La Frenais' nomination, which arrived after the AGM papers were printed, was accepted with no objections and members added this to their list of nominees. No election was necessary as nominations did not exceed vacancies.

Sarah Oswald proposed that the nine committee nominees be accepted. Bill Bevan seconded the proposal which was passed unanimously.

Elected officers were Carl Atkinson, James Carter, Susan Cross, Philip Haysom, Maureen La Frenais, Aaron Lawton, Cathy Lewis, Jo Scott and Ruth Taylor.

Item 9 Appointment of auditors

Carolyn Lloyd Brown proposed that Menzies LLP be reappointed as AHI's accountants for a further year and the Committee be allowed to determine their remuneration. Verity Walker seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.

Item 10 Closing remarks

Aaron Lawton asked for any further questions or comments from Committee or Members.

Alan Randall suggested coordination with GEM (Group for Education in Museums) with regard to conference dates as there was an overlap this year. Around six members of GEM were present at the meeting. Jo Scott explained that the AHI conference takes place in a very short window between the end of the school holidays and the beginning of the university term. This is to ensure the maximum number of delegates can attend and that the lowest cost can be achieved by using university accommodation – a strategy also employed by GEM. Verity Walker suggested the possibility of a joint conference and the committee agreed to consider this.

Aaron Lawton closed the meeting at 09.50 by thanking the Committee for their enthusiasm, commitment and hard work over the past year and the Members for their continued support.