

Northumberland Federation of WIs
Minutes of the Annual Council Meeting – 2 October 2021
Royal Grammar School 10:00



1. Welcome

1.1 Mrs Read warmly welcomed members of the Board of Trustees, Advisers, delegates, and observers to the meeting, how great it was to be back and happy to see so many members in the familiar surroundings of the RGS.

2. Moment of Reflection

2.1 As this was the first Annual Council Meeting since the arrival of the pandemic, Mrs Read invited everyone to take a time of reflection.

3. Jerusalem

4. Safety Announcement

4.1 Mrs Read provided information of the Safety Procedures at the RGS.

5. Apologies

5.1 Apologies were received from Mrs P Marks, Mrs J Wylie, Mrs D Sowerby, Mrs M Goodchild, Miss Hilary Robson, Miss J Dickson, Mrs A Dixon and Bygate, Hexham Town, Rothbury, Cornhill, Hepple WIs. Mrs Read thanked all who had sent nice messages of support and well wishes.

6. Introduction of members of the Board, WI Advisers and Staff

6.1 Mrs Read introduced the Board of Trustee members, WI Advisers, and staff.

7. The Objects of the WI

7.1 Mrs Read reminded members of the Objects of the Women's Institute.

8. Adoption of the Standing Order of Council

8.1 Mrs Read proposed the adoption of the Standing Orders of Council, seconded by Mrs Cunningham (Southridge WI).

9. Minutes of the ACM held April 2019

9.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

10. Appointment of Tellers

10.1 It was agreed that Mrs Wynne (Dinnington Village WI) and Mrs Harden-Vane (Adviser/Cullercoats WI) would act as tellers.

11. Proposed change of date of the ACM

11.1 Mrs Read reminded everyone of the three-month extension of the annual membership and National brought in a flexibility policy enabling WIs to decide for themselves what they want to charge for the WI portion of the subscription. WIs can charge the full amount of the WI portion of the subscription, reduce their portion of the subscription or waive the WI portion of the subscription entirely. Due to National changing the end of year from December to March Mrs Read proposed to mirror this and to extend this financial year to the end of March 2022 and to move the Annual Council to the Autumn. This was carried with a vote of 54 in favour.

12. Presentation of the Financial Statement

12.1 Mrs Birch (Federation Treasurer) read an item from LIVErNEWS (Liver Patient Support Newsletter) on the First Signs of Civilisation in a Culture.

12.2 All WIs were sent a copy of the Financial Statement prepared by the accountants Stephenson Coates in April 2021. Mrs Birch advised the Federation's finances had remained feasible over the past 18 months up to 31 December 2020. However, to cover various expenses, it was agreed to realise some investments. Mrs Birch thanked all WIs for their generosity in sending donations to the Federation even during these difficult times for members. These donations helped enormously.

12.3 Mrs Birch proposed that the Financial Statement be accepted, seconded by Mrs J Dover (Chollerton WI).

13. Appointment of Auditors for the coming year

13.1 Mrs Read proposed that Stephenson Coates be appointed as accountants for the coming year. Seconded by Mrs E Robson (Greenhead WI).

14. Introduction to the Federation Committees

14.1 Mrs Read advised that each Committee would be giving their reports:

Craft Committee – Mrs K Coleman

Mrs Coleman began by saying how proud she was to be back, tentatively safely together. She thanked all of her hard-working committee who share their great ideas which eventually become interesting events for members. But it is all helped along with a bit of cake! She named all of the Committee in turn and thanked them for their support and hard work. She particularly thanked three ladies who had decided to stand down and thanked: Elaine Wallace, Jackie Gaughan and Edna Moscrop for all their help advice and guidance.

Even during lockdown, the Committee have worked hard to keep things going which included a Mask for Marj competition and the two winning face masks were displayed in the foyer for members to see. Mrs Coleman outlined the planned events for the coming year if restrictions allowed. These included: paper cutting, food demonstrations with Mrs Malloy, marzipan fruits, flower workshops and at Christmas a festive craft day to create a Santa in a Box. She hoped to host two competition days in 2022 at Cresswell House, which will incorporate an Olympic subsection in June and later in the year one themed on Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in September. The Committee are also investigating a day trip to Gallashields to see the Great Tapestry of Scotland. However, during these unprecedented times members safety is key, and they will work hard to create conditions in which members would feel happy and safe to attend, for example, groups would be smaller and according to the guidelines at that time of course. Mrs Coleman thanked members for their support in the past and hoped this would continue in the future.

Leisure – Mrs B Kilkenny

Mrs Kilkenny was pleased to be back and to announce the new title – Leisure Committee and explained that it was felt that this more closely reflected the areas of the committee events offered to members. However sporting activities would not disappear but would be more leisurely in nature.

She was delighted to announce that the much-delayed final of the Darts and Domino competition from April 2020 had taken place and congratulated Hepple who won the darts and Stocksfield the domino competitions.

Mrs Kilkenny gave insight into the planned events for the coming year which included: Tai Chi sessions, Christmas Pudding Beetle Drive. For 2022 there will be a Darts and Domino Competition, Whist Drive, a Domino Drive at Stannington, a Summer Quiz and a Golf Challenge at Matfen if negotiations go well. Also, the committee were investigation venues for strolls, croquet and gardening events and possibly a trip to the new RHS Salford. She hoped members would find something interesting to participate in and if anyone had any suggestions for something different to contact her. She concluded by thanking members for the continuing support and the Leisure Committee for *"hanging on in there"*

Public Affairs – Mrs P Douglas

Mrs Douglas began by saying how lovely it was to see everyone once again after such unprecedented times and after lockdown it seemed that her brain and memory had gone. She thanked all of the members of her committed committee and advised of two new members Mrs K Wynne and Mrs D Walton. She expressed her sincere thanks and support to Mrs J Arthur who had decided to step down.

She was delighted that the Angels of the North event which occurred just before lockdown had been a big success but was disappointed that it meant that the opportunity to visit the Mary Quant Exhibition was missed. She looked forward to offering some interesting future events which included: A Murderous Newcastle Tour, To Bin or Not to Bin about waste management, International Day – Spain to include Flamenco Dancing and possibly a trip to Dundee or the Bowes Museum and the Lindisfarne Gospels when they return to the North East. Also, for 2022 for HM's Platinum Jubilee whip of trees had been ordered to participate in the Treebilee and create a green canopy. Any WIs interested in a whip to contact Cresswell House.

Mrs Douglas thanked her amazing committee and hoped that members would find the offerings interesting and that the committee would have their continued support.

Combined Arts – Mrs M Bengtson

Mrs Bengtson explained that she was wearing two hats as she was making a report for Combined Arts and Membership Support. She gave thanks to her small but perfectly formed Committee, especially Mrs Stobbo for her wonderful contribution who had stepped down and welcomed Mrs Glover to the ranks. She outlined the future events the Committee were currently planning which were: a fashion show, visit to an art gallery / exhibition, swing dancing but was really looking forward to the return of the popular events Music Rocks with John Arnop. Also planned were four new “Show Stopper” events involving delicious food which were a Vicar of Dibley tea, a Dinner Lady Lunch, an Ab Fab event, and a Jubilee tea.

Mrs Bengtson concluded that anyone interested in joining the committee to contact her and hoped to see members coming along to their events.

Membership Support – Mrs M Bengtson

As Mrs Marks was unable to attend, Mrs Bengtson relayed her message. She urged members to continue to stay safe and was amazed how many ladies had learned technology and started meeting on Zoom. Treasurer’s workshops were planned for Spring 2022 and the new WI Handbook was available to download on My WI or a hard copy is available from Cresswell House for £5 per copy. There were still some Yearbooks available if any needed spares. She urged WI Presidents to keep in touch with her members especially any new members.

Mrs McLean took over to provide an insight on what lockdown had been like for the Advisers during the pandemic. Despite not being able to visit WIs it had been very busy and certainly a time of *highs and lows*. The *lows* being that members could not meet and some WIs sadly took the decision to suspend due to ageing membership and lack of members re-joining in 2021 and frustration on not receiving information or support from National as staff were all working from home. However, despite that there had been many *highs*. Some WIs had increased their numbers and there had been many enquiries from women interested in joining WIs in their area. WIs have met in parks and gardens, had virtual tea parties, provided afternoon teas in bags, sent out newsletters, delivered plants, sent out sunflower seeds for members to grow and made numerous telephone calls to keep in touch, including embracing technology and learning to use Zoom! This also included National who held the first ever online National Annual Meeting.

Mrs McLean congratulated and thanked members for working through the past difficult months in true WI style with encouraging words and smiles. The highs have certainly outweighed the lows.

15. The Impact of Food in Lockdown

15.1 Mrs Malloy began by acknowledging that Covid had affected many aspects of our lives and one, that basic human need for food has had good and bad issues. In Lockdown there were empty supermarket shelves and we struggled to find ingredients, but at least one good thing was many people started to cook and bake. However, the downside was the closures of restaurants and coffee shops, places for socialising and eating. Alongside this was the concern many felt about the safety of food, however the Food Standards Agency had stated that the possibility of Covid transmission by food is very low. She provided a reminder of the WIs guidance on the provision of food at WI meetings or other events which is if food is being served at least one member is required to hold the Level 2 Food Safety Certificate. Therefore the Federation will be arranging a one day training course early 2022 but they are also available online or run by the Local Authority.

15.2 She reminded all of the Federation advice when selling baked goods to include a label with the complete list of ingredients and that includes jams, chutneys and other preserves. She concluded with a quote from Nigel Slater: *“British food is a celebration of comfort eating. Our traditional savoury recipes are all about warmth and sustenance, our puddings a roll call of sweet jollity, our cakes are deep and cosy. We appear to be a nation in need of a big, warm hug.”*

16. Running your own WI premises in Lockdown

16.1 Mrs Lamb, the President of Ulgham WI, one of the lucky ones to still own their own hall. However, she explained that it could be a double edged sword. It was great to have the flexibility but can be a financial burden. During the pandemic the hall had to be kept clean, many different cleaning products were purchased for the Cleaner and hall users and sanitiser and masks for both entrances. Also a separate space with equipment was kept should anyone become unwell whilst in the hall and Covid was suspected.

16.2 However as soon as lockdown commenced the hall was closed for use. According to the insurance policy the water supply had to be turned off and regular checks to the interior and exterior were conducted on a weekly basis. Despite no income the hall had to be maintained and all the bills paid. Fortunately there

were Government grants available which were a life saver. Mrs Lamb concluded that her members value having their own hall, flexibility, own storage which included all the memorabilia from the 97 years as Ulgham WI.

17. MCS and its importance

17.1 Mrs Woodsford explained that Membership Communication System (MCS) is a secure online database that holds every WI member and is used at all levels of the organisation. It was important that every WI have a representative to ensure the data relating to their members always remains up to date. This is important so that all members have access to all the benefits of the membership to which they are entitled. The data that is stored is in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

18. A New Board Member's Perspective

18.1 Mrs Walton, a member of Jesmond WI explained her understanding on how the WI works had developed over the past six years, seeing how the jigsaw fitted together between national, regional federations, board sub-groups and WI groups and local WIs. She thought what a wonderful group of ladies she had seen and met – what a powerhouse. She explained that although she felt a little trepidation when attending her first meeting of the Board of Trustees she advised that she was welcomed with warmth and understanding. Her view of the meeting was that it was full of business, coupled with laughter, some reminiscences and seriousness as the agenda unfolded. She admired the Trustees who had such passion for life, the WI and all it stands for on the ideals of fellowship, truth, tolerance and justice. The Federation with 2,700 members celebrated its centenary in 2018. Its past Presidents and members are a tribute to where it is presently. She reiterated the vision and values of the WI and she hoped that members can make the WI what they want it to be and be active members together and help shape the organisation for generations of women to come and be very proud too.

19. ACWW

19.1 Mrs Read explained that due to Covid it was not possible to hold any events to raise funds for the Water Project however, she was delighted to announce that £5161.04 had been donated to ACWW. She hoped that fundraising would commence again soon and had lots of ideas which will be highlighted in the Newsletter and on the website and Facebook page.

20. Chairman's Remarks

20.1 Mrs Read stated that during the pandemic it has made many organisations re-evaluate what they do, how they work and interact with others and the WI was no different. As Yazz and The Plastic Population sang in the 80's.. *The Only Way is Up* or, if a D Ream fan the *Things Can Only Get Better!*

20.2 Like WIs, Mrs Read had attended many meetings and had to get the grips of technology. She had been amazed how Northumberland's WIs had kept their members going with Zoom meetings, newsletters, goody bags and thought it had been a magnificent effort. She encouraged everyone to keep up the momentum to take the WI forward. It had been a golden opportunity to rethink, refresh and reinvigorate. Many WIs had done things slightly differently because of lockdown and now embrace new ideas and ways of working.

20.3 Mrs Read explained that the decision had been made not to furlough Mrs Gash. In the beginning of lockdown, she worked from home, making visits to Cresswell House for post but was soon back in the office when restrictions allowed, although the office was not open to members. The Officers continued to meet to ensure the Federation was kept running smoothly and it was because of this, events had begun again so quickly.

20.4 Routine maintenance had been carried during lockdown which included a full electrical check. It was hoped to replace all the light fittings with eco-friendly LED ones in the building as soon as possible. She concluded by thanking members for maintaining their faith and trust in the WI and hoped all were reinvigorated and ready to face the future full of enthusiasm, energy and *Strive to Thrive*. If that was true, then Northumberland would certainly thrive for many years to come.

21. Birthdays

21.1 The Birthday Certificates from National were presented to:

2020 75 years – Prudhoe
 90 years – Hedgeley
 100 years – Ponteland and Wark

2021 100 years – Broomhill, Cornhill, Kirkheaton, Netherton, Warden in Hexham, Whalton

21.2 Other WI Birthdays included:

5 years – Amble, Dinnington Village, Hexham Town, Newton & Bywell
15 years – Hartford Bridge, Whey Aye
30 years – Haltwhistle
35 years – Garden Village
50 years – Berwick
55 years – Darras Hall
65 years – Old Hartley
90 years – Cramlington, Humshaugh, Rochester
95 years – Dilston, Stannington

22. Lesley Smith as Her Royal Highness Mary Queen of Scots

22.1 Lesley Smith regaled everyone with her expert knowledge and dazzling costume performing as Mary Queen of Scots.

23. Thanks to Lesley

23.1 Lesley was eloquently thanked by Mrs Coleman.

24. Raffle and 100 Club Draw

24.1 The Raffle was drawn and the winners of the 100 Club were:

1 st	26	Sally Wade	Ulgham WI
2 nd	59	Margaret Brown	Widdrigton WI
3 rd	208	Beryl Newton	Stocksfield WI

25. The Vote of Thanks by Chairman

25.1 Mrs Read began by thanking Mrs Gash the Federation Secretary for all her hard work during lockdown and putting together her first Annual Council and also the staff of the RGS especially Jill Graham and Steve who ensured the day ran smoothly. She thanked the Board and was especially grateful to the Officers: Mrs Birch, Mrs Coleman and Mrs Kilkenny for their support and friendship. She thought the Advisers had done a fabulous job, keeping in touch with WIs and helping them with problems including sadly those WIs who had suspended.

26. The Vote of Thanks to Chairman

26.1 Mrs Kilkenny thanked Mrs Read for guiding the Federation through a difficult time keeping everyone's spirits high. It was *Life but not as we know it...* but she met the challenges head on. Keeping in touch with WIs, speaking to many WIs and members on the telephone, getting to grips with Zoom, keeping up to date with the many changes in the Government Guidelines and information from National. She never wavered in the belief that things would return to normal and keeping up moral. The Federation never closed, and she kept in touch with the Officers and Nancy in the office. Mrs Kilkenny gave a small thank you *to the man behind the Chair* Dave Read, for supporting Marj and the whole WI during this unprecedented time. When Mrs Read took up office in April 2019, she didn't know what lay ahead, faced many issues and Mrs Kilkenny was in no doubt that things will go from strength to strength.

26.2 It was hoped that many members will join her at the Christmas Celebration at Newcastle Cathedral as well as other events that are planned to take place at Cresswell House. We will "*Strive to Thrive*" and onward and upward!

27. The National Anthem

27.1 Mrs Read thanked everyone for coming and the meeting concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.