

REPORT of the 2023 FEDERATION ANNUAL MEETING
Held at Trinity Park, Ipswich on Tuesday 7th March 2023

Chairman's Welcome – Celia Davies welcomed everyone and Jerusalem was sung.

Apologies had been received from some of the WIs not present and some of our invited guests.

We were then welcomed to Ipswich by the Mayor, Councillor John Cook.

The business of adopting the Federation Standing Orders and the 2022 Annual Reports were then followed by the presentation and adoption of 2022 Accounts.

Federation Treasurer, Vivien Hartill presented the accounts for the year ended 31st October 2022. WIs and therefore delegates have received an abridged version. Should any member wish to see the full accounts they are available at Orford Street.

I am sure most of you were not expecting to see me here presenting the accounts again as I retired as federation Treasurer in May 2021. Unfortunately my successor Bev Pilborough had to relinquish the post last September and I stepped back into the breach. We thank Bev for her work during her time in post.

In 2021-22 Suffolk East Federation made a deficit on ordinary activities of £18,893. The annual revaluation of investments has resulted in a unrealized loss this year of £10,973 and thus there is an overall deficit of £29,866. Both overall income and to a greater extent expenditure have risen significantly during the last year although not to pre-pandemic levels. In the last financial year new gates were purchased as fixed assets, however, repairs to the chimney of nearly £2,000 are included in ongoing expenses and therefore are part of the deficit.

I reported in 2020 that I was expecting a deficit on ordinary activities for the next few years although not to the extent of last financial year. Over the last three years we have lost a number of WIs and membership is still down although a few of our WIs are now experiencing a welcome growth with a shot at the NFWI prize for recruitment.

The Trustees have set a reserves policy of holding around one year's ordinary expenditure in general funds to cover a sudden loss of income and to meet any other unforeseen circumstances so that a large one off expenditure would not compromise the financial wellbeing of the Federation. We now know just how important this is. As the Federation is no longer going to be running holidays the £30,000 restricted holiday fund has been transferred back to general fund. The general Federation running cost pre-pandemic was around £80,700, this year it is £80,500. Even with a significant deficit this year we have sufficient reserves but all three levels of the WI organization are experiencing financial difficulties and the current cost of living crisis is pushing up prices beyond our control. I am predicting a further deficit for the current year.

Despite this we continue to make no charge to WIs for SEFWI News, Membership Advisory training, WI insurance and pooling of fares at present. If however a WI considers themselves in financial difficulties, the federation may be able to help, so contact the office.

The sub-committees have again worked hard during the year to organize events for you our members. These are all costed on breakeven numbers. We know there is still some reluctance to attend events and we did have to cancel rather more than we would like, but others were very popular. Please try to support those on offer this year as participation of members is vital for the Federation to remain viable. We were pleased to see so many entries for the SEFWI Showcase last summer which ran along with the Creative Stitch graduate show. They have had a few difficult years as well but the signs are now optimistic and the work as stunning as ever. SEFWI raised £16,288 overall on our events, courses and workshops.

Every little helps so if you can please support the 200 club and the bulb scheme. May I also remind you of the gift aid scheme. NFWI are very keen for federations to reclaim gift aid on their share of the subscription and then send the appropriate records for them to do the same. We are receiving copies of WI claims that operate the scheme. WIs cannot make gift aid claims if they charge for visitors, are small or most of their members do not pay any tax. But even if your WI does not claim, individual members who are eligible (ie pay tax) and are willing, can complete a form for federation and national.

During the financial year the Federation's financial internal controls have been reviewed against charity commission guidelines and the Trustees have also considered other major risks to which the Federation could be exposed and have taken the necessary steps to mitigate any such risk

I wish to thank my fellow trustees and advisors and the SEFWI staff for all their support, help and guidance. Our accounts clerk Daphne, retired at the end of the year but I am pleased to say that we have appointed a new one, Katie West.

The adoption of the Suffolk East Federation accounts for the year ended 31st October 2022 was seconded by Walberswick WI and carried.

I am also grateful for the support of our accountants who have changed their name but not personnel. Knights Lowe Limited trading as Ballams in Ipswich are willing to continue to act so I move their re-appointment as Independent Examiners for the current financial year. This was seconded by Worlingworth & Tannington WI and carried.

Vivien was thanked by the chairman.

Chairman's Address. Celia Davies thanked everyone for being here. It has been not only been a pleasure but an honour and privilege to have held the office of Chairman of the Suffolk East Federation of Women's Institutes for the past three and a half years.

In recent weeks I have taken the time to look back and remember some of the milestones along the way. In April of the Centenary Year, 2019 our chairman Erika Wilkin became ill and retired in October of that year. I was then duly elected and we as a federation continued to celebrate the Centenary as planned, concluding here at this very venue with a most entertaining Concert which was a wonderful mix of readings from members and songs from the centenary choir, led by Yula Andrews.

We held the Annual Meeting in March 2020 here at Trinity Park, it was an interesting meeting, and the speaker of the day was Danny Crates. Amongst other topics we looked at different ways of communication, the use of social media, emails, and others methods, very forward thinking!! The rumour of a possible Pandemic had been circulating for some weeks; but it still came as a shock when only days later Covid 19 with rules and regulations hit us with a bang. Lockdown followed, Zoom and Teams Meeting came into their own, as did many other forms of communication. It only feels as though it was a short time ago and yet it can seem to be in the distant past. There are occasions when I find myself guilty of forgetting the empty streets, schools and churches. When Leisure Centres were places one went for the very important "jab" not to play badminton or join the yoga group.

The WIs, SEFWI and National worked to keep members up to date with the changing rules and regulations, encouraging any permissible forms of contact. For many, Zoom became a very valuable asset, it enabled us to hold committee meetings, keeping the channels of communication open. Newsletters and Book Clubs flourished. Walking became the best form of exercise, with the anticipation of perhaps meeting someone along the way and the opportunity for a real face to face chat even if we had to keep two meters apart. It was odd to see anyone without a mask.

In May 2021, by using new ways of communication, with thanks to the Federation Secretary, the Board of Trustees for the planning and Andrew Nunn for technical assistance, we held a very different Annual Meeting, with the board in one room and everyone else on Zoom. We then started on a very uncertain path to some sort of normality with a few hiccups on the way. It remained uncomfortable for many, which showed in the slow return of members to events, however the Annual Meeting 2022 was held here and it was a very positive event and an absolute joy to meet once again. Since then thankfully we have moved on gaining momentum as we go.

However, that is in the past, we have risen to the challenges, at times with difficulty and it is time to move forward with some important new ways of communicating learnt through the difficult "Covid Years". Zoom, emails, WI Newsletters remain relevant and will help financially with keeping some of the costs such as travel and room hire down.

We have a lot to look forward to with new ideas mixed with tradition, but we need you, WI members, to help. There are many ways to do this: You could become a committee member of your own WI, join a SEFWI subcommittee to help in organising the events you know WI members enjoy. Learn more about being a SEFWI trustee or a WI Adviser, just phone or email the office to find out more. WI life is much easier and much more fun when shared with fellow members. We will find out later who will be the Chairman taking the Federation forward and I look forward to reading SEFWI News and discovering the exciting plans they have in store.

I would like to thank you, for supporting SEFWI events and for all the help you have given during my term of office.

Laura Lopez – Active Lives joined us on stage and explained that Active Lives is there to help us keep active and healthy as we mature. She then led us in a seated dance routine to "Ain't no mountain high enough" Much fun was had by all.

Patsy Johnson-Cisse of Brave Futures gave us an emotionally charged account of the work of Brave Futures with children who had suffered child sex abuse. The hard hitting message was delivered with astonishing statistics and a little humour with knitted body parts that help children explain what has happened to them.

Michael Strand – Suffolk Wildlife Trust Michael told of the latest acquisition of Martlesham Wilds – an area leading down to Martlesham Creek that has been bought and is being re-wilded from farmland to nature reserve. Although the land has already been bought, the grant used to obtain it has to be paid back, so massive fundraising is taking place now. Any WI can contact SWT to arrange a guided walk in the area.

Michelle Attrill gave us a little insight into British Sign Language. She talked of the differences similar to accents in the spoken word and taught us all to sign a phrase. Michelle is available to WIs as a speaker through the Year book.

WI Day – Lynda Leesmith encouraged everyone to register their WI or group for WI Day on 16th September. More information was available over lunch break.

Sub-committee Chairmen presented the various events and outings in the calendar and Kate Peacher gave some tips on how to write reports for the SEFWI News for which she is editor.

Deb Johnson – Lighthouse Women's Aid joined our meeting to thank all WIs for the support given to the refuge. She updated us on the changes and how store vouchers are more valuable than second hand clothes. For a woman to have the choice of what to buy gives her self esteem, something she may never have had. Non perishable food items are much in demand as we go through the latest financial crisis.

Tai Pan Combat Self Defence. Steve Von Leichtenberg gave us a demonstration on what we could do to protect ourselves should we find ourselves under attack using this age related martial art.

200 + Club draw £100 196 W Dawson of Hollesley WI.

Federation Secretary, Gill Denny announced the Board of Trustees for the coming year.

Vivien Hartill, Nacton
Wendy Heath, Earl Soham
Tina Hurley, East Bergholt
Lynda Leesmith, Marsh Maidens
Kate Peacher, Mendham & Metfield
Jenny Pearson, Earl Soham
Alice Robertson, Henley
Anita Scruby, Mendlesham
Jenny Wightman, East Bergholt

Presentation of Awards

Those WIs who have significant birthdays in 2023 were given their certificates as was newly qualified WI Adviser, Cindy Lawes. Retiring committee members were given a small floral gift.

Chairman's Award

It is an honour as Chairman of SEFWI to annually choose one of our members to receive the recognition that they deserve for the unique contribution that they bring to the WI. This year's recipient has pulled our archives together to create our Centenary Book. It is Rose Graham of Bacton & District WI.

Guest Speaker – Laura Wright. Laura grew up with three older brothers and attended Brandeston Hall School before moving to Framlingham College on a scholarship. She dispelled the theory that everyone who attends public school is wealthy. The family struggled to keep her there, but she excelled in both sports and music, being crowned BBC Young Chorister of the Year at 14 years old. Laura recorded as part of the singing group All Angels before working solo, writing and performing anthems and singing at major sporting events. Her beautiful voiced filled the hall and everyone was enchanted by this young woman who sets aside time to help stroke patients using music and singing.

Laura was thanked by **Kate Peacher**

Wendy Heath thanked all who made today's meeting such an enjoyable one and our Chairman was thanked by **Anita Scruby**, not only for a great meeting today, but for her leadership, friendship and support for the board, committees and federation throughout her chairmanship..

Gill Denny Federation Secretary announced the officers for the coming year: Chairman, Tina Hurley; Vice Chairmen, Lynda Leesmith, Kate Peacher and Anita Scruby; Treasurer, Vivien Hartill.

After the raffle, all were wished a safe journey home and we closed with the National Anthem.