



Minutes for the Guild of Food Writers' AGM 2025

7.00 pm on Wednesday, 15 October 2025 at Immediate Media, London, W6 7BT and online via Zoom

Notice of the AGM was circulated by email, on the Guild's newsletter and via the Facebook forum. 58 members attended: 32 in-person and 26 online.

Brief notes of the President's, Chair's and Treasurer's reports follow. Full transcripts can be found at the bottom of this document.

2024 AGM minutes

President Ruth Watson requested approval of the Minutes of the 2024 AGM, circulated before the meeting. Approval was granted .

Presidents Welcome

Ruth Watson, president, welcomed members to the meeting. She thanked committee members for their vital work during the year with special thanks to Jan Fullwood for her work on the Awards, also Angela Zaher and Silvana Franco for their work on Sponsorship along with Joy Skipper and Harry Hook.

Members were urged to respond to periodic invitations in the Guild Newsletter and Facebook Forum to fill committee vacancies or to self-nominate if they had particular skills.

Special thanks were also extended to chair Sam Goldsmith and vice-chair Julie Friend for their work throughout the year.

Treasurer's report and presentation of accounts

Julie Friend reported a small operating loss of £3,091 at the end of 2024, mainly due to the £18,000 cost of updating and securing the website, However reserves of £60,000 and total net assets of £47,600 ensured website costs and legal fees relating to the Guild becoming a Company Limited by Guarantee were met.

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Combining Zoom with In-person events helped control costs while providing a wide range of activities.

Income from membership was £46,000, which combined with sponsorship won by the hard work of the sponsorship committee, meant the realistic budget set for 2025 was achievable.

Julie requested approval of the accounts, circulated prior to the meeting, which was granted.

As a footnote Julie appealed for all members to pass details of potential sponsors to the committee

The Chair's report

Sam Goldsmith reported a busy year with 17 varied events attended by 437 members. Special thanks were given to Guild Administrator Kim Furnell, finance administrators Jo and Karen at Association Management & Services, events team Julie Friend, Adele Conn and Angela Zaher who also oversees the Futures Fund with Ruth Watson, and the committee.

Additionally Sam thanked the Diversity and Awards judging teams and looked forward to introducing a WhatsApp community.

Guild membership had increased from 564 to 574, including re-joiners. A pay and work survey was planned for 2025.

Sam also thanked leaving committee members Kathy Slack, Jacob Smith, Judy Bastyra, Sam Wilson, Dina Maki and Mallika Basu; and welcomed new committee members Janette Marshall (secretary) and Olayemi Adelekan (newsletter).

He noted it has been his third year as Chair and he will be retiring by the next AGM.

Resolutions

No resolutions were proposed.

Any other business (AOB)

Jane Suthering asked for an explanation of the new judging method for the Awards. She felt it was not practicable. Jan Fullwood responded that it had gone well overall, and the 2025 judges had found it achievable. The current system was being kept in place for 2026 and would be reviewed after the Awards completed. A detailed explanation of the process will go out to the membership.

The AGM concluded after c.20 minutes with Sam Goldsmith thanking everyone for their attendance.

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President, Treasurer and Chair's reports follow:

Ruth Watson – President

Good evening

I'd like to welcome all those here in person as well as those joining us online.

Thank you all for taking the time to participate in the Annual General Meeting of our Guild. It is a very important occasion — one at which you will be brought up to date with the Guild's actions and successes throughout the year. It also gives you an opportunity to ask questions of the Chair.

Our Special Officers are vital to our work and we truly appreciate all their time and effort. I would also like to thank our tireless committee for all the unpaid work they also do on our behalf. Each position is vital but I'd like to mention a few people in particular — namely, Jan Fullwood for her truly sterling work on the Awards, Angela Zaher who runs our Mentorship scheme so assiduously, Silvana Franco who leads the Sponsorship team with such professionalism, and Joy Skipper who ensures we enjoy a feast of discounts. And those enjoying some fabulous treats in the room tonight would, I know, like to give a shout out to Harry Hook who has brought together such a fabulous cornucopia.

Occasionally, a position becomes vacant and you will see a request in the Newsletter or on the Facebook Forum for someone to fill it. But please don't wait to be asked. If you know you have some spare time and relevant skills please email Kim, our administrator. It would help enormously to have a pool of people on stand-by.

Living a long way apart, I don't see a lot of our Vice-Chair but I commend her Instagram account to all. She accomplishes an amazing variety of work and dynamic interaction. It's a real inspiration (not least her egg biriyani and crazily scrumptious sandwiches!)

As a company limited by guarantee, this year the Guild at last attained structured stability. For that, and all our successes — such as the Awards — we must thank our Chair, Sam Goldsmith, and our tireless vice-chair, Julie Friend. Both are a godsend.

Julie Friend – Vice-chair and Treasurer

Good evening everybody. This is the financial report for the Guild of Food Writers, year ending December 2024.

At the end of '24 we were showing a small operating loss of £3,091. This loss was due to an anticipated, but still extraordinary expense of over £18,000 for updating our website. This work was originally planned for 2023 but was delayed.

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The site was no longer secure, and it is our responsibility to keep the data of our members safe. We took the opportunity to streamline somewhat and make the whole thing smarter and easier to navigate. There are still a few tweaks we would like to make, but the foundations are now there for us to be able to do so.

We encourage you to check your profiles regularly and to ensure that these are up to date, including the key words of your specialities, helping others find you when searching.

Thankfully we had built up some reserves over the past few years so whilst this was a large expenditure, we were prepared to cover it and still retained a healthy bank balance of over £60,000 and a total net assets of £47,600 (after outstanding bills were to be paid).

We also incurred some legal fees related to the transition to a Company Limited by Guarantee which will show part in 2024 and the remainder this year.

We have to recognise the hard work of our awards sponsorship team, some in the room with us tonight, who did exceptionally well in raising funds last year (and more so this) bringing in over £38,000 in sponsorship (I shall refer back to sponsorship at the end of this report). A profit through the awards went a good way to help buffer the website outlay.

By continuing to mix in-person events with those on Zoom, we controlled expenses in this area, and also by charging a nominal fee for a few of these, we ensured that we could provide a wide mix of interesting talks and educational activities, whilst not being out of pocket in this area.

Membership brought in over £46,000 of income and continues to grow at a healthy rate, always with a particular influx after our Summer awards.

Those fees support our daily work, which as you may or may not know is carried out by a committee of unpaid volunteers with just one paid employee. No mean feat.

We have been realistic with the budget for 2025, keeping it at around break even which we hope to achieve.

Not part of this report but an important note on finances, I refer back to awards sponsorship. The bottom line is that if we want to put on the professional, quality style of awards that we have done over the last few years, we really need sponsors, which in today's uncertain financial environment, are getting harder and harder to find.

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We would ask that if you are associated with, promote, work for or endorse, any food or drink business who you feel may fit with our principles and who could benefit from sponsoring one of our awards, then please pass those details and contact names on to anybody on the committee so we may pursue those leads further. Thank you for your continued support.

Sam Goldsmith – Chair

Hello and Welcome to the 2025 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers. As per usual, it's been a busy year for the Guild with a range of events, an improved website, updated constitution and, of course, another successful Awards.

It's been my third year as Chair and I will now be entering my fourth and final year! I'm very grateful for the support of our fantastic committee, special officers and our administrator, Kim, as well as our finance administrators Jo & Karen at Association Management & Services. We are incredibly lucky to have such a hard-working and dedicated committee, particularly special because every member is a volunteer balancing their lives as well as their commitments to the Guild.

Before my overview of some key activities, I would just like to reiterate my thanks to all of the committee and special officers as well as our President Ruth Watson & Vice President Chetna Makan who are also finishing their first year in office. Both of whom have brought energy, passion and professionalism to their role. There's not enough time to outline how each and every one of them contribute to the Guild but I can assure you that they ALL work incredibly hard and I couldn't do my job without each and every one of them.

This year we've so far run 17 events which have been attended by 437 members. I'm sure you will agree that the Guild hosts a fantastic mix of professional workshops as well as trips, socials and opportunities for members to expand their knowledge. Last year we attempted our first hybrid AGM, which wasn't without complications but hopefully this year we have managed to make it work a little better! A huge thank you to Julie Friend and the events team Adele Conn and Angela Zaher for their dedication to the events programme.

Our other programmes such as the Mentorship Scheme, impeccably overseen by Angela Zaher and Futures Fund, managed passionately by Ruth Watson have also continued to flourish and support members. A reminder that our discounts scheme continues to grow – no mean feat. Joy Skipper has been working very hard to ensure membership have such great benefits. Our social media continues to grow, under the watchful eye of Anisha Mistry, Claire Ruston and Sam Wilson who continued to bring life to the platforms. We've further future proofed the website thanks to Heather Brown.

We are steadily increasing the number of members. Currently the Guild consists of 574 members. This is up from 564 this time last year. We had 57 members who did not renew their membership from 2024.

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It's heartening to see how many re-joining members we have had in recent months. A big thank you to Kathy Slack for overseeing joining members and Urvashi Roe who is stepping into this position. It's also important to note that we are seeing a strong number of diverse members joining the Guild and this is in large part due to the great work that Mallika and the Diversity team – Aaron, Priya and Dina - have been doing. Mallika will be leaving the committee this year, she's done an amazing job and Priya Mani will be stepping in to that role.

We've only just recovered from our amazing Awards ceremony which was a huge success thanks to the many committee members involved but a particular thanks to Julie Friend who oversaw the reception which was incredible. Also, to Jan Fullwood and all the judging team Coralie Dorman, Gilli Cliff, Anne Harnan, Laoise Casey, Anne Katz Kennedy to ensuring a smooth and rigorous procedure.

Now, I could speak all evening about the great number of things that have happened this year but I know we have others to hear from and questions to answer! Looking ahead I'd like to introduce a WhatsApp community which will allow announcements to be posted and keeps us modern. Julie and I will also be looking at the Events schedule and how we can keep it fresh and up to date. Ren Behan will be unveiling a new survey around pay and working conditions and finally we will be looking at membership tiers and how we can ensure we can remain competitive and relevant in today's age.

A welcome to new committee members: Janette Marshall (committee) and Olayemi Adelekan (newsletter).

Thank you to leaving committee members: Kathy Slack, Jacob Smith, Judy Bastyra, Sam Wilson, Dina Maki and Mallika Basu

My final words are to you, our vibrant community. Firstly, to say thank you for your support and friendship over this past year and lastly a thank you for your contribution and commitment not only to the Guild but to our profession.