



Minutes for the Guild of Food Writers' AGM 2026

6.30 pm on Wednesday, 10 June 2026 online via Zoom

Notice of the AGM was circulated by email, on the Guild's newsletter and via the Facebook forum. 57 members attended with 7 apologies.

### **2025 AGM minutes**

Chair Samuel Goldsmith requested approval of the Minutes of the 2025 AGM, circulated before the meeting. Approval was granted.

#### **President's Welcome: Ruth Watson**

Good evening

Thank you very much for taking the time to attend the Guild of Food Writers' Annual General Meeting. The tone might seem a bit corporate but it's very important because it's here that any big changes are notified to the membership, and here that you can voice any concerns or pose any questions to the Chair.

As ever, I'd like to thank our committee and the Special Officers who keep everything going, and who do so voluntarily. All are invaluable but I would especially like to give credit to Jan Fullwood, Julie Friend, Silvano Franco, and their teams, who did such sterling work on the judging process, sponsorship and the Awards ceremony itself. The whole event was a great success and it was palpable how much everyone enjoyed the evening.

In addition, I would like to highlight the terrific work Angela Zaher does on our Mentorship scheme, Urvashi Roe on membership applications, as well as Aaron Vallance and Priya Mani's input on encouraging the Guild not only to appear but actually be as diverse as possible.

As I've said before, the committee often has vacancies, but even if there are none currently, we'd love you to make yourself known to our terrific administrator, Kim Furnell. She is the conduit between the membership and the committee and is always there to help, guide and pass on your comments.

This year sees the departure of our dear Chair, Sam Goldsmith. He has always had the Guild's aims and purpose at the heart of his chairmanship, and demonstrated how

caring an organisation can be. In the last two years he has had a very tough time himself but he has soldiered on and remained resolute. However much he has enjoyed the role I am sure he will also be handing over his responsibilities with a degree of relief. Thank you, Sam, for everything you have done.

Times have been hard for everyone recently, and probably won't be any easier in the near future. It makes the Guild, its purpose and its membership even more important. As our patron, Delia Smith, is often wont to say, "None of us is as smart as all of us"

### **Treasurer's Report: Julie Friend**

Good evening, everybody. This is a brief financial report for the Guild of Food Writers, year ending December 2025. At the end of '25 we are delighted to say that we showed an operating profit of £13, 919 as opposed to a small loss the year before. This meant we could restore dwindling funds and feel safe in the fact that we have the resources to support and protect our members and be prepared for any unexpected expenses that may arise.

Profit came mostly from our awards through generous sponsorship and careful budgeting for the event itself. We particularly thank the sponsorship team for their hard work.

Membership fees brought in just over £43,500 and continues to grow at a healthy rate with a particular influx of interest after our awards party.

As most of you are aware much of our work, is carried out by volunteers with just administration and finances being paid for. We realise, that as we grow, we may have to expand that team and introduce further paid expertise, particularly to ensure that we do not fall behind with technology.

Looking at 2026 we have already seen that sponsorship was less this year, unsurprisingly in today's financial climate, and we will make a small loss on the awards party. We are looking at how we can resolve this issue with an enhanced more defined sponsorship package at the very least. Once again, we encourage any of you with food related corporate leads to share your contacts with us.

In other expenses a very necessary new laptop has already been acquired this year for Kim Furnell, our administrator, but this came in at just under £700.

Our 2026 budget has been set at a realistic small profit of around £2,000 and we are currently on target for this outcome.

### **Chair's Report: Samuel Goldsmith**

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the 2026 Annual General Meeting of the Guild of Food Writers. Things are a little different this time around — It has only been

six months since our last AGM — but even in that shorter window the Guild has packed in a full programme of events and, of course, another fantastic Awards.

This marks my fourth year as Chair, and — as you know — my last. Tomorrow, there will be a new Chair! Serving in this role has been a genuine privilege, and I owe a great deal to the people around me: our brilliant committee, our special officers, our administrator Kim, and our finance administrators Jo and Karen at Association Management Services. What makes this committee remarkable is that every single member is a volunteer, giving their time to the Guild while juggling everything else life throws at them. We are very lucky to have them.

Before I run through some highlights, I want to say a particular thank you to all of the committee and special officers, and to our President Ruth Watson and Vice President Chetna Makan, who have now completed their second year in office. They continue to bring energy and passion to everything they do. I won't attempt to list every individual contribution — we'd be here until midnight — but please believe me when I say they ALL work tremendously hard, and this job simply wouldn't have been possible without them.

Since our last AGM we've delivered 10 events, drawing over 100 members. From professional workshops to trips and socials, the programme offers something for everyone — chances to learn, to connect and occasionally just to eat well in good company. My sincere thanks to Julie Friend and the events team — Adele Conn, Angela Zaher and Marie Cheong-Thong — for everything they put into it. Elsewhere, our programmes keep going from strength to strength. Angela Zaher continues to run the Mentorship Scheme superbly, while Ruth Watson's stewardship of the Futures Fund supports members at every stage of their careers. Joy Skipper has kept the discounts scheme expanding, our social media is thriving in the hands of Harry Hook, Claire Ruston, Nic McDonald and Sofia Gallo, and Heather Brown has kept the website in excellent shape and we will miss her when she steps down from being a special officer this year. Ren Behan has been taking care of all professional matters — I know she has been a great help to many of you — and her survey on pay and working conditions will be published soon.

Our community continues to grow steadily. Membership currently stands at 574, with a further 29 waiting to pay, and the number of members re-joining in recent months has been particularly encouraging. Thank you to Urvashi Roe, who has overseen joining members brilliantly in her first year in the role, and to Priya Mani and the Diversity team — Aaron Valance and Anisha Mistry — whose work continues to bring a strong and diverse range of new members into the Guild.

We're still catching our breath after another wonderful Awards ceremony. Its success was down to many hands, but particular credit goes to Julie Friend for an incredible reception, and to Jan Fullwood and the judging team — Adrienne Katz Kennedy, Anne Harnan, Coralie Dorman, Gilli Cliff and Laoise Casey — for continuing our newly reformed judging process. And of course, the Awards simply couldn't happen without our sponsors: Silvana Franco has led an amazing team, including Harry

Hook and Jennifer John, all of whom have worked tirelessly. If you have ideas on that front, please do reach out to them. Thanks also to Janette Marshall, who faithfully minutes every word we ever utter, and to Yemi Adelekan for keeping our membership communications tip-top.

I could happily talk all evening about the past year, but there may be questions to answer. As this is my last AGM in the chair, looking ahead really means handing over. The process of electing my successor begins immediately after this meeting, with an announcement tomorrow. I step down knowing the Guild is in robust health — financially, structurally and, above all, as a community — and that it rests in the very capable hands of this committee.

My final words go to you, our members — and this year they carry a little extra weight. Chairing this Guild for the past four years has been one of the great privileges of my career. Thank you for your support and your friendship, for your patience as we've modernised, and above all for the commitment you show — not just to the Guild, but to our profession. It has been an honour.

## **Resolutions**

No resolutions were proposed.

## **Any other business (AOB)**

Margaret Ogunbanwo asked what the Guild could do for her as a new member. Sam Goldsmith advised her to keep eye out on newsletters... read the newsletters, see what events are coming up when we send out the emails for them. There will be an Autumn get-together, so if you'd like to meet members, that's a really good place to do that. There is also the Facebook Forum which is a really good place to join to meet people.

Chetna Makan continued that if you are keen to help, if there is a specific need for any event or any help, it's always mentioned in the newsletter. So reading the newsletter is the most important thing, everything is mentioned in there.

Judy Jackson said that I am a very elderly member, and for that reason I haven't attended any of the events, and I couldn't go to the party and things like that. But I just want to say that I've been on many committees in my life. This one is the most happy and quick AGM I have ever been to. And that idea of everybody being happy and getting on and doing things is very inspirational. So I just want to tell you that even from a distance, I'm very happy and proud to belong to the Guild.