



**The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland**

## **Autumn Council Meeting**

### **Mossley Mill**

**Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council**

**Saturday, 26th October 2024**

### **Federation Chairman's Report**

**Lady Anthony, honoured guests, Executive Members and fellow members**

This is my first Autumn Council Report since taking office.

It has been a busy 6 months since my appointment and I had to hit the ground running.

My first outing was two days after my election, to the Music Festival in Templepatrick. This was a very enjoyable and entertaining day. I was really impressed by the choirs and soloists. Well done everyone.

Next came the Balmoral Show. This was a busy but enjoyable week, meeting and talking to members and visitors to the Tea Room, selling ballot tickets and helping out at the other stalls. I admire and thank the members from all the Sub-Committees and volunteers who worked hard to make it a success.

Then there was the Quiz Final and the Golfer of the Year tournament. I also attended by Zoom the National Federation of WI's AGM which took place in the Royal Albert Hall. It was very interesting and I was particularly impressed by the number of new members that had joined over the past year, over 5,000.

Our Operations Manager Mary McManus handed in her resignation at the beginning of June. She had worked for us part-time but was offered a full-time job working for Living Wage, one of her many interests. We wish her well in her new position.

Our Treasurer, Sheelagh McRandal and I have had a busy time since the end of August with meetings with Investec who take care of our investments, our Insurance Broker and last week with our Auditors.

In September, I enjoyed dinner with Ballydownfine to celebrate their 30th Anniversary. After dinner we were entertained by a guitarist and had a great sing-song of all the old favourites.

Iveagh Area invited me to a lovely afternoon tea in Brownlow House, Lurgan. Over 100 ladies attended and we were entertained with a talk about the history of Brownlow House and a very interesting talk about candles from Gail Lynas of Buick House Candles, I would recommend her to your WIs. We were also entertained by a well-known comedian. It was great to meet and talk to a lot of the members. Congratulations to Margaret McKee for organising the smooth running and compèring a great event.

The Executive is back after the summer break and at our meeting in August we had a celebration lunch for Kathleen, our Finance Officer, who has been working for the Federation for 25 years. To mark the occasion, she was presented with a lovely silver bracelet and flowers.

As you are now all aware, our new website went live at the beginning of September. We are hearing very good reports about it from members. The Members Section gives you all the forms you need to make your returns, etc. Treasurers and Secretaries can fill in and forward returns direct to HQ or you can print them off and send them in. This should be your first port of call for information, resulting in less paper needing to be sent out to Institutes. Our Magazine Editor, Caroline is now taking charge of it. The site will be developed further as necessary.

The Executive recently decided to appoint a Public Relations Officer and Judith Wainwright, the Area representative for Quoile, has agreed to fill the post. She is supported by a small Committee who have already started work. A new leaflet has been designed which has a QR code giving links to our website, Facebook page, etc. It will soon be available to print off the website which will enable Institutes to print their own leaflets for advertising.

This year's City of Belfast Autumn Fair took place in Botanic Gardens in September. It was very successful, with 13 entries from Institutes and one Area entry in the WI Competitions. There were 9 entries for jam and chutney. We also won the Belfast City Council Show Rosette for Best Society Display. The public showed a great interest in our displays and we did a lot of talking about the WI and persuading people to join us. My congratulations to the Homecraft and Home and Garden Sub-Committees for all their hard work making the show a success.

The process of becoming a Limited Company has begun and hopefully will go smoothly and not take too long.

As I mentioned earlier, we had a successful Balmoral Show, however, concerns have been expressed about visitors not being able to find us. The Balmoral Sub-Committee met earlier than usual to discuss improving signage and attracting more customers. Unfortunately, we ran out of items for the bran tub last year. The Balmoral Sub-Committee is asking for an increase in your contribution to £10.00. Your Executive Member will be in touch to ask each of her Institutes for £10.00 for the bran tub. They would like to gather the money in early so that items can be bought and wrapped.

I am pleased to say that we have recruited a new Operations Manager named Zoe Hunter who will commence employment with us on 2nd December.

Last Saturday, I attended the Festival of the Spoken Word in Templepatrick. Again, the talent of the WI was on show. The 'Prepared Speech' class had 3 themes to choose from and I was amazed by how much the speeches were all different and all had a humorous element. The 'Humorous Verse' section was also very entertaining. I particularly liked the verses about the *Three Brothers*, *Ode to a Fart*, and *Matrimonial Matters!* My only disappointment was that there was not more support in the audience to enjoy the talent on show.

My thanks go to the Executive Committee, especially Sheelagh and the Sub-Committee Chairs who work hard to ensure that events are organised and run smoothly.

An organisation like ours cannot run without a great office staff and my thanks go to Kathleen and Caroline who keep the FWINI running and answer a myriad of questions from me, the Executive Members and the members.

I thank you all.

Finally, ladies, without you the members, there would be no Women's Institutes in Northern Ireland. However, the organisation is only as good as its members – and I would like to set all 126 Institutes a challenge to each get 5 new members this year. This would mean 630 new members. So, fellow members, we all need to get out there and talk to people, advertise and get the WI seen. I know that a lot of Institutes are proactive, and one Area recently had a recruitment drive in a local department store.

The WI is a fabulous organisation, we contribute to the community, learn lots of new things and especially form friendships that last for many years. So, let's get out there and promote this great organisation **the Women's Institute.**

Lady Anthony this concludes my report.

**Brenda Richardson**  
**Federation Chairman**