BBC English Regions Management Review 2014/15
Our aim is to provide a high quality, trusted and valued regional television and local radio service for all communities across England, while fully embracing the exciting new ways we have to build a relationship with local audiences in the digital era.

If you wish to find out more about the BBC’s year – including full financial statements and performance against other public commitment – then please visit: www.bbc.co.uk/annualreport
Controller’s introduction

“We believe it is a crucial part of our role to help audiences to understand important stories which are likely to affect them, their families and others in their neighbourhood.”

In village halls, cafes, school canteens and a host of other venues across England, audiences were able to see the white of the candidates’ eyes as they probed them face-to-face during the special, often highly charged, election auditorium debates we organised and broadcast in every corner of the country in the run up to the general election. In what was easily our biggest ever editorial project, our thirty nine local radio stations transmitted more than 170 debates between them, our twelve television regions produced one each in an extremely well watched late night slot on BBC One the week before polling day and our online and social media sites really seemed to touch the right spot with people and sparked a vast amount of reaction and spirited discussion.

These debates, which formed just part of the extensive contribution English Regions made to the BBC’s overall election coverage, not only served to demonstrate that we have an unfaltering determination to reflect and report key events happening on the doorsteps of people from as many different communities as possible, but also that we believe it is a crucial part of our role to help audiences to understand important stories which are likely to affect them, their families and others in their neighbourhood.

It is extremely pleasing that local and regional output continues to have such an enduring place in the lives of audiences. With just under half the adult population watching our early evening bulletins each week they remain the most viewed television news programme in the country. But we are not complacent and are working hard to continue to adapt to ensure we provide what people want from us now and in the future.

Technical advances are undoubtedly providing us with an opportunity to nurture an even closer and more personal bond with licence payers, but underpinning everything we do will be a determination to provide the very best service of high quality local news, important information and discussion served up online, on social media and on television and radio by trusted and valued presenters who bring something a little bit special to the lives of people living in different communities across England every day.

David Holdsworth
Controller, English Regions
BBC English Regions, which is part of the BBC News division, delivers a distinctive, high quality service of local and regional news, information and discussion, together with a range of other locally rooted programmes and content which reflect daily life in different communities through regional television, local radio, online and social media outlets.

One of the main features of all our services is the high level of interaction and participation by local audiences – something we are keen to continue and develop in the future.

We produce daily television news output across 12 English regions, along with weekly current affairs, politics and sports programmes. There are 39 local radio stations and 42 local websites. We aim to roll out Local Live streams – which have been providing frequently updated news, sport, weather and travel information online in about a dozen local areas for a while – to all parts of England by the end of 2016. All our teams across the country run successful social media sites which appeal to a much wider demographic than our core audience.
**Two minute summary**

**Television**
- 47.1% of the adult population watched at least 3 mins of BBC regional news in an average week.
- The most recent series of *Inside Out* (broadcast Jan-Mar 2015) had an average audience of 2.9 million adults.
- Our 6.30pm programmes are the most watched news programmes in the UK.
- 3.1 million adults watched our 10.25pm bulletin in an average week.

**Radio**
- BBC local radio is listened to by 6.7 million people in an average week.
- 2.3 million local radio listeners listened to no other BBC radio station.

**Online**
- There were 11.9 million average weekly unique UK browsers to English Regions online content.
- An average of 329,000 UK unique browsers interacted with the Local Live feeds each week, peaking as high as 581,000.

*Source: BARB/TRP, BBC England SD, adults*

*Source: RAJAR/TRP, BBC LR in England TSA, 12 month weight, Q1 2015*

*Source: Comscore DAx data for BBC News Online*
We place our audiences at the centre of everything we do and use technological advances to enable them to have a real part in the output across all our different platforms.

From uncovering and breaking significant local news stories of national relevance on a daily basis to producing high profile, feisty debates with politicians being held to account face-to-face by audiences; from hosting incredibly popular public events marking important anniversaries of the two World Wars to showcasing more extremely talented new and unsigned musicians, the range of output and content produced for – and very much amongst – communities across England on BBC local radio, regional television, online and social media outlets over the past twelve months has arguably never been greater or more diverse.

The Political Year

By any measure it has been one of the most eventful years in politics and BBC English Regions teams have been at the vanguard of reporting what the stories have meant for local audiences, while also contributing significantly to the BBC’s overall coverage. Our specialist local radio political reporters and our regional political editors and teams played a critical role in our general election coverage by using a heady blend of top notch editorial skills, local knowledge and connections, and a great deal of tenacity, to dig out original stories which consistently set the agenda on all our platforms and on social media, and frequently made headlines nationally too.

In conjunction with network colleagues, we appointed a Reality Check correspondent in the months leading up to polling day whose task was to sort fact from fiction and to bring clarity by analysing key claims, promises and commitments made by politicians on local and regional programmes. Our teams in the regions and at Westminster delivered extensive day-to-day coverage of the campaign across all our services, with the party leaders and other politicians taking part in numerous interviews with local presenters and reporters.

Regional Sunday Politics programmes on BBC One provided live and more in depth discussion of the main local talking points each week. And, as part of the biggest editorial project we have ever undertaken, we produced more than 170 local radio and 12 regional television special election debates which involved candidates being quizzed directly by audiences made up of voters from a wide range of backgrounds. We also produced material for our local radio African-Caribbean programmes and organised a special audience debate which focussed on election issues among Asian communities which was simulcast across BBC local radio stations and the BBC Asian Network. All our debate programmes prompted a vast amount of discussion and comment on our social media sites too.

One particularly lively encounter came in front of a gathering of informed sixth formers at a school in Hexham in Northumberland. Three hundred first-time voters saw the candidates clash over the future of the NHS, with the debate then broadcast on BBC Newcastle. Readers of the Manchester Evening News helped to decide the theme of one of the BBC Radio Manchester programmes with a journalist from the paper reporting the debate on social media as it happened. Another, organised by BBC Radio Leeds, was also broadcast live on a Bradford community radio station after the two stations entered an informal partnership.

Our online coverage of this year’s general election delivered a unique proposition to audiences. Alongside live blogs of our debates and a wide portfolio of other original election content we launched 533 streams from constituencies across the country which sprang into life on election night and captured the unfolding events minute-by-minute at a truly local level. Between 7-9am on the morning after the night before more than 30 million users were checking the results in their local area.
Service performance

Last year we organised and broadcast debates on BBC One in the areas where the high profile Clacton-on-Sea and the Rochester and Strood by-elections took place. However, the political year was not just about elections and there was extremely positive feedback to each of the programmes we broadcast in all regions on BBC One in November which explored the possible next steps for devolution in England following the referendum in Scotland. As part of this project we commissioned a poll across England which revealed that at the time four out of five people supported the idea of having more powers devolved to local areas.

Digital England
Our priority is to build on the success of our growing online audience of up to 14 million weekly unique browsers by maintaining our strength in original journalism and innovation. As a result of a review carried out this year of our strategy and structures, we will see our digital teams in the regions roughly doubling in size with the continuing roll out of Local Live. These streams already provide bespoke, frequently updated news, sport, travel and weather information in a dozen areas and our intention is for them to be available in at least half of the country by the end of 2015, with remaining areas being covered during 2016.

Following a successful pilot, in addition to carrying content generated by BBC Online, local radio and regional television journalists, Local Live streams will also carry links to the best stories from local newspapers across the country. New technology will be used to help to increase the appeal and shareability of posts by making it easier for teams to embed more audio and video. Tagging now underpins all our publishing and will drive the move towards greater personalisation of content.

Alongside technological advances we are also working hard to develop new expertise in our central team – particularly in the areas of digital video, data journalism, long form investigations, audience engagement and partnerships. At the core, remains our determination to create network standard journalism for local audiences which can reach the world through digital platforms.

Our coverage of the big stories has often been characterised by its thorough and informed approach to sensitive and difficult issues. Through working with radio and TV colleagues we have delivered many key stories online such as the Hillsborough inquests, which involved creating some carefully crafted interactive content. Our feature work has frequently been commended for its ability to bring events and stories to life through the small screens of computers, tablets and, of course, mobile phones. The tranche of content created around the Merseyside ‘Giants’ arts project, a major commemorative piece around the Hartlepool bombardment anniversary and a ‘digital first’ approach to the Clacton by-election showcased how unique our offering can be.

In social media, local BBC Facebook and Twitter accounts have seen significant growth in engagement and there is now much greater expertise within English Regions teams about how best to make the most of social media platforms. Innovative work aimed at serving younger audiences on new services such as Whatsapp has included dedicated output which covered Richard III’s re-burial.
Many of our regional television and local radio teams are using social media outlets daily to reach bigger and more diverse audiences with their stories. One striking example was the BBC North West Tonight story of a hospital in Wigan meeting a dying woman’s wish to see her horse for one last time, and what happened when they met. Within just a few days it had been seen by 43 million people on Facebook.

The BBC website won five Online Media awards this year with local teams leading the way. Our East Midlands staff won the Regional News Website of the Year award and our East team received a commendation in the same category.

Next year will focus on ensuring we deliver improved services such as Local Live and further developing the user experience and design. It will also see digital teams continuing to grow and provide enhanced expertise in all our regions and localities. Setting this alongside our plans to develop more specialist skills, we will continue to provide an excellent service for key breaking stories, but will aim to do it better – with a more creative, powerful, innovative and analytical offer to drive audience growth and approval.

Editorial highlights
Some wonderful stories were uncovered to mark the 70th anniversary of D-Day. For example, our team in Middlesbrough remembered Stan Hollis – the only man to be awarded the VC for his actions that day – by taking his granddaughter to Normandy. Remarkably a BBC archive interview with Stan from 1944 was unearthed and was played to his family, who had never heard it or knew it existed, as part of a documentary on BBC Tees. BBC Radio Solent presented their two breakfast shows from West Dorset and Normandy. Breakfast in Dorset came live from Weymouth and told the story of the US GIs preparing to cross the channel for D-Day, while the Southampton programme came from Bayeux.

Over the year, BBC local radio broadcast more than a thousand stories highlighting the Home Front during the First World War. More than a hundred were also featured on regional television, with half hour special programmes on BBC One marking the local impact of the global conflict. Many of the stories were found through our partnership with the Imperial War Museum, with the best saved online as a legacy for future generations. Throughout the summer, the WW1 At Home Roadshow – which attracted more than a quarter of a million visitors – allowed local people to research their families’ wartime history. On August 4th our teams reported across the country as the nation remembered the outbreak of war 100 years before.

During the past year we have developed our use of “pop-up” style audience debates as part of our response to covering important stories. It follows audience research which clearly shows that audiences appreciate programmes which help them to understand complex stories better and which hold those in positions of power to account. In the West Midlands, What Faith in our Schools? navigated through the issues around allegations of religious extremism in classrooms in Birmingham for a special regional BBC One programme recorded in front of an audience. And in the North East, Scotland and Us was recorded in the border town of Berwick and explored what the referendum vote might mean for the North East – with discussion on greater devolutionary powers and the growing differences between life in England and Scotland. Both programmes attracted extremely impressive audiences.

Living with Dementia was an editorial strand across all local and regional outlets which produced some memorable output and strong stories about poor provision, low understanding and inadequate training. An interview with David Cameron on BBC Radio Oxford drew personal testimony from him about watching Margaret Thatcher “fade away” and his own fears of succumbing to the illness. He also listened to the stories of Radio Oxford listeners and answered questions and concerns about the quality of care available.
Service performance

The case of Myles Bradbury — a paediatric consultant at Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge — was a further impressive example of the BBC working together in terms of sharing journalistic and technical resources to be ahead on a big story. BBC East’s home affairs correspondent Sally Chidzoy led the way, being the first reporter to reveal that an agency had failed to pass the paedophile doctor’s name to the police for more than a year. After Bradbury was jailed for twenty two years the News Online story was read by 1.7 million people.

Another story which had huge resonance with audiences on all platforms was that of Alan Barnes, just after the pensioner from Tyneside was mugged outside his own home. Online pages received more than 4 million page views and social media almost went into meltdown.

BBC London tackled the subject of the shortage and cost of housing with a week-long special series of reports across all platforms. In Home Truths they commissioned four films from contributors with controversial solutions to the crisis, including the idea of building all over the greenbelt and moving older people to retirement homes to free up family housing. The videos ran first on Facebook, with discussion on radio, Twitter and a pull together online piece which attracted hundreds of comments.

Rarely seen footage of Martin Luther King speaking at Newcastle University in 1967 formed the basis for a week of broadcasting on BBC Newcastle and included a report which appeared nationally on The One Show. The radio station took the speech to America and played it to some key figures at the MLK memorial. The resultant reports also appeared on the BBC World Service, Radio 4, and numerous other outlets. A documentary, narrated by Lenny Henry, which set the visit in the context of the sometimes difficult race relations situation in the North East at the time was shown on BBC One in the North East and Cumbria.

There have been many examples once again this year of local and regional teams providing live coverage of breaking stories for network outlets. BBC Radio Humberside and BBC Look North (Hull) were first to Flamborough Head after calls from eye witnesses said that a helicopter had crashed into the sea. Radio Humberside’s Drive programme was extended and Look North’s satellite truck transmitted live reports from a difficult location as it transpired that two people had been killed. The teams serviced the News Channel, as well as other local and national radio outlets and also provided extensive coverage on social media.

There was extremely colourful live minute-by-minute reporting of the Tour de Yorkshire cycling event on our website and on social media, as well extensive exposure on radio and television. It was a huge technical challenge and, as with so many of our editorial triumphs, much credit and thanks should go to our engineers and the team responsible for planning, organising and providing our coverage. A BBC Look North (Leeds) special programme which captured the scale of the event, and the huge sense of regional pride, attracted particularly good audience figures — double the average for the slot on BBC One.

For Children in Need, hundreds of children joined choirs in Plymouth, Chatham, Birmingham, Norwich, Blackpool, Elstree and Bradford for a special live performance on BBC One of “I’ll stand by you”. Immediately after the song there was a huge increase in donations to the charity. Local radio and regional television highlighted the local angles of the charity appeal, explaining where money raised had been used.

Regional Television

Correspondent Colin Campbell and his BBC South East Today colleagues delivered a strong exclusive story as part of the programme’s series of reports investigating people smuggling. Undercover filming showed migrants paying to be smuggled out of the UK so that they could be registered as asylum seekers in Italy — meaning they were likely to be deported to Italy rather than their country of origin if they ever got caught when back in the UK.
Service performance

BBC London’s work in exposing a Harley Street doctor who trained nurses to obtain botox illegally has been praised by the medical profession. He was given a year’s suspension by the panel which disciplines doctors. All the evidence came from a BBC London undercover investigation which filmed a course he gave to nurses on how to get round or ignore the rules on giving this treatment. The producer was the main witness in the case and was questioned closely by the panel members. And BBC London went undercover again to reveal that laughing gas was being openly sold and used at a leading dance festival following the government’s attempted clampdown on “legal highs”.

An investigation into the safety of loom band charms by BBC Midland Today led to a high street chain store taking them off the shelves. The product was part of a latest craze to make bracelets from brightly coloured elastic bands. Tests conducted on a packet of the charms bought in one Birmingham shop revealed that they contained dangerous levels of cancer causing chemicals. The story was picked up by many other outlets inside and outside the BBC.

BBC English Regions won four of the ten awards at the Circom television awards in Croatia. The annual event is held to celebrate the best of public service regional output across Europe. BBC London was honoured twice – for the Best Investigative Journalism for a programme about landlord racism and also for the Best Reflection of Minorities in Society. Phillip Norton from BBC Look North (Hull) was given the award for Video Journalism and Late Kick Off in the West Midlands was named best regional sports programme in Europe.

The BBC North West Tonight team just missed out on a BAFTA after receiving the only BBC nomination in the news category for the awards. However, it was a clean sweep for our regional TV teams at the Royal Television Society national journalism awards, winning the current affairs, presenter and news programme categories.

Regional teams in Bristol marked the 80th birthday of the BBC in the city with some fantastic output which used archive material to look back at the rich variety of programming produced over the years from the Whiteladies Road base. There was a piece each night on BBC Points West, including one featuring John Craven who cut his teeth in the newsroom there.

Inside Out
Our Inside Out programmes have continued to attract a strong reputation for consistently delivering high quality investigative and original journalism which appears on television, online, on radio and increasingly on social media outlets. Popular subjects have included housing, care homes, schools, the economy and transport.

Editions of the programme when the regions have joined up to explore a topic together have been particularly successful. The future of pensions was one of our shared topics in the autumn of 2014. It caught the mood, ahead of major changes announced by the government.

In the winter of 2015 two subjects were selected because they were important debating points in the general election. Our coverage of how the work of family doctors fits into the NHS, attracted a large audience, together with press coverage and reports on network BBC News. Programmes about immigration also hit the headlines, as we revealed a new ‘immigration map’ of Britain that was published by Oxford University. This exclusive material was followed up in every national newspaper and was popular with other BBC news outlets. The map was published online first and showed – at a local and national level – significant increases in migration, particularly from the EU.

Content from Inside Out is regularly re-worked for other regional and national news programmes including Breakfast News, the News Channel, 5 Live and others.

We are particularly proud of the impact we have made with our stories online, both regionally and nationally. One such example was Ian Botham’s personal story about his father suffering from dementia which made the headlines and gained recognition from the Prime Minister which also involved a week of coverage on local radio stations called Living with Dementia.
Service performance

Local Radio
BBC Radio Shropshire broke the story of the crematorium that had returned the ashes of dead babies to parents only once in 10 years. It came from inquiries made through the Freedom of Information Act and involved tracking down former employees and speaking to experts in the cremation industry. The reports prompted a number of families to come forward with their stories. The council leader was moved to call in to the station despite initially declining an interview.

BBC WM marked the 40th anniversary of the Birmingham pub bombings with a series of exclusive interviews. Many of the people who talked to the station’s Adrian Goldberg about their experiences on the night had never spoken to the media before. And at 8pm on November 21st the station broadcast a “real time” documentary exactly 40 years to the hour since the tragedy. The programme featured station archive from the night and the recollections of victims and emergency service workers.

BBC Sussex linked up with BBC Radio Kent to produce a special live debate on the increasingly emotive issue of shale oil exploration and fracking. The programme, featuring a panel and more than a hundred local residents, weaved in contributions from network correspondents David Shukman and John Moylan as well as listener reaction.

The night Eastbourne pier burned BBC Sussex stayed on the air into the evening with a rolling news special. BBC Radio Kent’s Phil Harrison was the first reporter on the scene. By luck he happened to be on the beach with his family while off duty, but jumped into action recording and sending back audio and video to his base on his mobile phone, while also providing updates for the News Channel.

BBC Radio Oxford went on air at 3am on a Sunday morning to broadcast the explosive demolition of the Didcot cooling towers. As the crowds turned out to watch the floodlit spectacle, the structures were finally brought down at first light. Perhaps predictably, the video of the demolition was a huge hit on BBC Radio Oxford’s Facebook page.

Stoke on Trent City Council suspended its deputy leader and launched an investigation after BBC Radio Stoke’s breakfast programme discovered the councillor had sent the station text messages using fake identities. It came to light during coverage and scrutiny of the way the council had spent money on a show garden and entertaining at the Chelsea Flower Show. The programme received a supportive text from “Jean in Fenton”, but investigations revealed it had actually come from the councillor.

At BBC Radio York the new breakfast presenter Georgey Spanswick was the first person to report from the GSHQ intelligence base in Scarborough in its 100-year history. It followed two years of contact building and negotiation by the station. The sequence included fascinating content about the role Scarborough played in code-breaking during World War Two.

As part of the celebrations to make 30 years on air for BBC Radio Sheffield’s mid-morning presenter Rory Robinson the Lord Mayor sprung a surprise civic celebration in his honour during an outside broadcast from the town hall.

Our BBC Introducing programmes continue to go from strength to strength in terms of finding and providing airtime for a broad range of new musical talent. Huw Stephens has showcased some of our shows on his Radio 1 programme with Abbie McCarthy from BBC Radio Kent presenting the first of a series of sequences to show off the best of new music in different parts of the country.
Service performance

More than a dozen of our stations worked with volunteers and staff from different community radio stations across England to get stories to air as part of a special link up. For example, Birmingham Newstyle Radio reported on an increase in the number of Black and Asian men seeking help after ending up on the streets, while Canalside Radio in Manchester produced a piece about being single after 60. And there have also been successful partnerships between some of our radio stations and local music festivals with BBC WM covering Birmingham’s Mostly Jazz, Funk and Soul Festival.

On a sad note, BBC Radio Derby presenter Colin Bloomfield died at the age of 33 in April just a few weeks after stopping work. For the previous twelve months, while undergoing treatment for skin cancer, he had still managed to broadcast and many of the station’s listeners were touched by the brave and open way in which he discussed his illness on air. A charity appeal he launched to raise awareness of melanoma amongst young people raised more than a hundred thousand pounds in a few months.

General News Service (GNS)

The aim of our GNS team, who are based in the main BBC newsroom in London, is to reflect the main national and international news agenda of the day for local and regional news bulletins and programmes – and to champion the best journalism from across England to the rest of the BBC.

GNS reporters broadcast live from the centre of Glasgow the morning after Scotland narrowly rejected independence and they have been involved in helping regional outlets to explain the effects on English devolution ever since. They provided live reports from the stunning sea of poppies at the Tower of London to mark the centenary of World War One, sent live despatches from Camp Bastion on Armistice Day as British troops withdrew from Afghanistan and camped outside St Mary’s Hospital for the birth of Princess Charlotte.

The team is charged with “bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK” and in the course of the last year sent out reporters to ensure that Local Radio had access to the biggest global stories. The World Cup in Brazil, the trial of Oscar Pistorius in South Africa, the war in Syria, the Downing of the Malaysian Air plane in Ukraine all led to GNS reporters providing individual live updates from around the world for the thirty nine BBC local radio stations in England. The team also work in partnership with BBC Monitoring to use their analysts to provide insight and context for important foreign stories.

As part of the BBC-wide Syria Day coverage, in addition to producing extensive coverage for local radio, a GNS reporter also provided television content for BBC London, the West Midlands and the South regions. The team is also developing its use of social media platforms. In a recent example, a snapshot of which English councils had turned off streetlights as part of council cuts was summarised an interactive map on the website.

The Arts

Efforts to improve the profile of our coverage of the Arts continued apace this year; English regions is now represented on a new, cross-BBC Arts steering group chaired by the BBC’s Director of Arts Jonty Claypole, resulting in local radio and regional television being involved directly in some key arts moments across the BBC. This ranges from seasons on film and theatre, to specific partnerships with network arts strands such as Radio Four’s Front Row.

For example, twelve of our radio stations staged a debate on the health of the arts sector across the country as part of a series of BBC programming early this year. The events were held in a wide range of regional arts venues, from the Royal Exchange in Manchester to the Norwich Forum and Hull Truck Theatre. Each one provided lively and informative programming for stations.
Local TV
It was an important year for our project that supports the UK’s emerging local television industry. BBC English Regions, on behalf of the wider BBC, buys content from the new stations to help them develop their programme-making capacity in their early years. Up to £15m is earmarked for this purpose from the current licence-fee settlement.

By the year-end, deals to purchase news footage had been struck with 15 stations spread between Belfast and Southampton, Cardiff and Newcastle. Each partner uploads raw material that can be used by BBC news teams.

We also began to co-commission crafted content. The first fruit of this venture was a history film about the Thorpe rail disaster in Norfolk which was made by Mustard TV and aired by Inside Out in the East. We plan to expand this part of the project in the year ahead, as well as welcoming further stations to the news deal.

Religion and Ethics
Our centrally based religion and ethics team, together with producers and presenters across BBC local radio, continued to deliver a great amount of original journalism over the past year. For example, research into the subject of generosity – and the comparative behaviours of people of faith and those of no faith – attracted national attention. In addition to extensive coverage on BBC local radio stations, the Radio 4 programme More or Less headlined an edition of its programme with the material. The Daily Telegraph and many social media platforms were among those beyond the BBC who picked up and reflected the coverage of the story.

English regions also produced research on the power of music to heal as part of a partnership with Radio Two’s Faith in the World Week. Again, this received widespread coverage across the BBC. The story was reported and discussed widely on social media outlets and even reached The Times of India. Each local radio station broadcast specially commissioned features during the Faith in the World Week. Content gathered by the stations also formed a special web page of personal stories on the Radio Two site, while the station’s Good Morning Sunday programme broadcast audio stories gathered by local stations.

Our small central religion and ethics team also reported live from key events for BBC local radio – and, on one occasion, even for foreign television too. They provided extensive coverage of the “saint making” of Pope John Paul from Rome, were at the critical York synod which finally agreed to create women bishops and broadcast live from Auschwitz commemorations in Poland.

Sport
Local Radio sports teams have continued to follow their teams around the country, bringing the passion and excitement to their listeners. Whether it’s following a local football team to a Wembley cup final, either code of rugby or county cricket, live sports coverage remains extremely popular with our audiences and often features teams that receive little other media coverage.

BBC English Regions has been at the forefront of the BBC’s commitment to women’s football. Three multimedia journalists have reported this season’s Women’s Super League, sharing their material across regional and network television and radio, while also writing online articles. Two Local Radio sports reporters, Robyn Cowen and Vicki Sparks, have become familiar women commentators, covering Five Live Sports Extra’s WSL matches.
Service performance

Our unique cricket service, ball-by-ball online commentary on country cricket, was listened to 500,000 times in 2014, and in 2015 is now available on the move on mobile, tablet and the BBC’s Sport App.

Many local radio sports commentaries have also been broadcast around the UK on Five Live Sports Extra, making up forty per cent of that network’s output.

When Cornwall won rugby union’s County Championship for the first time since 1999, BBC Radio Cornwall not only did live commentary on the match, it was streamed around the world online and people were also kept in touch on social media.

Our regional football show Late Kick Off, which focussed on the activities of our local Football League clubs on and off the pitch, ended its run after 5 years and nearly five hundred and fifty programmes. Our weekly rugby league programme, the Super League Show, celebrated its seventeenth series in February by coming from the World Club Challenge in St Helens.

Two major sporting and public events in the summer of 2014 were a particular success – the Tour de France was fully reflected by the BBC across regional TV, many local radio outside broadcasts and social media, culminating in a BBC Look North special on the Sunday night on BBC One that drew an audience of 400,000 and a share of more than thirty per cent – well above the slot average. Meanwhile the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow gave our regional multimedia team the chance to follow all our English competitors for regional news programmes.

Our Unsung Hero awards, now in its thirteenth year, once again gave the public the chance to nominate those people who help to make sport flourish in their communities all over the country.

Working with communities

Serving and reflecting a wider range of communities across our output as whole and in specialist programming continues to be an important objective for BBC English Regions.

In September 2014, as part of Director General Tony Hall’s pledge to open up the BBC to people from a wide range of backgrounds, the BBC’s apprenticeship scheme was launched with apprentices based in 45 of our local radio stations across the UK. They have been working as Apprentice Broadcast Assistants (England, Channel Islands) and Apprentice Content Assistants (Wales, Scotland and N Ireland). It is a fifteen month scheme and will enable those involved to work towards a qualification with the National Council for the Training of Journalists.

BBC English Regions funded two attachments with our General News Service team (see above) at New Broadcasting House in London for staff from our community programmes, one each from our UK Black and Asian programmes. The aim was to produce more diverse stories for regional production teams across the country, as well as providing a development opportunity for staff. One of the successful candidates, Ngunan Adamu from BBC Radio Merseyside, was sent to Nigeria for the coverage of the one year anniversary of the kidnapping of 500 girls by Boko Haram and provided some outstanding content.

Our African-Caribbean comedy night was a free event for listeners to BBC local radio's UK Black programmes at the BBC’s Radio theatre at New broadcasting House in London. More than three hundred people watched a line-up of African-Caribbean comedians who came from across England. BBC London’s Eddie Nestor and Brenda Emmanus hosted the event and the night was filmed with a video made available on our UK Black website. Excerpts from the event were played on BBC Local Radio, 1xtra, Radio 4, and Radio 4xtra. Lenny Henry was one of the people who gave his support on social media.

BBC West Midlands sports Unsung Hero Dennis Neenan

BBC Norfolk held a BBC Introducing day across the station’s daily output to highlight talented unsigned musicians
Technology
Our Live Broadcast Vehicles project is now into its second phase and is delivering a further 28 VERVs, 19 VSats to and 3 Satellite Newsgathering Vehicles which will enable our teams to broadcast live and send content back from almost any location. There have been some connectivity issues mainly affecting local radio VERVs, but technical improvements throughout the year have provided more stability.

An increased use of equipment linking 3G and 4G SIMs to send video and audio back to base is adding to the news gathering tool set and may provide a cost effective alternative to using satellite.

A review of how all these new resources can most efficiently service BBC English Regions and the wider BBC is underway.

ViLoR (Virtualised Local Radio), which has been developed by the BBC Engineering team based in English Regions, is now live. To the presenters and production teams the ViLoR studios appear conventional, but the underlying equipment and infrastructure is centralised and virtualised. Editorial teams have full control over contributions, music play-out and mixing desks, but the circuits, codecs and audio files are stored, streamed, mixed and processed in remote data centres, in real-time. BBC Radio Northampton was the first station to migrate to ViLoR in June 2014 with BBC Radio Suffolk and BBC Essex following. BBC Three Counties Radio are moving from their 30 year old analogue studios in Luton to brand new ViLoR studios in Dunstable, with the relocation being about a million pounds cheaper than any previous Local Radio station relocation, with ViLoR being the key reason for the cost reduction. With the pilot being judged a success, we are intending to expand ViLoR to serve all 39 BBC Local Radio stations.

Meanwhile, the system has been shortlisted for the IBC Technology Innovation award.

The long awaited refurbishment of the BBC’s Plymouth site has been running throughout the year. The TV system design is based on the Salford and New Broadcasting House models in terms of much of the technology used. The regional television programme Spotlight is due to go live at the end of June and BBC Radio Devon is expected to move into their new ViLoR studios during September.
Future strategy

Our goals over the coming year are aligned with the BBC’s key four objectives.

These are:
- Make distinctive, world-class content
- Transform our offer for younger audiences
- Develop a more personal BBC
- Demonstrate value for money in every area of our work

Our priority will be to continue to develop and enhance the quality of what we do on television and radio, while increasing our efforts significantly to develop our online and social media presence by creating a more personal sort of offering that really resonates with, and is highly valued by, the broadest possible range of people from communities across England.

We want to provide the best, most trusted and appreciated local and regional news service in every area – but we also believe it is extremely important to support other local media and will continue to foster fruitful working partnerships with organisations outside the BBC in a similar vein to the current arrangements we have with local newspapers regarding our Local Live sites and local television services.

Our aim will be to make sure the BBC’s local services are the place to turn to for breaking local news stories, special investigations and grown up debate. Added to this, we will find inventive new ways to explain the context of key issues and what they really mean to individuals and their families and friends.

As we have amply shown over the past year – particularly in our general election coverage – we see an important part of our role being to hold people in positions of power to account and to provide a platform for the audience to question them directly. So called Accountability Journalism will continue to feature prominently in our output.

Although we feel we have made strong progress this year, it remains an important objective to increase the overall diversity of both our output and our staff with the aim of making our programmes and content even more reflective of the wide range of cities, towns and villages we serve every day.

Contacts

If you wish to find out more about the BBC’s year – including full financial statements and performance against other public commitment – then please visit www.bbc.co.uk/annualreport

If you want to know more about how the BBC is run, then please visit www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc

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