

**Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) Meeting – 9 December 2013**  
**Note of conclusions and action points**

---

Present: Ric Bailey (BBC), Nadia Banno (BBC), Emily Barber (Channel 4) Kathleen Carragher (BBC Northern Ireland), Chris Hagan (UTV), Dominic Harrison (Channel 4), Tabby Karamat (BBC), Gordon Macmillan (STV), Alasdair Macleod (BBC Scotland), Ian Pratt (BBC Wales), Steve Perkins (Local Digital News), Nick Powell (ITV Wales), Alex Robertson (Electoral Commission), Rob Shepherd (BBC), Warren Seddon (Electoral Commission), Martin Stott (Channel 5), Hywel Wiliam (S4C), Chris Wissun (ITV),

Apologies: Jimmy Buckland (Talksport), Joan Darroch (STV), Rhys Evans (BBC Wales), Darren Henley (Classic FM), Peter Lowe (BSKYB), Paul Sylvester (Absolute Radio), Jo Verrill (Classic FM – Global),

Venue: 28 Portland Place, London, W1

---

**1 NOTES OF LAST MEETING**

These were circulated at the meeting and were approved for publication. They do not purport to be a full record but merely a note of the conclusions and action points.

**2 MATTERS ARISING**

Nil

**3 RETROSPECTIVE FOR 2013**

**Local Elections 2013**

- Two parties complained about the number of PEBs they were allocated.
- Two parties wanted to change the date of their broadcasts.

**4 REPRESENTATIONS FROM POLITICAL PARTIES ON PEB CRITERIA FOR 2014 ELECTIONS**

The BLG had invited written representations from political parties in the UK on the PEB allocation criteria for the elections due to take place in 2014 in addition to any other matters relevant to the BLG for example, PPBs and Referendum Broadcasts.

In the letters to the political parties, the Chair of the BLG:

- invited each party to submit any considered views they may have had about the criteria for allocation of PEBs in the previous elections so that they could be circulated and discussed at the next BLG meeting;

- enclosed the PEB arrangements for the previous occasions on which the same elections were contested;
- emphasised that each broadcaster takes its own decision about the PEB criteria and allocation, following discussion at the BLG, and that each broadcaster writes to the parties separately about their own plans; and
- welcomed any views on other issues relevant to the next BLG including referendum broadcasts.
- Substantive representatives were received from the following parties:
  - (i) British National Party
  - (ii) Green Party.

The BLG noted and discussed each of the parties' submissions. The main points raised by the parties related to their evidence of past and current electoral support which they asked the BLG to take into account when determining their allocation of broadcasts in the forthcoming elections. The BLG members discussed the factors taken into account and the political context.

## **5 LOOKING FORWARD**

European and English and Northern Ireland Local Elections are taking place in 2014. The previous criteria for these elections were discussed including what happens when there are two elections on the same day. For the European and Local Elections in 2009 the BBC offered multiple broadcasts for the European Election (based on the threshold and additional criteria) and only one broadcast for the Local Elections in England (based on the threshold criterion). No additional broadcasts were offered for the local elections. It was noted that the Ofcom rules state that a minimum of two broadcasts must be offered and do not address what happens when there are two elections on the same day. The BLG members also discussed the potentially high number of broadcasts that might be allocated when two elections took place on the same day and the practical difficulties that presents for scheduling.

It was noted the General Election is taking place in 2015. The BLG members briefly discussed the effect on the Westminster Parliament if Scotland achieved independence in the referendum in 2014. The representative for the Electoral Commission said that it was not determined yet but there would be a transition date for the changes to be made.

PPBs for 2014 were also briefly discussed by the BLG members. The BBC confirmed it had allocated slots for early 2014 already. Winter PPBs take place at the end of January/beginning of February and Spring PEBs take place in March. Autumn PEBs will take place after the Scottish Referendum.

## **6 SCOTTISH REFERENDUM 2014**

The BLG members discussed the Scottish Independence Referendum Bill and the issue regarding the designation rules, specifically, the ability of the Electoral Commission to designate on one side only which would create difficulties for the broadcasters who have an obligation of due impartiality in respect of political broadcasts. Though it appears unlikely that only one side of the referendum campaign will be designated in the Scottish Referendum the BLG agreed to write to the Electoral Commission formally on this matter.

No comments were raised in respect of the current Referendum Production Guidelines on the BLG website.

The BLG members also noted and briefly discussed the legislative and Ofcom rule provision regarding the purpose of a PEB must not be to promote an outcome of a referendum.

## **7 OFCOM CONSULTATION**

The BLG members discussed the 'major parties' requirement and its application to election broadcasts and editorial coverage. It was noted the current Ofcom consultation is consulting on whether UKIP should be a 'major party'.

It was agreed the BLG members who are governed by the Ofcom rules will submit a joint response to the consultation. Points in respect of PEBs which affect all BLG members could be endorsed by the BLG. A draft would be circulated for discussion.

## **8. LOCAL TV**

It was noted that following the BLG's consultation response to Ofcom regarding Local TV PEBs Ofcom had reduced the requirement for PEBs.

Steve Perkins was formally introduced and joined to the BLG by the Chairman. Mr Perkins joins the Group on behalf of Local TV.

**9. ELECTORAL COMMISSION CONSULTATION**

It was noted that the Electoral Commission was conducting a wide consultation on elections. In respect of broadcasters, the key issues relate to: an independent's entitlement to PEBs (this follows the complaints made by Siobhan Benita in the Mayoral Election); and the question relating to regional broadcasts and Mayoral elections outside London (for example Liverpool).

It was noted that each of the BLG members directly affected by these issues, BBC and ITV, would be submitting a response to the consultation.

**10. BLG Website**

It was agreed that the Referendum and Production Guidelines would be reviewed to see if any changes were required.

**11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

For the General Election 2015 it was agreed by the BLG that written submissions from the parties were preferred rather than face to face meetings.

The General Election will take place in the first week of May 2015 so the decision on the allocation of PEBs would be made around March. The BBC notifies the parties of their allocation around the end of February/early March.

The next BLG meeting would probably take place in December 2014 with a further second meeting option in early 2015.