

Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) Meeting – 15 November 2011
Note of conclusions and action points

Present: Ric Bailey (BBC), Nadia Banno (BBC), Michael Cairns (BBC Northern Ireland), Joan Darroch (STV), Dominic Harrison (Channel 4), Tabby Karamat (BBC), Alasdair Macleod (BBC Scotland), Rob Morrison (UTV), Darwin Templeton (UTV) Nick Powell (ITV Wales), Ian Pratt (BBC Wales), Alex Robertson (Electoral Commission), Stephanie McMeeken (Electoral Commission), Rob Shepherd (BBC), Martin Stott (Five), Chris Wissun (ITV), Paul Sylvester (Absoute Radio),

Apologies: Garmon Rhys (BBC Wales), Mared Hughes (S4C), Darren Henley (Classic FM), Sarah Jones (BBC), Gordon Macmillan (STV), Rosalind McInnes (BBC Scotland), Jimmy Buckland (Talksport), Peter Lowe (BSKYB),

Venue: 66 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

(a) Production Guidelines – it was noted that there is an inconsistency between the Parliamentary Recording Rules and the BLG's Production Guidelines regarding the use of Westminster proceedings. It was suggested that the Production Guidelines be brought into line with the Parliamentary Recording Rules. The Chair of the BLG committed to write to the parties to inform them of this change which would only apply to Westminster (and not to the Scottish Parliament or the Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland – or London). Other proposed minor amendments to the BLG's Production Guidelines were discussed.

(b) Editorial Content – it was raised that the Conservative Party had wished to broadcast a PPB on the BBC that appealed for monies to be donated to a cause. Though a PPB's editorial content is not defined or circumscribed in the relevant legislation it was not possible to broadcast such a PPB on the BBC because it sought to generate revenue.

3 RETROSPECTIVE FOR 2011

BLG members discussed matters relating to the Referendum Broadcasts, PEBs for the various 2011 Elections and PPBs. In summary:

A Referendum Broadcasts

- There were no referendum broadcasts in Wales as no organisations were designated.
- There were two broadcasts for each side in the Alternative Vote Referendum. The order of broadcasts was determined by a coin toss.
- The AV Referendum campaign ran concurrently with the various 2011 Elections.
- The broadcasters remained alert to the provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 in respect of whether any parties wished to use their PPB or PEB to voice their position on the Referendum. This issue had been raised by the Cabinet Office in respect of whether any legislative amendment was required however it was the BLG's view that the legislation was clear.

B PEBs

- The technical quality of PEBs delivered by the smaller parties was poor where those parties made the broadcasts themselves. All members agreed that responsibility for the quality of the broadcasts lay with the parties.
- In respect of radio broadcasts, they had been reduced – on the BBC - to 90 seconds in duration. The TV sound could not be used for radio so radio broadcasts also had to be produced. There were also some issues with music drowning out the dialogue.

C PPBs

- There was no Queen's Speech PPB this year.
- There were no PPBs in Wales due to the referendum period.
- In Northern Ireland, each of the largest five parties are allocated a single PPB over a year in line with their conferences.
- The BBC Trust will be looking at PPBs in the future – to be discussed in AOB at item 6.

4 REPRESENTATIONS FROM POLITICAL PARTIES ON PEB CRITERIA FOR THE 2012 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 2012 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.

Written representations were received from the following parties:

- (i) English Democrats; and
- (ii) Labour Party.

The BLG discussed each of the parties' submissions. The main issues that were raised by the parties were as follows:

- (a) Allocation of PEBs – One of the parties expressed their support for the continuation of the criteria which were used in the previous elections. The other party expressed their view that due to the significant financial costs of standing in the London Mayoral and Greater London Authority Elections the PEB criteria should be changed to allow qualification for a minor party on the basis that they have stood in previous GLA elections plus they are standing a mayoral candidate plus they are entering a full slate on the party list. One of the parties also expressed the view that they should be allocated a number of PEBs equal to the combined total allocated to each of the Coalition parties, in addition to being allocated the final broadcast of the election campaign in order to respond to the Coalition parties' PEBs.
- (b) Timing of PEBs – One party noted that due to the AV referendum a number of PEBs were broadcast later in the schedules this year and expressed the view that this should not become a long term trend, requesting that allocations for the next round of PEBs be made in the normal early evening slots.

- (c) Party Political Broadcasts – One of the parties requested they be consulted when the BLG considers the implications of the proposed 2012 elections for Police and Crime Commissioners on the scheduling of PPBs, and for general future consultations on PPBs.

5 LOOKING FORWARD

Elections in 2012 are the London Mayoral/GLA Election, Scottish Local Elections and English and Welsh Local Elections. Proposed draft PEB criteria for each of these elections were circulated for discussion.

6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Party Political Broadcasts

The BBC Trust will be consulting on proposals for party political broadcasts to be broadcast seasonally in England, Scotland and Wales rather than being tied to specific political events.

It was suggested by a BLG member that the BBC Trust and Ofcom review their PPB policies at the same time. The Electoral Commission confirmed that it would be happy to give its views on any proposed policy change.