

## **AUDIENCE COUNCIL ENGLAND**

Minutes of meeting held on Friday, 18 January, 2008  
at Oakley Court Hotel, Windsor

### **IN ATTENDANCE :-**

Alison Hastings	Chair
Annette Priestley	Chair, South
Clarke Willis	Chair, East
David Claridge	Chair, South East
Dwain Neil	Chair, London
Elizabeth Dodds	representing Sue Kelly, North East & Cumbria RAC
Jacqui Francis	Chair, West Midlands
Julie Panagarry	Chair, North West
Phillippa Denton	Chair, East Midlands
Stephen Marshall	representing Ted Wright, Yorkshire & Lincolnshire RAC
Stuart Paterson	Acting Chair, West
Thelma Holland	Chair, South West
<i>Andy Griffee (part)</i>	<i>Controller, English Regions</i>
<i>Craig Henderson (part)</i>	<i>Head of English Regions Programming</i>
<i>Louise Hall</i>	<i>Head of Governance &amp; Accountability, England</i>
<i>Frances Bryant</i>	<i>Public Accountability Manager</i>
<i>Carol Webster</i>	<i>Public Accountability Manager</i>

Alison Hastings had been delayed due to a flight cancellation; Julie Panagarry chaired the meeting until her arrival.

### **1. APOLOGIES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Julie Panagarry welcomed Thelma Holland, recently appointed Chair for the South West, to her first full ACE meeting; she thanked Elizabeth Dodds and Stephen Marshall for representing their councils. Apologies had been received from Sue Kelly, Elizabeth Peacock, and David Wilson who had hoped to represent the Yorkshire RAC.

### **2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

**2.1** The minutes of the video conference on 4 December 2007 were approved as a true record.

## 2.2 Matters arising

Reports on outstanding action points from the previous meeting:

- The RACs had completed their responses to the Impartiality Review questions, see Paper 6
- A briefing paper on the Impartiality Review had been emailed to ACE members on 16 January
- An ACE sub-group had been set up to consider the issue of local accountability; its report and recommendations were attached as an annex to Paper 2, the Head of Governance & Accountability England's Report
- Several updates had been made to the ACE website; the work was ongoing
- Plans for February outreach would be considered under item 6.2

## 3. REPORTS

### 3.1 Trust meetings of 17 October & 14 November 2007

The Chair offered to send members some recent analysis on distinctiveness and creativity.

She also drew members' attention to Culture Secretary James Purnell's speech at the Oxford Media Convention on 17 January on the subject of top-slicing the licence fee; and mentioned her attendance at the BBC's News & Sports Festival along with Chairman Michael Lyons and Richard Tait for a session entitled 'Can the BBC trust the Trust?'

### 3.2 Head of Governance & Accountability, England

Louise Hall drew members' attention to the following:

#### **Maximising Audience Councils' Effectiveness Review (MACE)**

The timetable for the review was as follows: consultation at the Joint Councils' Conference on the next day (19 January); an update to the Trust's Audience Council Committee in February; and the final report to the Trust in March.

#### **ACE Sub-Group: Local Accountability**

The sub-group's recommendations were accepted. It was noted that they made full use of the powers of the RACs to ensure effective local accountability.

It was further agreed that the designated Local Radio link person on each RAC would have contact with the Managing Editor at least twice a year, be briefed on the station's objectives, be invited to public meetings/events, and join the Managing Editor for an annual accountability phone-in where appropriate.

The suggestion for a sub-committee within the RAC to focus on Local Radio performance was discussed and concern expressed that this would add to an already heavy workload for both members and Managing Editors; members also cautioned against this being seen as reviving the old Local Advisory Councils. They asked for feedback from the Yorkshire & Lincolnshire RAC trial in the autumn.

Andy Griffiee requested a list of all the 'link' representatives for each station as from the date of the approval of new members in March 2008, and undertook to raise the issue at the next Managing Editors' Conference.

### **Induction Day for Chairs & Deputies**

This was planned for Wednesday 30 April in Birmingham. Current Chairs who would like to attend were asked to contact Louise.

### **3.3 Controller English Regions' Report**

Andy Griffiee highlighted a number of points from his report.

The implications from the savings announcements continued. It was hoped there would not be a need for any compulsory redundancies within England.

RAJAR: overall performance year-on-year for Local Radio was encouraging. Big city stations continued to be the main challenge.

*Connecting in a Crisis:* Local Radio continued to be the first stop for information, for example during the floods. He was pleased to inform members that Hilary Benn, Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, had encouraged people to tune into BBC Local Radio for information.

All staff across the BBC had or would be attending the *Safeguarding Trust* workshops to ensure a full understanding of BBC policy and protocol. Any new competitions would have to receive the final approval of the Controller before going to air.

Members agreed it was vital that the BBC scrutinise all competitions. Some presenters had treated the whole issue of competitions with some disdain on-air; members felt this had undermined viewers' and listeners' confidence that the BBC had put its house in order. They were pleased to learn that not only staff but presenters were also going through the training.

Andy informed members that in its first two weeks, the 8pm news bulletin on BBC One had increased the number of viewers watching news by two million. This had been its prime objective. Figures had been variable across the country, with the highest in the South East and South West, and the lowest in the North East.

Regional trails were now to be scheduled across the BBC output and not just around regional programming; this was a new arrangement with the Marketing, Communications & Audiences Department.

Members briefly discussed the overuse and trailing of current affairs material within news programmes and it was agreed that producers needed to be more selective, particularly with regard to *Inside Out* and the regional news programmes.

### **3.4 Head of Programming update**

Craig Henderson tabled his report and highlighted the following.

The main network commissioning process across England was based on the production centres outside London, namely Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester.

Under reprioritisation the network production centres were focused on: ensuring sustainability at the network centres; building on existing and new skills; and trying to redress any imbalance.

The regions were making an impact on the networks, creating good contacts for future commissioning. Two compilation tapes were played as an illustration of the strong material from the regions which was being commissioned and broadcast by the networks. This included *Helicopter Heroes* and *Nation on Film*.

Special programming was due for launch in April under the working title *Made In England*, a project in partnership with The Arts Council. There was to be regional programming and the possibility of transmission on the network.

Members agreed that these programmes must be inclusive, reflecting diversity within the regions. They recognised and praised the quality of productions coming from the regions and were encouraged by the plans.

### **4. RAC Programme & Service Review: the 8pm Bulletin**

The Chair noted that she had not been surprised to learn that some members watching the news at 6pm found the 8pm bulletin unappealing. The 8pm bulletin was designed to attract viewers who rarely consumed news or current affairs, which was why it was important for members to seek views from their own networks to contribute to RAC discussions.

It was unfortunate that the bulletin had been taken off over Christmas and had not had a consistent run during the review period.

Andy Griffie reminded members of the bulletin's success in attracting additional viewers. There had been no evidence that audiences were switching away during the bulletin, and a third of people in England were aware of it. The local bulletin was usually made up of the two most important news items of the day.

One council had loved the bulletin and described it as less tabloid than Channel 5 and still very much 'the BBC'. Members discussed its length and style, with most supporting the concept which was thought to be right for the targeted audience. It was felt the service appealed across the age divide and provided a good catch-up for anyone coming home late.

### **5. Impartiality Review: RAC Comments**

Members had found the process hard work partly because of the timing (over the Christmas break) and also because of the multiple and repetitive questions.

Chairs had found it difficult to get members to engage and the overall response had not been high. The density and complexity of the document had made a big 'ask' of volunteers. A different style of presentation would have helped, with some graphics and tighter prose.

Members considered the main points to be addressed at the Joint Audience Councils' meeting with Professor King later that day, including the distinct issues in England around diversity.

## **6. Trust Business**

### **6.1 Complaints Framework Consultation:**

The draft ACE response was tabled for approval; this was given after a short discussion.

It was noted that a member of the Trust Unit Team for Editorial Standards had joined the ACE sub-group's conference calls to answer queries and had already taken on board many of the recommendations.

The main issues included the definition of a complaint; the clarity and accessibility of the guidance; and the practicality around setting a response deadline of four weeks.

Members of the sub-group estimated that the consultation process had taken between eight and ten hours, including reading through the 100-page consultation paper. While it was accepted that this 'came with the territory', it was agreed that it was up to members to manage their time, and for Chairs to use their deputy chairs to assist with that. The virtual consultation process had also been a significant added burden to the accountability support team.

It was felt that a formal consultation timetable would provide a clearer view across the year and assist with balancing volunteers' workload. It was also suggested that consultation papers should be provided in a visual as well as written format, for those who took in information in different ways.

Members agreed that future consultations could be carried out by similar ACE and RAC sub-groups.

The members of the sub-group were thanked for their commitment and time.

### **6.2 Audience Views on Entertainment: Proposal**

The Chair introduced the proposal which arose out of concerns about audience views on the subject and the place of 'entertainment' within the Purpose Remits and the wider BBC offering.

Members agreed to the proposal, to commission desk research and host RAC outreach events in February. Dwain Neil, Julie Panagarry, Annette Priestley and Clarke Willis offered to advise on the format and content of the outreach events, to be based on a draft which would be drawn up shortly.

Headlines from the events would be available for the next ACE meeting and a full report ready in time for the April Audience Councils' Day with the Trust.

## **7. Outreach Activity**

### **7.1 Young People's Events: evaluation and review**

The main points from the report were highlighted and it was noted that the England-wide summary would form part of the ACE Annual Report. The activity had helped increase council members' understanding of the way young people consumed media including the BBC and proved to be an enjoyable experience.

Highlights from the regional events should be included in the RAC Chairs' introductions to their regional annual reports, and the full report shared with the RACs.

It was agreed that in future, greater care was needed with the drafting of questions to be used for outreach activity.

A great deal of hard work had gone into organising the events and summarising the feedback. The Chair thanked the members and the accountability team for their valuable contribution.

### **7.2 February Events: Entertainment**

See under item 6.2 for details of proposed outreach activity.

## **8. Priority Issues for BBC Trust, April 2008**

Members were reminded that this was an agenda item for the February RAC meetings, to feed into the ACE deliberations in March.

## **9. Burning Issues & any other business**

No matters were raised.

**Details of next meeting: Monday/Tuesday 10/11 March 2008  
BBC Birmingham**

The meeting closed at 4.45pm.