

Regional Audience Council for BBC East

Minutes of meeting

Tuesday 8 April 2008

BBC The Forum, Norwich

Council members present:

Jennifer Akpeki-Tyrell	Link to BBC Three Counties Radio
Melvina Dunnett	
Susan Hales	
Stuart Hobley	
Chandi Hubert	
Helen Hunt	Link to BBC Radio Northampton; deputy chair
Amanda Kennedy	Member of sixth form group
Annie Kiff-Wood	
Wendy Lees	Link to BBC Radio Norfolk
Joe Lewis	
Laura Mungovan	
Dominic O'Sullivan	Link to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, deputy chair
Peter Short	
Marcus Tinworth	Link to BBC Essex
Clarke Willis	Chair East RAC
Annie Woodman	Member of sixth form group
	*Link to BBC Radio Suffolk TBA

Absent:

Nicola Mullany

In attendance:

BBC

Tim Bishop	Head of Region BBC East
Louise Hall	Head of Governance & Accountability, England, BBC Trust
John Sparrow	Public Accountability Manager, East & London RACs

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

Clarke Willis welcomed everyone. He introduced seven new members and two members of the sixth form group who will contribute the youth voice this year.

Apologies were received from Nicola Mullany.

2. Minutes of 11 February meeting

2.1 Minutes

Approved.

2.2 matters arising

2.2.1 Weekend regional news

Tim Bishop noted a re-assignment of resources to lengthen the Sunday early evening bulletin and drop weekday mid-afternoon reports.

He noted the intention to provide a video news service on *MyLocal* websites (successor to Where I Live websites) subject to BBC Trust approval.

2.2.2 Ipswich murders trial

Responding to Council members' views that treatment of this seemed identical to the way the unfolding murders were covered, Tim Bishop explained that facilities and resources had been planned to meet local, regional and national needs with on-screen journalists reporting for a variety of outlets. He accepted that "parachuting in" had been a continuing factor and acknowledged that the limited use of regional reporters on network programmes is a long-term issue.

[nb: issue included in ACE annual report and raised with the BBC Trust at the Audience Councils' Day on 23 April]

3. Programme and service review

3.1 The White Season

- six programmes broadcast on BBC Two between 7-14 March intended to explore "what it means to be white and working class in 21st Century Britain". Some supporting items on regional and local services.

Though only two programmes were nominated for review, many members had seen the trailer and others from the season.

3.1.1 *White Girl* (drama)

Individual members' comments -

- "riveting"
- "engaging"
- "What is its purpose?"
- "more about relationships than class or religion"
- "working class family portrayal too violent, Muslims portrayal genteel"
- "[simply] a dysfunctional family, from which the young girl would have found comfort from any welcoming neighbour"
- "It seems to be 'white bad, immigrant good'"
- "more about the impact the daughter made on her mother"
- "too easy – it would have been more interesting if a Muslim girl were invited into a white family"
- Minority disagreement about the language content – too strong, or acceptable in view of the dramatic context.
- A majority felt the drama was well made and engaging. Though for some it was simply too long, one felt it suitable for peak time BBC One.

3.1.2 *The Poles Are Coming* (documentary – Polish immigrants to Peterborough)

A majority felt this was a worthwhile and revelatory programme, presented in an engaging way, with commendation for reporter Tim Samuels. Members who had emigrated to Britain in the 1950s or moved from other parts of the UK empathised with the Poles' experiences – "it was like how we were received".

- "Brilliant. It told the story from both sides...and got to the real issues"
- "I related to this – I felt it was true to life"

- “A surprising programme - a mix of races were complaining about immigration”
- “It was important to include the effects [of emigration/immigration] on Poland”
- “I felt embarrassed about the [white] people in the Job Centre. The locals get on with the Poles”
- “I didn’t appreciate the blasé approach of the reporter”.
- “it seemed a bit too flippant to me.”

3.1.3 Other programmes in the season

Some members had seen *Last Orders*, about a white working-class community on the outskirts of Bradford and the slow decline of their working-men’s club. Their comments were –

- “A bit stereotypical”
- “the American film-maker had made some inappropriate assumptions”

Rivers of Blood (an assessment of Enoch Powell’s keynote speech on immigration)

The one member who saw this felt it omitted the impact of the speech on immigrants and did not include any insight into his character.

All White In Barking (Life in this East London community with one of the highest immigrant populations)

The one member who watched this found it “moving, [exploring] genuine issues”

3.1.4 The trailer

Most members had seen this. The range of reaction included “aggressive”; “didn’t interest me” [though gripped by programme] “It passed me by”; “I thought it would be reality TV, which put me off”

3.1.5 Other comments

- Some members unclear about the purpose of the season, after watching the programmes.
- Others felt informed: “it challenged perceptions”
- “It lacked any element of celebration”
- Most agreed that it was the kind of initiative expected of the BBC - “everybody’s talking about [immigration] privately”
- One member felt that it lacked coherence, which could have been provided through an introductory programme.

3.1.6 The season as a whole/Chair’s summary

There was mixed reaction to the programmes in this season – both those that members were asked to watch and others they saw as a result of normal viewing and listening. The trail - intentionally provocative - had been offensive for a minority, aroused curiosity for others, but had mainly been a disincentive to watch. A majority found aspects of *White Girl* engaging, seeing it more as a development of the central character and her mother than a question of race. Most felt that the style of *The Poles Are Coming* helped present a rounded insight into all aspects of European immigration, accurately reflecting an experience that some members recalled personally. However, though everyone agreed that the topic was one worth exploring and that to some extent the programmes had challenged perceptions, many felt that the promise of the season had not been fulfilled – indeed that it had been negative about the white working class.

Relevant Public Purposes – citizenship, education and learning, creativity, reflecting UK, World to UK.

BBC response re trailing

The question of trailing is always contentious because trails must summarise a whole programme, or in this case a whole season of programmes, in one 30 second production. They serve a purpose in producing a reaction, though clearly not universally the one the trail-makers wanted.

3.2 Service licence review

3.2.1 CBeebies

Those with direct or reflected experience agreed on the excellence of this service – on screen and online. It provided a rich resource of engagement and informal learning which acknowledged the developing language capabilities of children. Parents valued the service because it was trustworthy and did not include distracting advertisements.

3.2.2 CBBC

Respondents felt that the overall achievement was less satisfactory than CBeebies. Most felt that older children within the age-range were not well served and were simultaneously drawn to more stylish offerings from commercial channels (e.g. Disney's *High School Musical*) While girls might engage with *Tracey Beaker*, boys preferred more adult output, for example sport. The council's sixth formers commented that it was weaker for the loss of *Live And Kicking*. Some felt that the related website was not especially attractive.

BBC response

Tim Bishop explained that children's programming is very much an area where the licence fee delivers strong original programming, with the commercial sector withdrawing due to the high costs and other issues. The BBC invests extensively to provide a distinctive offering. He highlighted *Newsround* as a high quality news programme with lessons for many other broadcasters in the way it made stories accessible and understandable.

3.2.3 BBC Local Radio in the region

3.2.3.1 BBC Radio Cambridgeshire

Dominic O'Sullivan reported that the Managing Editor is refreshing the station's schedule. Its main competition is from BBC Radio 2 and Radio 4 and its biggest audience is 10am Saturday following Jonathan Ross.

3.2.3.2 BBC Essex

Marcus Tinworth noted that Sir Michael Lyons (BBC Chairman) had recently been interviewed and taken listeners' calls. He felt that the detailed changes being introduced by the new station manager were working and declared the Saturday sports programme 'fantastic'.

3.2.3.3 BBC Radio Norfolk

Wendy Lees, the new link between the station and the Council, had met David Clayton, managing editor, that morning. He confirmed the differences she had noticed in the last few months to make the station more direct. She enjoys the programmes and feels they are more relevant to Norfolk.

3.2.3.4 BBC Radio Northampton

Helen Hunt continues to find the station's speech content 'engaging' – for example the effective consumer programme. She especially enjoys the weekday mid-morning and Saturday afternoon programmes. For her, the station is continuing in the best traditions of BBC Local Radio.

3.2.3.5 BBC Three Counties Radio (Bedfordshire, Herts and Buckinghamshire – based Luton)
Jennifer Akpeki-Tyrell, the new Link to this station, noted the start of a new schedule the previous day (7 April) with Stephen Rhodes taking over the breakfast programme. Jennifer has met Mark Norman, the station’s Managing Editor, who she feels is a “bold” manager, willing to take risks.

3.2.3.6 BBC Radio Suffolk

Currently there is no link, though three members live in the county. A volunteer is sought!

Action CW/JS

4. Chair’s reports

5.1 Audience Council England (ACE) meeting March 08

Draft minutes and an executive summary were circulated.

5.2 Head of Region’s report

This had been distributed.

Tim Bishop tabled audience data for regional output. It indicated that the East is above the average for England, with *Look East* attracting a third of the available audience, while Anglia attracts a fifth.

He also noted a controversy involving *Rokker Radio* (the Three Counties programme for the travelling community) surrounding the way travellers are portrayed on radio.

5.2.1 members’ question: What progress with *BBC Local*?

Tim explained that this is subject to BBC Trust approval, which has a further nine months to run. He reported on a positive outcome of an audience group trial in Chelmsford, which is part of the approval process.

Louise Hall explained that the BBC Trust looks for clarity from each proposition, noting that iPlayer is the better for this considered approach. The downside is that the BBC cannot be as fleet of foot as it once was.

5. Burning issues /any other business

5.1 Whether the BBC Trust is inhibiting innovation.

[prompted by earlier reference to Trust approval requirement for *MyLocal* initiative]

5.2.1.2 commendations

One member congratulated BBC East on the half-hour programme broadcast after the 10pm news on the day the Steve Wright trial concluded. It was a moving portrait of a woman who helped Ipswich prostitutes. Tim Bishop explained that it had been made by the features editor, Diana Hare, and was intended as an alternative view on the Ipswich murders, now that the trial had concluded.

Another spoke enthusiastically about *Miracle On The Estate* shown early on Good Friday morning, about an initiative to produce a version of the Passion among residents of a high-rise estate. It had been remarkable, but there had been no trailing for it.

Congratulations to the BBC for re-gaining rights to Formula 1 motor race coverage.

5.2.1.3 Making a programme

Can the Council make a programme about its work?

Action JS

6. Trust business

6.1 BBC Trust draft work plan

This was distributed for information

6.2 MACE review

A summary document was distributed. This is an initiative conducted among the four Audience Councils in the UK to Maximise Audience Council Effectiveness. Its aim is to develop and share best practice throughout the Councils.

6.3 RAC Support Review

In the wake of the MACE review, the support structure and staffing for Regional Audience Councils (RACs) in England is to be reviewed. The review process will involve a consultant attending a representative selection of RAC meetings and inviting some Council members to comment on procedures and practice.

A summary document will be distributed with the next meeting agenda.

7. Outreach

7.1 Entertainment

Clarke Willis, Annie Kiff-Wood and Dominic O'Sullivan hosted appropriate family groups to fulfil the brief. The executive summary will be distributed with the next agenda.

With thanks to Helen Hunt for joining in and Wendy Witham and AJ for their support in Norwich.

7.2 Children's services

The next round of outreach is likely to take place during June and focus on responses of children to a questionnaire about BBC services provided for them. Details will be finalised during May so that expectations of RAC members can be communicated. Imaginative ways of engaging with younger audience members are expected.

8. Meeting schedule and timing

Members discussed the balance between value and practicalities of holding meetings in the localities of the six local stations to maintain contact and involvement with BBC local radio output. Travel between the east and west part of the region is difficult except by road and long distances are frequently involved. The timing of the meetings was also considered, to minimise impact on other daytime commitments and reaching home by a reasonable time. It was agreed that meetings would begin at 3.30pm for 4pm-6pm, the next in Cambridge. The September meeting may be held at Television Centre, subject to members' willingness to attend.

9. Key point(s) from the meeting, for ACE

- Support for challenging programmes and seasons such as *The White Season*, perhaps with an explanatory introduction.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting:

Tuesday 17 June, 3.30pm for 4pm-6pm Cambridge (venue TBA)

11. Key agenda items

- *Made In England* – review of regional programmes to mark St George's Day
- Public Service Broadcasting (comment on current Ofcom review)

Endnote

[We aim to make as much of the minutes available as possible. However, there will be times when sections of the minutes will be withheld from publication. These will be kept to a minimum and clearly marked.]

The reasons for withholding information are consistent with the Freedom of Information Act which applies to some of the BBC's information. See www.bbc.co.uk/foi for further explanation.]