

Regional Audience Council for BBC East

Minutes of meeting

Tuesday 7 April 2009

The Forum Boardroom, adjacent BBC Norwich

Council members present:

Jennifer Akpeki-Tyrell	Link to BBC Three Counties Radio
Mike Alderton	
Terry-Anne Golko	Link to BBC Radio Norfolk
Andrea Green	
Stuart Hobleby	Joint link to BBC Radio Suffolk
Chandi Hubert	
Annie Kiff-Wood	Joint link to BBC Radio Suffolk
Andrew Laing	
Nicola Mullany	
Laura Mungovan	
Dominic O'Sullivan	Link to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire
Peter Short	Link to BBC Radio Northampton
Marcus Tinworth	Link to BBC Essex
Clarke Willis	Chair East RAC

Absent: Susan Hales, Joe Lewis

In attendance:

BBC

Nikki O'Donnell	Editor, TV News, BBC East
Tim Bishop	Head of Region BBC East
John Sparrow	Public Accountability Manager, East & London RACs

I. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

Clarke Willis welcomed everyone. He introduced the four new members and Nikki O'Donnell, Editor TV News BBC East, who joined the meeting for the discussion on regional television news. Susan Hales and Joe Lewis had sent apologies.

He thanked Peter Short for taking over as link to BBC Radio Northampton. He also explained that Dominic O'Sullivan would chair the agenda item on BBC Local Radio. Clarke also invited members to attend a summer barbecue at his house, suggesting tentative dates Sat 11 or Sun 12 July 2009.

2. Minutes of March meeting, matters arising, burning issues

2.1 Minutes

Approved as an accurate record

2.2 Matters arising

Re Trust response to BBC's alternative proposals to BBC Local

Clarke Willis invited members to send any suggestions for programmes or regular items that would broaden the regional offering (e.g. regional arts coverage)

Suggestions to John Sparrow by end of Easter week.

2.3 Burning issues

2.3.1 Ofcom fine for Brand/Ross affair

Concern that the £150K fine for this meant that licence-payers, not anyone directly responsible, were being penalised by Ofcom.

CW highlighting to Alison Hastings

2.3.2 BBC complaint handling and accountability

One member's observation that BBC responses provided at the previous meeting re Edward Stourton's treatment and inappropriate language on *Top Gear* seemed arrogant, cynical or insensitive, an observation that might equally be made about the tone of some *Points Of View* responses. **JS to submit for discussion at ACE**

2.4 Topics for Any Other Business

2.4.1 Whether *Question Time* has now become celebrity led (e.g. with the introduction of e.g. Will Young as a panellist)

JS to source a programme response

2.4.2. What follow-up plans are there for this year's Comic Relief?

JS to enquire

3. Reports

3.1 ACE meeting 17 March

Draft minutes were circulated.

Clarke Willis highlighted Helen Boaden's reported comments. He hopes she will visit the East RAC. He noted that Alison Hastings will attend the East RAC

September meeting [likely to be in Cambridge, for outreach]

John Sparrow drew attention to the report on the BBC Trust consultation on children's services, highlighting the value given to RAC contributions.

3.1.1 Matters arising

What progress with an England representative on the BBC Direction Group – alongside the newly appointed Directors from the other nations?

Clarke Willis understood there had been no movement [though earlier the Director General had written to approve a place for Controller English Regions]. However, he felt that Helen Boaden is clearly an effective champion for English Regions, which had recently been amalgamated into her directorate.

3.2.1 Head of Region's report

Tim Bishop gave a verbal report.

- BBC support for ITV regional news

The BBC is actively exploring the resources and practicalities of this

- Possible support for local newspapers too

The prospect of this was signalled in a *Times* article by culture secretary Andy Burnham. Tim explained that it might mean, for example, providing local newspapers with audio or video. Overall, these are seen as pragmatic ways of supporting the competition during times of economic hardship whilst still retaining control of licence-fee income.

- New-style website for BBC Radio Norfolk

BBC Norfolk has piloted this design, which is likely to be the model for all other linked websites.

Possible review discussion item

- Easter Monday special

The 6.30 regional news will be replaced by a regionally produced feature – *England's Green And Pleasant Land*.

- Sony Award nominations for Radio Suffolk and BBC Essex
- Opening of new outreach centre in Forum

Officially opened on Monday 6 April 2009, a joint project with EEDA and the Forum Trust, accommodating the BBC Voices project, and a new BBC Open Studio for community use.

3.2.2 Members' questions

Can you explain how relations with ITV (Anglia) will work in the proposed new arrangements – especially re quality control.

BBC response. Broadcasters already routinely share pictures – e.g. the rota system for Royal occasions, reporting on the Prime Minister and specific instances where it's illogical or unpractical to install more than one set of equipment. The best recent example is coverage of Gaza, from which there was a dearth of pictures, which all broadcasters used. It's the angle chosen and the quality of journalism that distinguishes the reports. Some safeguards are likely to be established if the BBC gives material to newspapers.

3.3 The Accountability Year

This schematic illustrated the general relationship between RAC, ACE and BBC Trust over a typical business year. It will be put into operation fully from April 2010.

4. Trust business and feedback

Papers were circulated for information.

Clarke Willis drew attention to the paper on Network News Impartiality and encouraged members to continue monitoring output informally.

The Chairman's letters (follow-up to Audience Councils' Day in January and to the BBC Director General) were included in fulfilment of an action point from the March meeting)

5. Programme and service review

5.1 Local Radio in the region

This section of the meeting was chaired by Dominic O'Sullivan

In general, there had been few developments since the previous RAC meeting (3 March) Dominic invited links to contribute two or three key points. The available written reports had been distributed.

5.1.1 BBC Essex – link Marcus Tinworth

- Pirate Radio Essex will broadcast again over Easter
- A change in technology means that motorists can receive Essex traffic news (rather than information from other stations) while in the county.

5.1.2 BBC Radio Suffolk – Stuart Hobley/Annie Kiff-Wood

- No report (but see Head of Region’s report re Sony nominations)

5.1.3 BBC Radio Norfolk – Terry-Anne Golko

- The station is aiming for a period of stability
- The Managing Editor said there is somewhat confused picture in recent audience trends.

5.1.4 Three Counties Radio – Jennifer Akpeki-Tyrell

- The re-introduction of music to daytime output continues to prompt mixed reaction, from both audience and staff.

5.1.5 BBC Radio Cambridgeshire – Dominic O’Sullivan

- A marketing campaign underway to raise profile
- Station moves to new premises (in science park on edge of city) in September

5.1.6 BBC Radio Northamptonshire – Peter Short

- Targeted marketing at sports grounds, to encourage broader listening
- Current listenership 60:40 women:men.

5.2 Regional television news

Members had been asked to watch the editions of *Look East* on 1 and 2 April as the basis of this discussion. They were asked to consider the extent to which they feel BBC regional television includes stories relevant to them and how well they feel it portrays their region.

5.2.1 Members’ individual comments:

- Generally a good balance of stories across the region, but short local business news would be helpful.
- Though Milton Keynes can seem somewhat parochial, the area should receive a little more coverage (recent Gatehouse School report and soldiers’ return to Luton acknowledged)
- Business stories would be more appropriate than business news – but not all negative, please.
- The business story about manufacturing pre-fabricated buildings was positive.
- The spread of stories helps me learn the geography of the area.
- There do seem to be lots of Norfolk stories. I like the maps showing the locations of stories. Maybe viewers could be directed to the website a bit more – for greater depth. That might make it a bit more attractive to younger people.

- I was glad to see an item about Northampton, but that's usually quite rare. I think the problem is the size of the area. Why not have a tickertape giving headlines of other stories?
- Anglia (ITV) seems to have more pictures from around the region. And I like its short business stories
- It's a constructed region, and the presentation style seems almost automatic. Perhaps the way to refresh coverage is to mix things up a bit and take more risks – e.g. coverage of Luton murders.

Presentation

A majority appreciated the presentation of the main (6.30) news programme, with some comments about the individuals involved. In general, the dual presentation was seen as a way of counterbalancing any individual preferences. Above all, Stuart White was described as “a safe pair of hands”.

5.2.2. BBC responses

Nikki O'Donnell, Editor TV News for BBC East, thanked members for a useful and varied insight into television news coverage of the East. She acknowledged that few stories are likely to relate to the whole region in view of its size and characteristics. This is why there is an east/west split [i.e. an opt-out, or separate programme originated in Cambridge for viewers in the west of the area within the 6.30pm news magazine]. In general, the editorial response is to look for stories that have a broad resonance across the region supported by a variety of short items to get around the region.

Tim Bishop commented that good presenters usually split the audience into *like* : *don't like* – but that presenters can define a programme. Responding to “more pictures from Anglia”, he acknowledged that Anglia used to cover the patch more extensively, though with Anglia now reducing to one programme for the whole region it is philosophy not technology that separates the two broadcasters' approach, the BBC generally adopting a more in-depth, broadsheet style. We've been trying to include a positive perspective within our business coverage, which can become a human story too.

5.2.3 Chair's summary

The overriding concern for many members was the reality that BBC East is not a natural region, but an uneasy amalgamation of “South Midlands” and coastal counties, providing little common interest or experience. In that context members felt that the service was effective, achieving a relationship with its diverse audiences as much through information that resonates as by direct reporting. Younger members sought to broaden content through additional technology. A minority view is that the main evening regional news programme is a little too safe.

6. Outreach

6.1 Generally Accepted Standards

Following discussion at February/March round of RAC meetings, the focus of this will be the content of BBC pre-watershed programmes and the influence of iPlayer in circumventing any post-watershed safeguards.

The event will be held on Tuesday 19 May at the new Open Centre, BBC Norwich, beginning 6.30 for 7pm-9pm.

Members attending are asked to invite one or two people chosen from their informal networks for their diverse opinions.

The evening will take the form of discussion led by a questionnaire and programme extracts. Members will be asked to facilitate small-group discussion and take notes.

7. Burning issues / any other business

7.1 BBC complaint handling and accountability
(see 2.3.2 above)

8. Any other business

Itemised at 2.4 above

10. Date, time and place of next meeting:

Outreach: Tuesday 19 May 6pm-8.30pm Forum Open Centre, BBC Norwich

Business: Tuesday 16 June, Royal Hotel Cambridge at 3.45 for 4pm-6pm

Ends

16.04.09

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.]