

Regional Audience Council for BBC East

Minutes of meeting

Tuesday 11 February 2008

BBC Radio Suffolk, Ipswich

Council members present:

Richard Carter	Link to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire
Michael Deakin	Link to BBC Radio Suffolk
Melvina Dunnett	
Chandi Hubert	
Annie Kiff-Wood	
Peter Lerner	Link to BBC Three Counties Radio
John Newman	Link to BBC Radio Norfolk
Marcus Tinworth	Link to BBC Essex
Richard Walker	
Clarke Willis	Chair East RAC

Absent:

Joanna Hendricks	
Helen Hunt	Link to BBC Radio Northampton; deputy chair
Dominic O'Sullivan	Deputy chair

In attendance:

BBC

Tim Bishop	Head of Region BBC East
Kerry Sillett	A/Asst Editor, BBC Radio Suffolk
John Sparrow	Public Accountability Manager

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

Clarke Willis welcomed everyone. He introduced Kerry Sillett who joined the meeting for the local radio review. He thanked her for taking Council members on a short tour of the station.

Apologies were received from Joanna Hendricks and Dominic O'Sullivan.

2. Minutes of 7 November meeting

2.1 Minutes

Approved.

2.2 matters arising

2.2.1 Link between poor radio reception in North Norfolk and low audience figures.

Tim Bishop explained that this was unlikely to have made a significant difference since it was unfortunately a continuing factor.

Poss agenda item: presentation by Digital UK representative.

3. Programme and service review

3.1 BBC Local Radio in the region

3.1.1 BBC Radio Suffolk

Assistant Editor Kerry Sillett gave a background briefing on the station. Sports output is particularly strong, reflecting the success of Ipswich Town. The 30th anniversary of its winning the FA Cup will be marked with a themed day, staged jointly with the *Evening Star*, recalling life in 1978 and using a BBC big screen for sporting moments and other archive material. A BBC bus is being hired for a month's PR activity; the station's website has over 32K unique users and there have been over 7K uses of the listen again facility, mainly for specialist programmes. Efforts are being made to serve the area's Eastern European community.

The Head of Region's report including an update on the audience performance of all the region's six radio stations. (Post Meeting: RAJAR have corrected a series of figures, notably adjusting Cambridgeshire's headline figures higher, and Three Counties lower). Discussion around a variety of issues notably the problems of serving Herts Beds and particularly Milton Keynes and Bucks with one station.

3.2 General issues

3.2.1 Urban versus rural coverage

All stations are sensitive to accusations of perceived bias: a variety of strategies are used to ensure fair coverage – though essentially these rely on the effectiveness of district reporters. Norfolk stages outside broadcasts in market towns; Suffolk has reporters in Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds; Suffolk and Essex also deploy their radio cars and outside broadcast facilities around their respective service areas.

3.2.2 Travel and weather news

Everyone agreed that this was an important and valued service that a cross-section of people rely on, especially when there is transport disruption or bad weather.

Members noted that they listen to more than one station as well as relying on RDS traffic update overrides on their car radios. A disadvantage of this can be that an inappropriate service may interrupt listening.

Most stations augment a basic Travel-link service with updates contributed directly by listeners. BBC Essex has a new travel reporter, illustrating that stations have a degree of autonomy in tailoring their coverage.

Members emphasised the importance of concise, precise information in a predictable order – e.g. the road, the location, traffic direction (e.g. clockwise or anti-clockwise on M25), and any alternatives.

Most people were satisfied with weather information.

3.2.3 Localness of presenters

All agreed this was a vital ingredient of BBC Local Radio. Knowledge must reflect changes (e.g. new communities) and be inclusive, strengthening the sense of place associated with local stations and reinforcing their role in the community. Many local radio presenters in the East were born in or closely associated with the areas they serve.

3.3. CSV and BBC Local Radio

This is an established means of involving the community, for example by dealing on air with listeners' queries. One member praised the service, which had been effective in providing key information.

A debate over future funding is continuing. Editors recognise the importance of providing a core of social action to support the station's on air content, and off air support and discussions continue over the best way to do that in the future.

BBC response

BBC local radio overall attracts a distinct audience that is not reached by other BBC services. It is a service valued by a group who can feel that little else is aimed specifically at them. For example, BBC Radio Suffolk is now attracting a more down-to-earth audience in a county that has a strong allegiance to local radio. Presenters are crucial in this – because their local knowledge demonstrates that they care about their localities. Coverage of the high tides, with their risk of coastal flooding, is local radio at its best, enabling people on the spot to describe exactly what they see. If approved, *BBC Local* would plug gaps in coverage, notably in South Essex, Bucks and Herts.

Local radio in the East - Chair's summary

In general, BBC local radio in the region is healthy, with all but BBC Three Counties having a clear identity and logical service area. It is a service valued by a particular demographic which can be overlooked by other BBC services. Locality and a sense of place are universal strengths of the stations, generally achieved by recruiting broadcasters who have a strong identity with their "patch". Weather and travel form the cornerstone of use because the information is local and relevant: BBC local stations in the east of the region came into their own for flood coverage, illustrating again their flexibility and the value people put on reliable coverage at times of crisis.

Public Purposes: High on citizenship, high on reflecting the region and unrecognised for considerable creativity by presenting and production staff (who sustain output with a fraction of the resources available elsewhere in the BBC). And high for emerging communications in view of the use listeners make of station websites.

BBC Local Radio has a strong foothold into communities throughout England, with broad awareness of people and potential beyond the confines of journalism. Arguably this is a resource that the BBC under-uses.

4. Burning issues

4.1 Regional news

Council request for regional news at weekends

4.2 Coverage of Suffolk murders trial

Council members ask why this looks the same – involving London-based reporters, despite lobbying from this council and assurances that things would be different.

5. Chair's reports

5.1 Audience Council England (ACE) meeting 18/19 January 08

Draft minutes were circulated.

Marcus Tinworth deputised for Clarke Willis on the second day. He found the presentations and discussions interesting and feels that ACE chairs are beginning to be effective.

5.2 Head of Region's report

This had been distributed.

6. Trust business

6.1 Complaints Framework Consultation – ACE Response

Clarke Willis has contributed to this. An ACE submission is being prepared.

6.2 Impartiality Review update

This was discussed at the recent ACE meeting and a submission has been forwarded to Prof Anthony King.

7. Outreach

7.1 Question Time in Cambridge

Chandi Hubert, Helen Hunt and Dominic O'Sullivan attended.

7.2 Entertainment.

The outline and questionnaire are at Appendix I

Clarke Willis, Annie Kiff-Wood and Dominic O'Sullivan are in the process of assembling appropriate family groups to fulfil the brief.

8. Audience priorities

8.1 – 2007/8

Members expressed annoyance at the way East Anglian towns were portrayed on the Network News during the Ipswich murder and Asian bird-flu coverage, simultaneously highlighting the profligacy of transporting London-based presenters to the localities, though their presence added no editorial value. Coverage of the Steven Wright murder trial still looks the same. Members appreciated the edition of *How We Built Britain* devoted to East Anglia, commenting that otherwise there is generally little reflection of the region to the UK.

8.2 - 2008/09

- Greater reflection of the region to itself and the rest of the UK in a broader range of genres
- Insistence on feedback over issues raised with ACE
- reduce workload by redressing balance between output review and other activities including consultation and strategy

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

9.1 Regional news

Council request for regional news at weekends

9.2 Coverage of Suffolk murders trial

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10 Farewells

Clarke Willis presented Richard Carter, Michael Deakin, Peter Lerner and Richard Walker with valedictory mementoes. He thanked them for their contributions to Council work. Joanna Hendricks' memento will be forwarded.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting:

Tuesday 8 April, 3.30pm for 4pm-6pm BBC Norwich

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.]

Discussion guide: Entertainment

Introduction

At its 18 January meeting, the Audience Council England agreed that the February round of RAC outreach activity should be on the subject of 'entertainment' and its importance to family groups, and that an ACE sub-group be set up to advise on the event format. The members were Dwain Neil, Julie Panagarry, Annette Priestley, and Clarke Willis.

A draft outline for the activity was prepared with the assistance of Anne Fendick, a member of the London RAC and a market researcher with wide experience of working with focus groups, and the Audiences Team in the Trust Unit. It was amended and agreed by the ACE sub-group on 4 February.

Objectives

To find out about:

- the range of entertainment programmes people watch
- who they watch them with
- why these programmes are important to them
- the kinds of entertainment they expect from the BBC
- what they expect from other broadcasters
- how people define entertainment

Target group

Two to three family units, made up of three generations* - children from 13 upwards**, parents to include single parents, grandparent - and with a wide social mix across the 12 RACs. The target group to be identified through council members' own networks.

* if difficulty in getting three generations together, the family groupings do not have to be related ie: parents and children from one family, grandparents from a different family (this can also be carried out at different times if necessary)

**with one or two exceptions where children are below 10 (this will capture the 20- something parent).

Venue

Family home, BBC premises, neutral venue as appropriate.

RAC member's role

- Introduces him/herself and describes the role
- Explains what this is all about: research about your entertainment choices and preferences from television, radio and online
- Outline the BBC's mission - to inform, educate and entertain
- Why we're doing this – for the BBC Trust, which works on behalf of the licence-payer and ensures BBC management fulfils audience expectation

Assumptions:

- RAC Chairs/members act as facilitators with support from PAMs
- Members selected either have relevant skills or there is time to cascade knowledge from recent PAMs' facilitation training

Event Format

- RAC welcome and introduction
- Divide family groups into three – children, parents, grandparents
- Consider and discuss questions
- Wrap up by Public Accountability Manager/Invite group to summarise during session
- Duration: at least 90 minutes

Question sequence (to each participant)

1. What are your top three favourite programmes? (TV, radio, online)
2. Who do you generally watch these programmes with?
3. [Optional: name any programmes you don't like.]
4. [Pick a different programme from each participant] You mentioned [X] - why do you like it? What does anyone else think? Do you agree/ disagree?

Could provide some figures/broader objectives around the value of entertainment to the BBC and what audiences are currently thinking.

5. What kinds of entertainment programmes do you expect from the BBC?
6. Why?
7. What kinds of entertainment programmes do you expect from other broadcasters?
8. Why?

Creative options – as a group devise your ideal TV schedule – discuss

9. How important are entertainment programmes to you?
10. Why?
11. And finally, how would you define 'entertainment' – what does the word mean to you?

Invite a summary from within the group, on one or two of the specific questions (Q 5; Q 9)