

Regional Audience Council for BBC East
Minutes of meeting
Tuesday 17 June 2008
Gonville Hotel, Cambridge

Council members present:

Jennifer Akpeki-Tyrell	Link to BBC Three Counties Radio
Melvina Dunnett	
Susan Hales	
Stuart Hoblely	Link to BBC Radio Suffolk
Chandi Hubert	
Helen Hunt	Link to BBC Radio Northampton; deputy chair
Annie Kiff-Wood	Link to BBC Radio Suffolk
Wendy Lees	Link to BBC Radio Norfolk
Joe Lewis	
Nicola Mullany	
Laura Mungovan	
Marcus Tinworth	Link to BBC Essex
Clarke Willis	Chair East RAC

Absent:

Dominic O'Sullivan	Link to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, deputy chair
Peter Short	

In attendance:

BBC

Tim Bishop	Head of Region BBC East
Laurence Culhane	Asst Editor, BBC Three Counties Radio
John Sparrow	Public Accountability Manager, East & London RACs

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

Clarke Willis welcomed everyone. He introduced Laurence Culhane, who attended for the review of BBC Three Counties Radio. Apologies were received from Dominic O'Sullivan and Peter Short.

2. Minutes of 8 April meeting

2.1 Minutes

Approved.

2.2 matters arising

2.2.1 Annie Kiff-Wood and Stuart Hoblely have volunteered to act as joint link to BBC Radio Suffolk.

2.2.2 Featuring the Council's work on regional television

John Sparrow outlined a potential opportunity linked with proposed young people's outreach.

3. Chair's reports

3.1 May Audience Council England meeting

An executive summary of the draft minutes was tabled.

Helen Hunt deputised for Clarke Willis. Reporting on the discussion with Roly Keating (Controller, BBC Two) about *The White Season* she felt that she now understood its purpose – but that the aim of the season had not been explained beforehand. It had apparently resulted from audience research that identified a voice not often heard – the white working-class.

The question of whether the BBC Trust inhibited BBC creativity was discussed. BBC Trust public value tests are reportedly necessary as a check [that licence-funded activity does not distort the marketplace] and are an integral part of Trust work. Referring specifically to "Local Video", there had also been some management delay in preparing the proposition.

Clarke Willis noted that he and another RAC chair will meet Helen Boaden (Director, BBC News) to discuss "parachuting in" network reporters. He will report to the July ACE meeting.

He and another RAC chair will also meet Fran O'Brien of the BBC Trust Unit to discuss the recent impartiality report.

If/when an exec summary of this report is available copies will be distributed. **Action JS**

3.2 Progress on issues raised with the BBC Trust and new issues raised

A BBC Trust document – "Progress since 2007" had been circulated and a summary of the new issues raised was tabled. There was no discussion.

3.3 Head of Region's report

Tim Bishop's report had been circulated.

Responding to comments about sports commentary in Essex he explained that the BBC had to balance its duty to get value for money for licence fee payers with the desire from the dedicated football fan to get commentary on their club. In an area with multiple clubs like Essex some commentary, together with the ability to provide news of every goal from every game, could provide an attractive programming option. Changes next season in Essex were influenced by the need to save money but that was far from the only reason and the BBC would keep in mind the needs of the audience as it reviewed the programming.

4. Burning issues

4.1 The effect of cuts in local radio on sports coverage

See response at 3.3 above

4.2 What is the explanation for the overspend on the BBC website?

BBC response: This is an accounting issue – spending by the BBC's Nations and Regions website team was not amalgamated with the main spend. New procedures will be introduced to overcome this.

4.3 Slow roll-out of DAB in the region – only three local stations are available via DAB, inhibiting take-up.

Action: JS to forward to ACE

5. BBC Trust business and feedback

5.1 Public Service Broadcasting phase one paper

This was distributed for members' information

5.2 Sir Michael Lyons' speech (about public service broadcasting) to Royal Society of Arts on 13 May

This was distributed for members' information

Members commented that the speech was informative and accessible, whereas the Paper was not.

6. Outreach

6.1 Entertainment – final report

This had been distributed for information

6.2 Outreach on children's services

The Council has been assigned the task of collecting opinion on BBC provision for under six children, via outreach with their parents at a rural playgroup or similar organisation.

Sue Hales and Stuart Hobleby have proposed suitable groups.

Action JS with Sue and Stuart

7. Programme and service review

7.1 Local radio in the region

Review of BBC Three Counties Radio

An overview written by Laurence Culhane (Asst Editor, BBC 3CR) had been distributed, together with a sampler CD. He explained the evolution from BBC Radio Bedfordshire to a station for three adjacent counties, facing competition from 38 other services – which had led to the all-speech option, thereby reducing competition.

The station achieved 20% reach but has fallen away from this in recent months. The whole schedule has been undergoing a process of change since October 2007 to move away from over-reliance on phone-in contributions. There are also ongoing efforts to raise the professionalism of the station.

Marketing and focus-groups have revealed a perception among listeners that BBC Local Radio is “for your parents” – which has led to a re-focus on individual experience – i.e. real stories. There will be a marketing campaign later in the summer. The station's aim will be to offer something unexpected and relevant.

Members' questions

- Are you able to monitor your three service areas separately?

BBC response: Yes, but only in comparison with commercial radio.

- How do you attract young people to BBC Local Radio?

BBC response: It's about thinking differently about the audience – for example Mick Jagger is now 65. We're looking at the “replenisher age”, by stressing LR's relevance to people's lifestyles. But it is a battle of perception, and we hope we'll be helped by the marketing campaign. There is also a value in having a presence at significant local/regional events.

- What about presenter choice?

BBC response: We are now seeking more mature people, with life experience.

Jennifer Akpeki-Tyrell (link to 3CR) felt that the new schedule was still bedding in, but localness has returned to the breakfast show, which is building an audience.

7.2 Highlights from other BBC Local Radio stations in the region

BBC Radio Norfolk

Wendy Lees commented on the characteristics of the station's presenters – local, passionate and interacting. She had enjoyed the Big Skills features and the Springwatch OB. The station had also marked St George's Day. There are new programmes on Sunday evenings.

BBC Essex

Marcus Tinworth said he found the station friendly and positive. It takes part in the *BBC Introducing* initiative, featuring new bands on Friday evenings. It has recently launched two campaigns – *Essex Proud* and car-sharing. He commented that the station would benefit from more mobile technology, so that spontaneous live contributions could be included. Match commentary will be selective in future.

BBC Radio Northamptonshire

Helen Hunt noted positive audience feedback, especially for morning programmes, despite a drop in listening. She reported the Managing Editor's concerns about local participation in BBC-wide initiatives and observed that the station was not available via DAB.

BBC Radio Cambridgeshire

Dominic O'Sullivan had submitted a report.

He feels that the station has become more approachable recently, a view supported by people he's talked to. He notes that the schedule has been refreshed, with longer sequences and weekend changes, including a new Sunday programme designed to develop presenting talent.

The BBC in Cambridge has a new building - Pembroke House just off Milton Road on the Business Park – from which broadcasting should commence in December 2009

BBC Radio Suffolk

Annie Kiff-Wood and Stuart Hobley have agreed to become the joint link to this station. They expect to meet Peter Cook, the Managing Editor, in the near future.

7.2 *Made In England*

Members were invited to review the edition produced jointly by BBC East and BBC West featuring the photographer Harry Cory-Wright's attempts to capture the essence of Norfolk and Bristol in two photographs.

Members' individual comments:

- I liked the idea but I found the programme confusing
- It was slow and dull and seemed to be more about photography than England. There was a false tension and the pictures seemed stereo-typical. He didn't understand urban life.
- I expected something more heroic and dynamic.
- I loved it – he was searching for the essence of England. I became involved in the programme and enjoyed it.
- The project was a good idea. He captured the essence of Norfolk.
- I found it boring. Good camera-work, though.
- Relevant to me, but a bit waffly – which is what my art group thought too.. More about the photographer than the project.
- Good movie photography, but I didn't warm to Henry.
- I found it engaging, but what was the point?
- I felt it took the photographer out of his comfort zone, which changed him.
- Wouldn't have been my viewing choice. [Henry] seemed miserable and held back by the camera he was using.

Though a couple of members had seen some trails most commented about the lack of trailing and that they only watched the programme because it was “homework”, its transmission time making it too late for normal viewing.

Some members also felt they had missed many of the additional ingredients listed in the briefing note distributed in advance.

BBC response:

Commenting on trailing, Tim Bishop noted that under current arrangements, [operated by BBC Marketing and Communications] a smaller number of programmes are trailed more often and that *Made In England* had low priority. The brief to cover two regions had been a difficult one. He felt in reviewing the programming members should keep in mind how many non-news programmes were being made portraying the region and consider how well they felt their region was being represented both to itself and to the nation. He confirmed the likelihood that the *Made In England* working title would be used again for further programming next April.

7.2.2 Chair’s summary

Reactions to the content of the Harry Cory Wright programme varied from ‘confusing’ and ‘waffly’ to the enjoyment of ‘a search for the essence of England’. However there was consensus that it was broadcast too late, that its overall purpose was unclear; that few would have known about it, and fewer would have stayed with it, if it had not been ‘homework’. Many felt the project had merit in principle and were interested in the range of other related content and activities, but had seen or heard little of them in normal media consumption.

Relevant Public Purposes – Education and learning, Creativity, Reflecting the UK

7.3 Children’s provision – *Big Toe Stories* (BBC7), *Go4It* (BBC Radio 4) and formal learning General comments

Some members felt that considering these services separately from those reviewed at the last meeting was confusing.

Few had heard of either of the radio programmes; one praised the interactive service, commenting only on the sound quality.

There were few comments:

Go4It and *Big Toe Stories*

- Too long – a bit like homework, but some appreciation of the stories.

Go4It

- I have an aversion to the “cool” presenter
- I thoroughly enjoyed it

7.3.1 Chair’s summary

Members were puzzled at being asked to consider these strands of children’s output after having commented at length about CBeebies and CBBC at the last meeting. No-one was aware of either. Those who commented felt that *Go4It* was too long-winded for the intended audience but there was appreciation for some of the stories.

8. Any other business

8.1 Meeting schedule and timing

There was an inconclusive discussion about this. The next meeting is at Television Centre, London, and following the pattern agreed in April, the November one in Norwich unless the date is assigned to outreach, as in 2007.

8.2 ACE website

Clarke Willis expressed his dissatisfaction with this, compared to those of other councils.

Action: JS has alerted Louise Hall, Head of Governance & Accountability England.

8.3 Meeting paperwork and content for review

Clarke Willis said that papers and agenda should be despatched in good time. He also wanted to know what had been nominated for review at the next meeting.

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

The importance of informing members about content for review with sufficient notice.

10. Date, time and place of next meeting:

Tuesday 12 September 08 Television Centre London W12 7RJ

Tour 11am onwards, lunch 1pm, meeting 2.15-4.15pm

Ends

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.]