

Regional Audience Council, BBC East Midlands

Venue: BBC Nottingham, Broadcasting House, London Road,
Wednesday 6 February 2008

Minutes

Members present:

Phillippa Denton – Chair	(PMD)	Paul Burgin	(PB)
Katharine Stewart	(KS)	Nigel Hallam	(NH)
Jeanne Nicholls	(JN)	Guy Fennimore	(GF)
Glennis Taylor	(GT)	Paul Dickerson	(PD)
Sarah McCann	(SM)	Tracey Davenport	(TD)
Andy Zadora-Chrzastowski	(AZ-C)	Pip Ostell	(PO)
Samson Aye Ake	(SA)		

BBC Staff:

Aziz Rashid, HRLP	(AZ)
Carol Webster, Public Accountability Manager	(CW)

Apologies: None

1. Chair's Introduction and Welcome:

The chair welcomed members to the meeting

2. Minutes of previous meeting:

The minutes of the last meeting were adopted as a true record.

3. Matters arising:

There were none.

3. Programme & Service Review:

Review of Local Radio across the year:

The Chair invited the local radio link members to expand on their reports which had been circulated with the minutes. Guy noted that there were some amendments to his Radio Nottingham report which he asked CW to send out to members again.

Action: GF/CW

In the wider discussion:

Radio Nottingham: Members felt that the recent changes had been good and justified, that the lunch time phone ins were better than they had been, and the 40th birthday celebrations had been brilliant.

Radio Derby: Although there had been some initial reservations, the change at breakfast had been positive. The feeling generally was that the music output had changed and now appealed to a younger audience. PMD asked if there had been a policy change. AR explained that there is a playlist of familiar music between 9am and 4pm each day aimed at the target audience (aged between 44 and 55 years of age).

Radio Leicester: Jeanne added to her report by saying that she had not had a face to face meeting with the managing editor for some time and PB echoed this. GF said that he made a point of making contact.

Guy reminded members of the output from the websites linked to the radio stations. Paul said that the Derby Sports webpage had changed and now redirected visitors to the national website. He asked why this was as he felt that consequently the site was now used less often. AR explained that there is now one person covering sports for Derby, Nottingham and Leicester on the website and that this means the previews or match reports and analysis for all premier league matches are done from Birmingham. The lack of local influence is regretted but is unavoidable.

Feedback on impact on audiences:

It was agreed that local radio comes into its own in the event of a disaster/ emergency situation, as highlighted during the floods last year. The value of this service is demonstrated by the strength of listeners' reactions in these circumstances.

Members liked an occasional cross over with TV which brings a face to the voice and cited the John Holmes walks series shown on *East Midlands Today*. AR explained that there is a policy of collaboration across radio and TV. It was then proposed that there could be longer snippets on EMT featuring interesting aspects of local radio – GF suggested a half hour show for TV.

Members prefer consistency in presentation and are quick to notice if illness or holidays results in many changes of presenter. There were also some more detailed complaints.

[Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]

Chair's summary:

Members gave positive feedback on the recent schedule changes and noted improvements. They felt that local radio fulfilled its remit as a public service broadcaster in the event of disasters and emergencies as highlighted last year during the floods.

BBC Comments:

See above comments

4. Chair's Report:

- Audience Council England

PMD gave feedback on the ACE meeting in Windsor in January and thanked members for their input to the Impartiality Review. Members had received the draft minutes prior to the meeting and were invited to ask questions or to comment. She explained the MACE review and said that there would be feedback at a later date.

The 8pm news bulletin was discussed; there were differences of opinion with many members saying it was a waste of time, too quick, too fast, and that they were not clear what the purpose was. One member felt that Channel Five does it better and others that it needed to be trailed as many people did not know it existed.

AR explained that the bulletin was piloted in the West Midlands in spring 2007, in different formats. A lot of audience research was done during that time. The aim was to reach people who do not normally watch any news at all by giving them the headlines whilst not alienating mainstream viewers of BBC news. This had not been publicised so as not to turn people off. Research since transmission began shows that it is slightly less appreciated than other BBC news bulletins but is quite liked by 16 – 44 year olds at whom it is aimed specifically.

The Chair asked for feedback on the Trust's six year plan which Alison Hastings talked about at the RAC meeting in November and requested that any feedback should be emailed directly to PMD.

- Head of Region's Report:

The Head of Region's report had been circulated. AR talked to his report, and said that it had been an amazing year for local radio. He mentioned particularly the Radio Leicester Ruby Rainbow appeal which raised over £600k.

The RAJAR figures were good for Nottingham and satisfactory for Radio Leicester but Radio Derby had had some set backs.

GF referred to the New York Festival award achieved by the Tagging Special programme from Inside Out, which had featured in Island Life. The Council recorded its congratulations and noted how rarely regional television is nominated for an international award.

- Recruitment of new members:

CW updated members on the recruitment of new members. There are four vacancies to be filled, replacing three retiring members and Arshie Mushtaq who had tendered her resignation for personal reasons. The nominations would go to ACE in March for ratification.

5. Trust Business:

The Complaints Framework had been sent to members and PMD asked for comments to feed back to ACE. PB reported that he had watched a news item that covered this issue on Saturday, saying how difficult it is to complain about a specific programme. PMD said that this was covered in the framework and that once the draft is approved by the Trust this should change. GF suggested that there should be a review a year or so after gaining the Trust's approval to assess how the framework is operating.

PMD reported that all councils had made submissions to the Impartiality Review. Professor Tony King is now writing his report and it is understood that councils will see this in draft.

6. Annual Report 07-08 (DRAFT):

- The following key issues including 2007-08 Audience Priorities were identified:

1. More regional portrayal: There have been many programmes, both drama and factual (How we Built Britain, Saving Planet Earth) which had been complemented by regional opt outs. However there is a strong perception that since *The One Show* moved to London, much of its regional 'feel' had gone.
2. Delivering the first Public Purpose – Sustaining Citizenship etc: The Abolition of the Slave Trade season had helped to achieve this. AR commented that programme makers aim to achieve this purpose through news and current affairs programming across the spectrum including local radio.
During this discussion JN made the point that a connection is made when the local issue is brought to the fore following a national story (Margaret Beckett had done this on Radio Derby at the time of the controversy over Conservative MP Derek Conway's expenses).
3. RACs regaining the balance: There was a discussion about the balance between assessments of service licences and programme review. A member commented that the former LACs had devoted 90% of their time to programme reviews and provided feedback on programmes they had engaged with but this emphasis had significantly changed of late. It was also queried how much RAC discussions impacted on strategic plans. There was a consensus that new members

needed to be aware at the outset what is expected of them and this should form part of the recruitment and induction process. The council considered if it should be split into two mini RACs with members choosing an area of interest, but concluded that the whole council input was important.

- Identification of 2008-09 Audience Priorities:

Shared Priorities

1. Reprioritisation: losing the BBC buses was a retrograde step as they brought the BBC into the community and were a means of connecting with hard to reach groups. A valuable resource and local ambassador for the BBC had been lost and their impact would need to be replaced in some other way.
2. Coverage of devolved issues by Network, and representation outside the M25: The BBC is still a London centric organisation and needs to represent the regions better. It was felt that national radio was possibly better at achieving this (for example the Food Programme and Woman's Hour on Radio 4).
3. Extension of DAB coverage: One member expressed a concern about whether this was proceeding. AR felt that this was taken out of context following the deputy chair of Ofcom joking in a speech about whether it would be around for very long.

Priorities for 2008-09

It was agreed that the previous year's priorities were ongoing and there should be further accountability for local audience forums. The RAC should note their activities as a priority.

7. Outreach:

The next RAC outreach event was discussed. This will be targeted at families and will focus on their perception of entertainment programming. Members were asked to use their networks to source families to take part and to contact CW, who was asked to circulate the background brief. The activities need to be completed by the end of March.

Action: ALL/CW

9. Key Issues for ACE:

There were no major issues to report to ACE, but members made the following observations:

East Midlands Today: News presenters were looking smarter and wondered if this is a policy change.

There were comments on the new weather man with members divided on how they feel about him.

[Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]

AR said there had been a lot of feedback about him and 9 out of 10 of the comments were favourable. One member thought he was a breath of fresh air.

The shrinking of the credits at the end of many programmes annoys members who would prefer to see them on a full screen. PMD said that this is an ongoing issue for all councils.

One member had had audience feedback of dismay particularly from teenage viewers at the killing of Maid Marian in *Robin Hood*. Many were hoping this was a "bad dream" plot device.

On national weather bulletins (after the 6pm and 10pm news), members found the country's "creased" appearance on screen extremely off putting. AR said that this will change when they move to a new studio. Members asked if an East Midlands city could feature on the weather charts. The *One and Only* on Saturday Night was criticised as one of the worst pieces of TV one member could recall.

One member asked if the community correspondent scheme started two years ago is still operating. AR replied that the community correspondents are used as a resource rather than to front a story, and that editorially they are felt to be useful contacts in certain circumstances.

TD welcomed *The Politics Show* being available on iPlayer, and is now watching other regions' *Politics Show* as a result. He now used iPlayer instead of Sky+, and felt it would be good to see more local / regional programmes on this medium. However some other members are still wary of using iPlayer due to fears that the software carries viruses!

8. Burning Issues / Any Other Business:

PMD thanked Jeanne, Paul and Guy for their valuable input to the RAC, and presented them with a token from the Trust.

Each member gave a short response:

Guy recalled that nine years ago he had heard a trail on local radio and joined the LAC. There had been extraordinary changes during this time for the Council and at a historic period for the BBC. He thanked BBC for allowing him to have time on the council.

PB said it had been thrilling time, and felt the BBC underestimates how much of a thrill it is for a member of the public to be involved. The whole thing has been a fabulous experience.

For JN it had been a privilege to be involved, and she felt that the RAC is too much of a well kept secret. It had been fascinating seeing how another large organisation works.

On behalf of the BBC AR expressed his appreciation to the retiring members.

CW thanked the members on behalf of Alison Hastings, Trustee for England and Louise Hall. She reiterated Louise's comments at the meeting she had attended at the end of last summer when she thanked the members for helping in the transitional period and for their service as linked members in the new structure.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 9 April 2008, 5.30 refreshments

Venue: BBC Radio Leicester, St Nicholas Place, Leicester

Discussion/ Review for April:

- The White Season: *White Girl*
 The Poles Are Coming
- Service Licences:
 CBBC, CBeebies

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.]