

**Regional Audience Council for BBC East Midlands  
Venue: BBC Nottingham**

**Wednesday 12 November 2008, 6.00pm**

**Present:**

|   |       |                   |      |
|---|-------|-------------------|------|
| Phillippa Denton – RAC Chair                  | (PMD) | Katharine Stewart | (KS) |
| Tracey Davenport – Deputy Chair               | (TD)  | Sarah McCann      | (SM) |
| Nigel Hallam                                  | (NH)  | Jonathan English  | (JE) |
| Glennis Taylor                                | (GT)  | Lillian Nevins    | (LN) |
| Del Shorley                                   | (DS)  | Paul Dickerson    | (PD) |
| Aziz Rashid – HRLP                            |       |                   | (AR) |
| Carol Webster – Public Accountability Manager |       |                   | (CW) |

**1. Welcome, introductions and apologies**

PMD welcomed members to the last meeting of the year.

Apologies: Pip Ostell

**2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising**

**Matters arising:**

Weather map: Assurances had been received from the Head of Weather that locations in the East Midlands would feature from time to time. Members were asked to monitor this and feed back to PMD.

Chairman's visit to Leicester: some members had asked for feedback from Sir Michael Lyons' visit to Leicester earlier in the year; the Chair stated that there would not be an official report.

DAB: to be raised in Chair's report/ ACE meeting minutes later on the agenda.

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

**Feedback from the Salford Seminar:**

PMD thanked NH for his report and asked LN if she wanted to add anything. LN stated that she found the day very informative and useful. NH added that it had been helpful to meet members from other councils as well as participating in the business of the event.

PMD felt the seminar went a long way to answering some of the questions raised.

**3. Programme & Service Review**

**Losing It** stimulated a wide ranging debate. Several members had found that two programmes were unnecessarily long, disjointed and lacking in content; the issue could have been satisfactorily dealt with in one. One member criticised the pace of the filming, saying that the images were laboured. *[Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]* The presenter demonstrated that anger crosses boundaries and affects all communities. It was felt that the presenter had been used in the hope of achieving a comparison with Stephen Fry's struggle with bipolar disorder. *[Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]* Some parts of the programme, notably the interview with the nurse, had been very moving but these strong elements had then been diminished by other,

more trivial aspects. [Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]. However it was acknowledged that the choice of presenter and contributors was geared to getting the message to a wider audience.

Other programmes in the *Headroom* series, notably *How Mad are You* and *Cracking Up* were praised as excellent for giving different perspectives on mental health. The season dealt with difficult issues, raised awareness and helped to demystify a problem which was common but little discussed. The supporting website was also commended and it would be useful to know what would happen as a result of the programmes.

Members concluded that the overall reason for reviewing this programme, namely to assess whether the Public Purpose of Sustaining Citizenship could be met by programming types other than news and current affairs, was answered emphatically and several commented that it was essential that this purpose should cover other genres. However, *Losing It* had not been the best choice to illustrate this.

**Feedback on pre match coverage from Radio Leicester:** Some members had listened to the pre match coverage as requested by the programme producer. The consensus was that it was not very exciting, but it did give a feel for the match.

- **Local Radio Link Members Reports**

The link members were invited to talk to or add to their reports.

**Derby:** NH gave an update of his report submitted on 17 October. Since then he had met the Managing Editor and had been informed of the final sums raised by the Money Mountain and Children in Need appeals. He also commented on the Remembrance Day coverage which had highlights from the Indian and African Caribbean communities.

**Nottingham:** The report was tabled and JE talked through some of the highlights which included a tour of BBC Nottingham and the Big Night Out. He had met the Managing Editor and had made some suggestions on how audiences could contribute using the website.

The HRLP explained that there is a web team who develop the web policy for the BBC as a whole. He said that all sites were being revamped over time. Bristol had been completed recently and he suggested that members look at that to see what the local sites would soon be like.

JE also said that he had set up a Facebook site to solicit feedback on Radio Nottingham and that he had already had comments. One contributor, Mark Delamere, had started a discussion on new music on Radio Nottingham. The HRLP agreed to check the RAJAR figures for listeners to *The Beat* in the 16-24 age group and provide them at the next meeting. **Action: AR**

**Leicester:** DS tabled his report, the highlight of which was attendance at the Open Weekend. At this event, he had obtained many comments from listeners which had been passed on to the Managing Editor. Most were about Bill Maynard's sacking earlier in the year, and about *Silver Street* which did not appear to be popular although listening figures for the programme's time slot are up.

**Remembrance Coverage:** Most members had watched the programmes and felt the coverage by Dominic Heal and Ben Jackson was excellent; they congratulated EMT on this initiative. There was a discussion about the various programmes and events held, which had engaged most members. One commented on a programme about two young brothers who didn't know what the poppy signified. They were taken back to where their great grandfather had lived and given an insight into his life.

The use of the website, blogs and text messages was innovative as was a team going out to venues such as Nottingham Castle and doing searches for people who found out amazing information about

their families. The website information was very good and gave great insight; the only negative comment was that the audio on website was of poor quality.

One member who grew up in the USA said there was no focus there on WWI. He found the website engaging with some of the timeline explanations helping to enlighten him. Text messages from the website to mobiles about the soldiers' experiences were informative. He wondered if a contribution from the fee charged could go to the British Legion.

#### **4. Chair's Report**

ACE minutes: PMD updated members on the meeting that took place in Bristol and about the changes in the management structure of Nations and Regions presented by Mark Byford. As indicated in the minutes, ACE had great concerns about this development, especially coming so soon after the impartiality review. PMD circulated a letter sent to the Trust Chairman which summarised ACE's position.

The RAC was also concerned that, by not having an executive for English Regions with the same director-level status as the other Nations, England's influence and importance was diminished. PD felt that having to go through the Director of News could water down any concerns which might not be seen as a priority. Members were also concerned that this might be in anticipation of any Ofcom conclusions from the PSB review. The Chair undertook to keep members fully informed of how this matter progressed.

**Action: PMD**

There was an update on technology where Radio Derby's lack of DAB presence was raised. The Chair reported that everyone was aware of the issue, which is caused by financial constraints. Members urged that the refurbishing / updating of Radio Derby should remain a priority and some suggested that executive salaries should be reduced in order to increase funds available to refurbish the local radio stations and ensure continued service.

- **Head of Region's Report:** The HRLP's report had been circulated. AR highlighted the awards gained at the RTS and the Gillards. The RAC congratulated all concerned.

#### **6. Trust Business**

PSB review part 2: The Chair thanked TD for contributing on behalf of the East Midlands RAC. Papers were circulated with the minutes.

TD commented that volunteers were requested from each region and comments were collected via a message board; he felt that this was an effective use of technology to collate members' thoughts and comments. A unified response had been put together by Stuart Paterson (ACE member), and it was agreed that CW would email this to all members.

**Action: CW**

#### **7. Outreach:**

KS, LN and CW gave feedback on the recent outreach event at Top Valley School held on 10 November. It was designed to get young people between ages 13 – 16 years to express what they wanted from the BBC. The young people were invited to present this in any format they wished. All RACs were staging similar events which were recorded to form a compilation DVD to go to the BBC Trust as part of the consultation for young audiences ending on 16 December 2008. Before the event took place, there were meetings with various teachers at the school and some of the young people taking part, as well as telephone and email contact.

On the day Katharine and Lillian facilitated the event and hosted a question and answer session. Each of the young people who took part will be given a copy of the DVD. The DVD will be shown at the December ACE meeting and at the RAC meeting in January.

## 8. **Burning Issues/Any Other Business:**

- **Recruiting New Members:** The RAC is currently recruiting for 6 vacancies, terms to start in April 2009.
- **Little Dorritt:** SM made various comments about the programme based on her own perceptions and those of her network. The overall quality of the series was excellent and highly enjoyable. She queried why the series was being broadcast in two 30 minute slots a week and asked if it was done in this way because the story had been written in instalments by Dickens. Nevertheless she and members of her network felt this was unsatisfactory and would rather have a one hour episode each Sunday. There had also been a number of schedule changes which were unhelpful in following the story.
- **Merlin:** SM commented on an inaccurate image in the programme; a character living in a hut (Merlin's mother) had been shown as being able to read and write but realistically at that time only very limited groups such as monks would have been literate.
- **Ross and Brand:**

Unsurprisingly, this matter provoked a variety of opinions.

- BBC Management and the Trust had reacted too slowly to the situation and should have apologised sooner. It was unclear why, as a pre-recorded programme, its potential for controversy had not been recognised.
- One member pointed out that the obscene phone call was a criminal offence and asked how this was being dealt with.
- The issue of swearing, especially the 'F' word, had caused great offence to some. Several members said that the BBC should have higher standards than other broadcasters in not having swearing on its output. Jonathan Ross was as much at fault as Russell Brand and should also resign or be dismissed.
- However others, either personally or on behalf of their networks, spoke in defence of Brand and Ross. Their controversial output had itself been an attraction and fans of the show, also licence fee payers, had lost out by its removal. The BBC should include cutting edge material and should not be pressured by a media outcry into restricting this.
- One member said the RAC network gave the Trust a readily available source of contact with audiences and should have consulted them. Other members agreed.
- There was disappointment that other, more significant, news became buried by the furore and that it was important to keep a sense of proportion.

Meeting ended at 8.20pm

9. **Date of next meeting:** Wednesday 7 January 2009  
At BBC Broadcasting House, Nottingham

### **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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/foi) for further explanation.]*