

Regional Audience Council for BBC London

Meeting : Wednesday 16 April 2008
6th Floor Conference Room
BBC Television Centre London W12

MINUTES

Present

Patricia Adley
Steve Ashton
Paul Chapman
Michael Davenport Acting chair for this meeting
Elizabeth Heath
Ivor John
Jonathan Kewley
Christiana Ominiyi
Emma Palmer
Amir Shah
Tasneem Saiki
Shelley Ward Link to BBC London 94.9

BBC:

Michael Macfarlane – Executive Editor BBC London
John Sparrow, Public Accountability Manager

Absent, Christine Fanthome, Jennifer Vidal, Alexandra Tham

1. Chair's welcome, introductions and apologies

Michael Davenport welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Christine Fanthome and Jennifer Vidal. There was no word from Alexandra Tham.

2. Minutes: 6 February 2008 meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed. There were no matters arising.

3. Programme review

3.1 White Season

3.1.1 *White Girl*

Many members saw this as the tale of a dysfunctional family with supportive neighbours, a journey of discovery for the child and the influence she exerts over her mother, with a predictable end. Questions of race and the extremes of behaviour (violence, tranquillity) were subordinate scene-setters, calling into question the relevance of this production to the Season. The range of opinion included –

- “Brilliant drama...challenged preconceptions”
- “Provocative, but offensive towards the end”
- “Showed a more sympathetic and positive side of Muslims”

- “Bit predictable – Disney-like. BBC propaganda. The ‘right’ message”
- “Didn’t particularly enjoy, but a useful insight”
- “Moved by it, and significant in view of current fear of other faiths and cultures”
- “I enjoyed it – interested by the way two cultures interacted – and didn’t find the end predictable”

3.1.2 *All White In Barking*

- “The premise was good, but it was slow...and observational rather than investigative”
- “Not like my experience of mixing with people of other races”
- “Did reflect views that I frequently hear, especially perceptions by older white people [who are] frightened to air their views”
- “It delved into attitudes and enabled people to speak”
- “It was good that the programme revealed common preconceptions. It could have gone deeper”
- “Lots of truth, but a bit patronising about ageing and loss of community. It ridiculed ignorance rather than revealing views”

3.1.3 The trail

Hard-hitting for some, over-dramatised for others. Misleading because its promise of controversy was not fulfilled.

“It seemed like a Channel 4 trail”

3.1.4 The season as a whole

Members’ comments included -

- “‘Poor’ compared to Abolition season or the Panorama : White Flight [we reviewed]”
- “Not sufficiently hard-hitting – didn’t push people for answers”
- “Thought-provoking – and needing a follow-up involving younger generations”
- “Gave no explanation for the current situation”
- “The demise of the working men’s club [*Last Orders*] has nothing to do with immigration”
- “Valuable. The *Rivers of Blood* programme was the best”
- “BBC brave to do this season”

3.1.3 Chair’s summary

White Girl was variously moving, enjoyable and predictable, more about dysfunction and normality than race. Many felt its conclusion predictable, recognising merit only in some performance and characterisation. *All White In Barking* succeeded in encouraging its participants to express publicly what is often aired in private, but it took over-long to do so and seemed observational rather than investigative.

Awareness of the season had been achieved by a trailer which some had found racist. It had suggested high potential, the likelihood of engaging and thought-provoking programmes, promises not fulfilled by the programmes watched. Some members made adverse comparison with the edition of *Panorama* called *White Flight*, which they felt encapsulated issues more clearly and succinctly. However, there was praise for *Rivers of Blood*, the programme on Enoch Powell, for its insight into his character. Programmes in the season were considered educational but only partly fulfilled the Citizenship purpose. Creativity was confined to the drama, with only a partial reflection of regions to the UK. Nonetheless, most people felt the BBC was right to commission challenging, topical programmes in this vein.

3.2 service licence review

3.2.1 CBeebies

Parents described this as ‘the best of the bunch’ for the target age-group, providing a range of engaging programmes that offer informal learning. Games on the related website were also considered excellent and the correlation between TV, online and interactivity is coherent. Presenters seem ‘normal’ and though there was concern about the age of some programmes, their repetition seemed to be acceptable. Trust is a key attribute – responsible programming free of advertisements, relieving parents from monitoring responsibilities. One member was surprised by the invitation to create an online avatar, because, notwithstanding any controls in this environment, it familiarises children with social networking sites without sensitising them to any risks (cf *Facebook*).

3.2.2 CBBC

Parents observed that children at the upper end of the target age range avoided this service because it wasn’t ‘cool’, especially by comparison to American imports, notably *High School Musical*, which, though high-energy, is highly moral. The channel has little within its programming to attract and engage much beyond age seven, except *Tracey Beaker* which is appreciated more by girls. It’s as though the channel is unaware that children are more adult than expected – and choose more sophisticated offerings, such as cartoons. The youngest member reported that her younger brothers felt it was either too girly or too safe.

3.3 BBC London 94.9

Shelley Ward has received the local radio link role summary but has only recently been introduced to David Robey, the station’s Managing Editor. She is therefore not yet confident about how best to frame her reports. **Action JS**

4. Chair’s reports

4.1 ACE meeting March 2008

Minutes of the meeting were circulated and an executive summary distributed later.

4.2 Executive Editor’s report

Mike Macfarlane tabled his report, apologising for its lateness. It had been a busy couple of weeks.

Highlights include

- Special programme on the Torch Relay for BBC One
- London Mayoral election – debate programme
- exclusive story on Ken Livingstone’s private life
- London 94.9 London Marathon coverage
- HOME initiative exposing young people in Tower Hamlets to the creative industries.

Mike invited comment on his decision to run the story about Ken Livingstone’s private life – which had prompted many complaints.

The range of views included

- “..only if it reflects on his role, otherwise it’s salacious”
- “He has a right to a private life”
- “is it news? [in a family values context] it seems gratuitous”
- “Public figures are not entitled to a private life”

- “the news doesn’t necessarily affect his ability to do the job – Livingstone can’t be seen to be whiter than white”

Mike explained that the BBC has strict guidelines and that he had therefore referred the decision to BBC Editorial Policy. His justification for running the story was that the election is based on personality and at the time, Boris Johnson was doing less well among female voters. He therefore felt it was relevant – and he noted that Ken Livingstone had neither confirmed nor denied the story.

4.2.2 Questions and comments

4.2.2.1 Why the HOME initiative when the BBC is cutting jobs?

Response – It gives insight into an industry and an opportunity to acquire skills in the creative industries.

4.2.2.2 60-second films

One member had enjoyed these and commended them.

4.2.2.3 inaccurate captions

One member noted that this seemed to be occurring ‘quite often’.

4.2.2.4 Is the *One Show* ongoing?

Response – Yes.

5. Trust business

6.1 BBC Trust draft work plan

This was distributed for information

6.2 MACE review

A summary document was distributed. This is an initiative conducted among the four Audience Councils in the UK to Maximise Audience Council Effectiveness. Its aim is to develop and share best practice throughout the Councils.

6.3 RAC Support Review

In the wake of the MACE review, the support structure and staffing for Regional Audience Councils (RACs) in England is to be reviewed. The review process will involve a consultant attending a representative selection of RAC meetings and inviting some Council members to comment on procedures and practice.

A summary document will be distributed with the next meeting agenda.

6. Outreach

6.1 Entertainment

Thanks to Ivor and Christiana for hosting groups who took part in this outreach.

A copy of the executive summary will be distributed with the next meeting agenda.

6.2 Feedback from BBC Three re Young People’s outreach

Response from Danny Cohen, Controller, BBC Three, was distributed for information.

6.3 Children’s services

The next round of outreach is likely to take place during June and focus on responses of children to a questionnaire about BBC services provided for them. Details will be finalised during May so that expectations of RAC members can be communicated. Imaginative ways of engaging with younger audience members are expected.

7. Burning issues / any other business

7.1 Rights to BBC commissions

One member strongly disapproved of contractual arrangements that allow independent production companies to retain rights to programmes commissioned from them by the BBC, which takes all the initial risk. Once broadcast, the independent company is then free to exploit other outlets for the production without any benefit to the BBC.

[This arrangement is enshrined in current legislation]

7.2 The National Lottery

One member felt that this has lost sight of John Major's original objectives and seeks an investigative programme to explore the current operation and where the money now goes.

8. Key points from this meeting, for ACE

Could the RAC be featured on BBC London, to show Londoners that there is a group looking after their interests?

9. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 10 June

Venue: Marylebone High Street (room TBC) 6.15 for 6.30-8.45pm

11. Key topics:

- *Made In England* – review of regional programmes to mark St George's Day
- Public Service Broadcasting (comment on current Ofcom review)

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.]