

Regional Audience Council for BBC London

Meeting : Monday 6 April 2009
The Media Gallery
BBC Marylebone High Street

MINUTES

Present

Darren Bray
Michael Davenport
Christine Fanthome Chair
Janet Gompertz
Pam Grant
Tony Hazeldine
Ivor John
Marie Kemplay
Jonathan Kewley
Emma Palmer
Shelley Ward Link to BBC London 94.9
Jennifer Vidal

BBC:

Antony Dore – Editor, Television News BBC London
Michael Macfarlane – Executive Editor BBC London
John Sparrow, Public Accountability Manager

Absent: Steve Ashton, Elizabeth Heath, Tasneem Saiki

1. Chair's welcome, introductions and apologies

Christine Fanthome welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the five new members. Steve Ashton had given apologies for absence.

2. Minutes: 2 March 2009 meeting and matters arising

Copies had been distributed
They were approved as a true record.
No matters arising
Christine Fanthome notified one AOB item – identifying discussion points specific to the London council.

3. Reports

3.1 March ACE meeting
Draft minutes had been circulated.

Christine drew attention to Director of News Helen Boaden's comments about the value she places on viewer feedback. Also comments from Gareth Tuck who led the BBC Trust consultation on BBC services for children, highlighting the importance of qualitative feedback, for example parents' views that CBeebies is a safe place for [their] children.

Christine also reported her meeting with Dave Gordon, BBC Sport's Head of Events, who will be in overall charge of Olympics coverage. She will ask him to attend a meeting when the scope of Olympics coverage is a little clearer.

3.2 Head of Region's report

Mike Macfarlane tabled his report, and highlighted -

- Television audiences of 1.5 million during recent snow, rewarding the considerable effort made by BBC London staff
- An investigative report revealing that a key figure in Albanian intelligence lived in Fulham.
- A European Journalist of the year award for Gareth Furby
- Highest ever audiences for BBC London 94.9
- Several *Inside Out* stories featured elsewhere and the programme had received good co-operation from Moorfields Eye Hospital over the bionic eye report.
- BBC London is now officially part of BBC News. There are already increasing signs of co-operation, e.g. over G20 Summit coverage.

3.2.1 member's questions

How are viewing and listening figures produced?

- Television data is collected by BARB and used by all broadcasters. Some 4500 TV sets in a carefully chosen range of households are monitored, with data downloaded overnight via phone line. BBC television also has a supporting system, The Pulse, which enables another group of viewers to detail their viewing on a website, including overall ratings (Appreciation Indices) for each programme and rating news stories. BBC Radio joins with all other radio broadcasters to use RAJAR, a paper diary based system on which listeners note the programmes they have chosen

Does BBC Parliament include coverage of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and proceedings at Stormont?

- Some is included in BBC Parliament output – but otherwise coverage is available on BBC Two in these nations.

3.3 The Accountability Year – work plan schematic

The aim of this is to show the timing of RAC and ACE meetings, identify reporting and feedback and reflect the influence of the BBC Trust work plan when it is published.

4. Trust business and feedback for information

Papers had been distributed.

They were noted.

5. Programme and service review

5.1 BBC London 94.9FM

Shelley Ward's report had been circulated.

She highlighted –

- Changes to evening and weekend schedules with effect from 6 April. – including Tony Blackburn on Sundays, playing soul music
- The station's aim to attract more women aged 40+
- Vanessa Feltz OBs re credit crunch
- BBC London is the only BBC local radio station broadcasting throughout the night, to match London-based commercial stations.
- London 94.9 will be covering the London Marathon

Boris Johnson had been interviewed by Vanessa, but the encounter was perceived as lightweight.

5.1.1 Member's question

How will the station deal with the Mayor's apparent unwillingness to engage with issues?

BBC response There is generally some difficulty arranging an appearance, though "no-go" areas are never agreed. If this apparently flippant approach persists, listeners are likely to form their own conclusions and may express them at the ballot box.

5.2 Regional Television News

Members were invited to watch the editions of BBC London News at 6.30 on Wednesday 1 and Thursday 2 April as the basis for discussion. The news on these two days was dominated by the G20 summit.

Individual comments:

- The protest was made too much of (x 2)
- I wanted London-specific stories – e.g. I wore a suit to work and sensed negative reactions. I was looking for more texture.
- I appreciated the depth of coverage – but what else was happening in London?
- I saw other stories, for example Spurs' new ground, the body parts item, the BSG discussion, the tour of Winford House (US Ambassador's residence) and Boris Johnson under scrutiny [for London's ability to cope with recent snow]
- I compared the programme with ITV: BBC London introduced public opinion, and I appreciated presentation from City Hall.
- It looked as though the programme was "set up" for more riots than actually happened. I felt there was better balance on the second day
- Programme informative, with too much focus on protest – though this was much less than on Sky
- I wanted to hear from city workers – people in suits
- I hoped there would be an aerial shot to show the scale of the protest

Is the range of stories right?

Individual comments:

- Personal stories help make sense of the credit crunch
- There's a risk of too much [coverage of] the recession
- The amount of coverage may be making the recession worse
- I thought Michele Obama's visit to an Islington school was an ideal local story
- Some stories lack sufficient depth – e.g. river cleaning: why did it need cleaning; homeless man – how did he become homeless?
- Entertainment London life isn't reflected sufficiently – e.g. a review of London arts (cf Time Out)
- I appreciate the mix of light and shade and recognise the importance of the key story of the day.
- I look for the human side of news.

TV Editor's response re G20 coverage and other points

The coverage was carefully thought out, based on experience and actuality of previous G8 summits, all of which had included violent protest. As well as the outcome of the summit, the task was to examine how police handled events. Responding to specifics, local authorities and others not in the banking sector had advised their staff to dress down in view of awareness that people in suits would be targeted as bankers. The security services had established a no-fly zone over central and east London, preventing aerial shots. The G20 event had been building for so long that no other significant news (e.g. announcements of Government policy) was planned, since it was unlikely to be given much attention.

BBC London news at 6.30 almost invariably includes an entertainment or arts item – e.g. the recent report on the V&A. Visiting performers are only featured if there is a London connection. Yes, it would be ideal to have more time in which to explore the richness of the London arts scene, but in the absence of that, one report about the topic or event of greatest significance was appropriate.

Managing Editor's comments

Of course we try to avoid duplication, but sometimes it's difficult to distinguish between a national and a London story. After all, we're providing news for 10 million people – so we look for themes that will have significance to as many in the region as possible, for example by looking for the local/regional angle on a national story. Of course we liaise with the Six o'clock News, but in an extreme case they can decide to run stories which may comprehensively duplicate our planned agenda. Council members' range of opinion is valued, notably comments from people living in the outer suburbs

5.2.1 Member's question:

How will BBC G20 coverage influence potential Olympics coverage?

BBC response: It's been a useful dry-run. In essence we will be able to give more depth than Network news.

5.2.2 Other concerns

5.2.1 Missed story

One member reported on a gun incident in a north London secondary school, that was sufficiently serious to warrant armed marksmen to be deployed – but was not reported by BBC London.

Antony Dore was unaware of the story and agreed to investigate

Action - Antony Dore

5.2.2 Watching regional news after transmission

Members found that no regional news is available on iPlayer. It can therefore only be seen as a video download for 24 hours after broadcast, until it is replaced with the following day's edition of the programme.

[Note: This is likely to be rectified in the next six months]

6. Outreach

6.1 Generally Accepted Standards

This will now be held on Tuesday 19 May at BBC Marylebone High Street.

Discussion will be stimulated by showing extracts from pre-watershed programmes.

Members attending are asked to bring one or two people from their informal communities, chosen to broaden the range of opinion. John Sparrow will arrange other participation to ensure a reasonable balance within a total of around 25 people.

Members will be asked to facilitate small groups and act as note-takers.

The event will begin at 6.30 (brief RAC business meeting and briefing for the event) and continue until around 9pm.

7. Burning issues

None

8. Any other business

8.1 Identification of discussion topics of relevance to London licence-fee payers.

9. Dates of next meetings:

Outreach – Wednesday 20 May, 6.30pm for 7pm-9pm – Television Centre

Business- Monday 15 June BBC Marylebone High Street, 6.15pm for 6.30-8.30pm.

Ends

07.04.09

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.]

