

## East Regional Audience Council

Minutes of meeting

Tuesday 17 April 2007

MWB Business Centre Cambridge

### Council Members present:

Richard Carter	Link to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire
Michael Deakin	Link to BBC Radio Suffolk
Melvina Dunnett	
Chandi Hubert	
Helen Hunt	Link to BBC Radio Northampton
Annie Kiff-Wood	
David Lawrence	
John Newman	Link to BBC Radio Norfolk
Dominic O'Sullivan	
Marcus Tinworth	
Richard Walker	
Clarke Willis	Chair East RAC

### Absent:

Lisa Clarke  
Joanna Hendricks  
Harriet Larrington-Spencer  
Peter Lerner  
Denise Priest

### BBC:

Tim Bishop	Head of Region, BBC East
Jason Horton	Managing Editor, BBC Radio Cambridgeshire
Graham Hughes	Senior broadcast journalist, (SBJ) BBC Radio Cambridgeshire (observing)
John Sparrow	Public Accountability Manager, BBC England

### 1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

Clarke Willis welcomed everyone and introduced Jason Horton, Managing Editor BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, and Graham Hughes, SBJ Radio Cambridgeshire, who was observing.

Apologies were received from Lisa Clarke, Harriet Spencer, Peter Lerner, Denise Priest. Joanna Hendricks did not attend.

### 2. Programme and service review

#### 2.1 Overview of BBC Radio Cambridgeshire

A summary of the station's remit, broadcast area and competition was distributed.

Jason Horton explained that he had joined the station as Managing Editor on 1 May 2006; the station had been in operation for 25 years, beginning with only 2.5 hours of original output.

He noted that the station serves a large and diverse county including rural areas, the city of Cambridge with its university and London commuting, Huntingdon and the Fens. Peterborough with its links to the Midlands is also part of the patch, having its own breakfast programme since 2004 to serve the northern part of the area. There is strong competition from independent local radio (ILR) in the north and generally from BBC national services, notably BBC Radios 2 and 4. The station has been re-launched, with new jingles and a revised schedule with a strand of weekday special-interest programmes at 7pm that includes sport, gardening, Northern Soul music, new music and the arts. The changes are evolutionary, making better use of resources and intended to make the station friendly and local every day without allowing it to become an exclusive club. Unlike ILR there is no budget for promotional activity or prizes.

Commenting about the changes, Richard Carter (RAC link to BBC Radio Cambridgeshire) felt that the station had a genuinely local feel – for example presenters knew instinctively how to pronounce local place-names.

Members' individual comments:

- Had noticed changes and improvements but still feels the station can be a bit of a club.
- From snapshot listening the station did feel friendly. Approval of community involvement

Members' questions:

- How did the station cover minority interests

BBC Response: A preference to embrace minority issues and interests within mainstream output rather than provide special programming at off-peak times for identifiable minorities. For example, features on Polish residents have been included in daytime programming. (The station also relays *Rokker Radio*)

- Why so much focus on the mid-morning show?

BBC Response: Generally the listening peak to all radio occurred during breakfast shows. Cambridgeshire's breakfast programme currently under-performed, leaving mid-morning as the most listened-to programme of the day.

- Any developments with travel reporting?

BBC Response: both the financial and content aspects of this service were under review, for all BBC Local Radio stations. The most up-to-date information came from listeners phoning in.

- Did audience data enable station managers to separate out the proportions of listeners in rural and city areas?

BBC Response: The sample wasn't sufficiently large or robust to enable this – but listeners' phone-calls gave an adequate indication and for BBC Radio Cambridgeshire the spread seemed to be broad.

## 2.2 Significant points raised by RAC links to other BBC Local Radio stations

### 2.2.1 BBC Essex

Marcus Tinworth noted that Gerald Main had taken up his post as the station's new editor. The station had recently undergone a buildings audit and aspired to a more central location

in the town, subject to funding. An arrangement had been made with Essex County Cricket Club for a more visible presence.

#### 2.2.2 BBC Radio Norfolk

John Newman thought that recent schedule changes seemed to be bedding down and generating favourable comments. The station was recruiting a new Assistant Editor.

#### 2.2.3 BBC Radio Northampton

Helen Hunt reported that the station was approaching its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The station manager was pleased with the latest listening figures – 114,000 a week. Abolition-related items had been well received. Helen felt there was chemistry between the two drive-time presenters.

#### 2.2.4 BBC Radio Suffolk

Michael Deakin reported that the station's new editor, Peter Cook, was now in post and in dialogue with staff. The station had won a Creative Industries East award. Its breakfast show was shortlisted for a Sony award. The mid-morning presenter had resigned.

#### 2.2.5 BBC Three Counties Radio

Peter Lerner felt that the new sequence of weekday presenters sounded 'sparkier' than the previous line-up; no audience figures were yet available. Radio legend Dave Lee Travis broadcast his last Sunday morning show a couple of weeks ago. The weekend evening line-up was changing to attract new listeners and introduced Keith Skues presenting a 50s rock'n'roll show.

The station was conducting a petrol-pump promotion to highlight its quarter-hourly travel bulletins.

### 3. *Abolition* season

A season of programmes focused around 25 March, the bicentenary of the bill to abolish the slave trade.

Members commented that –

- they learned a great deal from the range of programmes offered
- three programmes in the season had been particularly effective in explaining the issue and giving it contemporary relevance – Moira Stewart's assessment of Wilberforce, Simon Schama's *Rough Passage* and Rageh Omaar's insight into child slavery in India.
- the special section on the BBC website had provided a valuable resource of information
- trailing for the season and individual programmes within it had been effective
- for some, their communities seemed to have limited interest in these programmes, notably a professional black group.
- projects of this kind were exactly what the BBC should do, irrespective of the potential audience size.
- the question of a contemporary apology for slavery could have been given too much prominence.

Programmes from the season seen or heard –

- *Songs Of Praise* (BBC One)
- Miss Dynamite / Nanny Maroon (BBC Two)
- Moira Stewart in search of Wilberforce (BBC Two)

- Simon Schama *Rough Crossing* (BBC One)
- Rageh Omaar /child slavery in India
- *In Our Time* (Radio 4)
- BBC Radio Suffolk Thomas Clarkson link
- BBC Radio Norfolk – linked MP.

#### BBC response

Tim Bishop thought that the range of programmes had brought the subject up to date and offered something substantial for all ages. The BBC website had provided substantial background and supporting information and trailing had brought the season together.

#### Relevant Public Purposes

##### Citizenship and civil society

- Comprehensively marked a significant moment in British history
- Programmes aimed at many specific sections of audience.

##### Promoting education and learning

- A wealth of new testimony, with first hand investigation by key black people into their links with former slaves.
- Explained the economic purpose and legacy of the slave trade
- Substantial resource of trustworthy material on Abolition website

##### Creativity and cultural excellence

- Choice of presenters and varied programme styles provided a range of ways to communicate a difficult and sensitive subject

##### Reflecting the UK, its nations, regions and communities

- Explored local links with the slave trade and its eventual abolition

##### Emerging communications

- Effective use of website to provide overview, support information and insight into range of programmes

##### Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK

- Explained how the slave trade operated in Africa and the Caribbean, the role of black slave traders and its present-day manifestation.

#### 2.4. *Comic Relief – The Big One* (16 March BBC One)

##### Members' comments

- Professional, funny, high quality; sketches benefited from pre-recording
- Stronger format and content than *Children In Need*
- Approved regular presenter changes (they did two-hour stints)
- *[Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]*
- A good night of television – especially the Catherine Tate/Prime Minister sketch
- Helped raise awareness of issues

##### Minority views

- Whole evening irritating
- *[Withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.]*
- Some causes (especially those in UK) seemed dubious

## BBC Response

Tim Bishop noted that *Comic Relief* was an external charity (unlike *BBC Children In Need*) and an umbrella for a wide range of causes. The event seemed more effective because the content was stronger and a transition from the all-live variety-style approach long used by *Children In Need*. He understood that all performers and presenters gave their services free.

## Relevant Public Purposes

### Citizenship and civil society

- Prompted sympathy and support for the less fortunate in the UK
- Attracted and involved a broad cross-section of audience, especially the young

### Bringing the world to the UK

- An effective way of revealing the plight of people in developing countries and the less fortunate at home

### Creativity and cultural excellence

- Stimulated imaginative ways of involving artists and programme formats in sketch styles

## 2.5 BBC School News Day (22 March)

Year 7 & 8 students in 100 secondary schools across the UK produced news reports for inclusion on a special BBC website, or national or regional television or local radio. There was extensive support material on a special School News Day website and each school had received training from a member of BBC staff. Its purpose was to give an insight into the process of newsgathering as a way of informing students about their role in citizenship

Members saw items at breakfast, on the 1pm and 6pm national news, on regional television and on the website.

- One member reported that staff of a Gt Yarmouth school were full of praise for the initiative and had gained a lot.
- The meeting recognised the value of involving 13 and 14 year-olds. One member wished for sixth form involvement

## BBC response

Tim Bishop noted that this was a pilot initiative for what was expected to become an annual event. All the reports were included on a special School News Day website on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk). Material and feedback was being evaluated. Next year any school that applied could take part. The aim was to develop media literacy. He was considering a sixth form news day in Norwich.

## Relevant Public Purposes

### Sustaining citizenship and civil society

- Engaged and involved young people at a formative period in their lives
- Provided experience of newsgathering practice and constraints

### Promoting education and learning

- Hands-on experience of newsgathering technology
- Understanding the role of journalists as news-gatherers
- Experience of working to non-negotiable and tight deadlines

### Creativity and cultural excellence

- Considerable achievement for students in mastering constraints, technology and processes

- Nothing new for general audience (eg territory already covered by *Newsround Presspackers*)

Reflecting the UK....

- Children's perspectives on local issues and topics that concerned them

Emerging communications

- Used television, radio and online but in ways already established for news reporting.

### 3. Minutes of 27 March 2007 meeting and matters arising

3.1 minutes

Page 4, *Nature's Calendar* bullet point 4 – information about *alternatives* to information on the internet was not given until late in the programme.

The minutes were then approved and signed by Clarke Willis.

3.2 Matters arising

Re page 3 comment about coverage of Formula 1 motor racing – the UK now has a significant Formula 1 racing driver - Lewis Hamilton.

### 4. Chair's report

4.1 March ACE meeting

A summary of the main points was tabled. Minutes will follow.

4.2 Annual review

Clarke was joining Dwain Neil (Chair London RAC) and Phillippa Denton (Chair East Midlands RAC) on 23 April to present the views of Audience Council England to Trust members. This was an important opportunity to inform Trust members about the views across England since the BBC Trust had an overview role for the BBC.

4.3 Closure of BBC Jam

The BBC Trust took this decision because of the European Union dimension. The Trust had now commissioned a public value test and asked BBC Management to review content in view of the criticism that it was insufficiently distinctive. The project, originally known as the Digital Curriculum, was a BBC initiative in spirit with its continuing commitment to provide support material for education using appropriate technology. It had been controversial from the outset because of issues raised by commercial interests.

4.4 Head of Region's report

Tim Bishop's report had been circulated.

He reported that a serious complaint was being processed about BBC East's editing of an interview used in the *Inside Out* special on the 1950s gas exposure experiment.

He noted that the on-screen clock for BBC East breakfast opt-outs went into operation the previous day. The council had highlighted lack of time information persistently, so this should be regarded as a success. The council thanked Tim and his team for dealing with the problem.

Responding to recent comments at council meetings about programme items that seemed only to be trailers for later programmes, Tim explained that there was a balance to be struck between principle and content. His test was whether an item included in *Look East* that also trails forward stood up as a news item in its own right. He accepted that the specific item that had raised the issue had not passed this test.

Commenting on the related question of accountability, Tim explained that once an opinion had been aired in a council meeting, it was for him to act on it or not as he judged appropriate, but there could be no expectation of a direct or automatic response to every adverse criticism, since there were likely to be other factors in play. Equally, it was open to members to pursue issues of continuing concern via the BBC Trust.

#### Scheduling of *Inside Out*

The new day and time was not yet fixed, amid ongoing discussion about the placing and content of *The One Show*. If this series fulfilled its brief to reflect the whole of the UK to a UK-wide audience, sustaining further similar content produced locally may prove problematic, with the risk that a local current affairs series may be lost.

### 5. Trust business

#### 5.1 Communication and public engagement strategy

Clarke had asked for another copy of this document to be distributed so that council members could re-read its content. It gave a structure to outreach and public engagement activity, so that members had a broader understanding of public opinion and the profile of Regional Audience Councils was raised.

Outreach events were intended to connect with audiences and collect a range of views about BBC output and services, to inform and influence debate with the BBC Trust. In practice, Clarke understood that activity could range from a presence at BBC outside broadcasts and/or major regional events (eg county shows) to a focus on specific groups and topics. He invited members to look at the websites for the Audience Councils in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, who already had an established outreach programme.

#### Individual comments

- All this seems to be too big a demand on members' time, especially in view of Local Audience Forum (LAF) activity as well
- What was the structure for RAC outreach?
- Resources were needed – notably display stands and leaflets.

Tim Bishop commented that, especially at LAF level, this was the year in which to try out a range of activities and assess which designs worked. He also highlighted the forthcoming edition of *Question Time* (BBC One) in Norwich, which might provide an opportunity to broaden awareness and interest in accountability.

He reminded council members that a joint initiative on a key topic across England would make a powerful statement to the BBC Trust.

Clarke asked John Sparrow to compile a list of LAF events and public events with potential suitability for accountability activities.

#### Action JS

### 6. Planning

#### 6.1 Deputy Chairs'/Chairs' induction day (30 April, BBC Birmingham)

Members were attending this from all RACs, to provide chairs with deputies to whom they could delegate RAC meetings when necessary. Helen Hunt and Dominic O'Sullivan were attending. Clarke would invite each to chair a meeting later in the year.

#### 6.2 Outreach

See 5.1 above.

Discussion of members' proposals and the development of an outreach plan was deferred until next meeting.

#### 6.3 Seminar on new technology – 25/26 June (Newcastle area)

Members were invited to say whether they were interested in attending.

#### 6.4 Social occasion

Clarke proposed a daytime barbeque at his home for members and their partners on a Saturday or Sunday in July or August

#### 6.5 travelling to Northampton

One member proposed a minibus so that members based in the east side of the region could travel together more efficiently and conveniently. **Action: JS to investigate**

### 7. Key points from the meeting, for ACE

- Concern about time requirements and lack of resources for outreach events.
- A deeper understanding of accountability as it applied to local and regional services.
- An on-screen clock had finally been restored to East *Breakfast* opt-outs due to persistence by the council.

### 8. Date, time and place of next meeting:

June 2007 –Northampton

### 9. Work plan for next meeting

- BBC Radio Northampton overview  
As usual, please sample the station's programmes, either off air or via *Listen Again*. A summary paper would be distributed in advance.
- *How We Built Britain*  
- a series presented by David Dimbleby, focusing mainly on the UK's industrial heritage. Scheduling to be advised.
- *How we are building Britain*  
- separate regional contributions to this national series, looking at contemporary Britain  
Scheduling to be advised
- *Play It Again* (BBC One)  
a current series in which the famous learn a musical instrument to performance standard, with follow-up workshops around England to give licence-payers some advice and hands-on experience with an instrument of their choice.
- Politics (inc *The Politics Show*)  
This topic was broadened in response to councils' concern at repeated focus on *The Politics Show* alone.

ends

*[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.*

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