

Regional Audience Council for BBC East

Minutes of meeting
Tuesday 27 February 2007
The Forum, BBC Norwich

Council Members present:

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

Absent:

Joanna Hendricks
Denise Priest

BBC:

David Clayton	Editor, BBC Radio Norfolk
Peter Cook	Assistant Editor, BBC Radio Norfolk
Margaret Hyde	Editor, BBC Essex (deputising for Head of Region)
Charles Runcie	Head of Sport, BBC English Regions
John Sparrow	Public Accountability Manager

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies for absence

Clarke Willis welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced new members.

Apologies were received from Denise Priest.
Joanna Hendricks did not attend.

2. Programme and service review

2.1 Overview of BBC Radio Norfolk

A summary of the station's remit, broadcast area and competition was distributed.
David Clayton gave a short presentation about the station's presenters, a majority of whom were local, with a wide age-range. He noted that some had been recruited as a result of work-experience on the station, others through links with the University of East Anglia

(UEA). Peter Cook explained the audience data, highlighting how the station fared against national and local competition.

Members' comments

- One member felt Stephen Bumfrey's programme was well-presented and provided a wide range of views
- Another noted poor reception in West Norfolk [issue raised at Governors' AGM in Norwich, 2006] and no DAB coverage in that area
- Weekend programmes were described as 'excellent', with a preference for more coverage of Kings Lynn sport (eg speedway).
- One member felt that the music seemed inappropriate for the audience
- There was a degree of consensus that newsreading was rushed.
- Storm reports were valued and commended
- The work of Jill Bennett, a TV producer based in NW Norfolk, was approved. The area she covers is large and it is rare for someone to remain in a specific area for so long.

BBC response:

David Clayton explained that the station's frequencies are often split for simultaneous commentary of two separate events (eg football). The station's music comes from the BBC Local Radio core, which has been market-tested. Its aim is to provide familiarity from a repertoire of tuneful contemporary popular music. Rushed news is a perennial problem which requires constant monitoring. He thanked members for this timely reminder. David acknowledged that resources influenced the station's coverage of West Norfolk.

2.2 Significant points raised by RAC links to other BBC local radio stations

2.2.1 BBC Radio Cambridgeshire

Richard Carter noted that there was another school-caretaker story in this area – arrested for sending letter-bombs to DVLA, Capita etc.

A new schedule and station sound will be launched in April

2.2.2 BBC Essex

Nothing of significance to report

2.2.3 BBC Radio Norfolk

A new schedule had recently been introduced but it was too early to comment on its effectiveness.

2.2.4 BBC Radio Northampton

Helen Hunt had visited the station and met Laura Moss, station manager. She was impressed with the station's vision and its plans for county involvement.

2.2.5 BBC Radio Suffolk

(see discussion on coverage of Asian flu story)

Michael Deakin reported that Peter Cook had been appointed as the new editor, replacing Gerald Main who becomes Managing Editor of BBC Essex.

The Asian Flu story had generated a high level of interest, with an increase in the use of the station's website and *Listen Again* facility. The station will have a ticketed Open Day in April.

2.2.6 BBC Three Counties Radio

Peter Lerner noted that a new schedule was now in operation, featuring longer sequences with two presenters, for programmes aimed at Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, but not for Buckinghamshire. Initial assessment was that the changes had worked well.

2.3 Regional sports coverage

A sampler DVD had been circulated.

Charles Runcie explained that his role was as co-ordinator and facilitator, ensuring value for money in local and regional sports contracts and providing a regional benefit from the BBC's contracts for national coverage.

2.3.3 Members' questions

- Why were slow-motion replays allowed to mask live action – eg the start of a critical line-out – and why did coverage include shots of people in the crowd?

BBC response

Slow-motion replays were very much a director's decision, with the aim of analysing significant play as soon as possible, and in the majority of cases replays dovetailed well with the progress of live coverage. If missed action proved significant it was usually shown during post-match review. Crowd coverage was intended to reflect the sense of occasion, the enthusiasm of the crowd and to sustain interest at moments when match play had temporarily stopped.

- More coverage of minority sports (eg recent Badminton highlights)

BBC response

Although the BBC recognised that this could be chicken-and-egg, the decision to cover must be influenced by the level of interest among participants and the standards reached. The yardstick used was the level of interest beyond core enthusiasts. The 2012 Olympics was acting as a stimulus to consider covering a broader range of sport. The criteria were likely to be

- did it make good television
- were we good at it

Rowing was easy to cover and the UK had a strong track record; squash was widely played but difficult to cover

- Why was local match coverage not consistent (example Wycombe Wanderers v Chelsea, but not Wycombe's other matches)

BBC response

Local sport editors must be able to make a pragmatic judgement about level of interest, cost and value for money - for example, only Southend and Colchester away matches were covered, as a service to fans.

- Would *Test Match Special* continue on Long Wave?

BBC response

Yes. It was also on the digital service Five Live Sports Extra

- Would the BBC consider covering Formula 1 motor-racing in future?

BBC response

Doubtful. ITV's contract continued to 2009. The lack of a significant British driver also diminished its overall appeal.

- Did this mean the BBC has turned its back on motor sport?

BBC response

There was regional coverage of speedway

- There was too much football on Saturdays!

BBC response

In fact there were only four rounds of the FA Cup, and otherwise the BBC had relatively few continuing football contracts. Football coverage was good value for money and had wide appeal.

- What was the future of sports broadcasting on the BBC, especially since many clubs had their own TV services.

BBC response

Charles believed that current arrangements and relationships were safe in the short to mid-term, not least because clubs relied on income from television coverage.

- Who was sport coverage on *Look East* aimed at? Its sport coverage was not as good as Anglia.

BBC response

It was predominantly sports news, aimed at the general viewer who was interested in the latest developments.

2.4. *Nature's Calendar* (12 February BBC Two)

Comments on this were almost equally positive and negative –

Appreciations (individual comments)

- Presenters passionate and knowledgeable
- Engaging and educational for children – especially at half-term
- Good attempt to involve viewers and show that nature was all around them; links national audience with the countryside
- Peaceful, and ideal for regional television; good photography

Adverse criticism

- Start not engaging and programme included little that was new
- Dull
- Unable to identify its purpose
- Website information given too late to be of value.

Public purposes

- Promoting education and learning
Encouraged engagement with nature and practical activity (partnership with British Trust for Ornithology to provide birdboxes)
- Representing the UK
Showed the diversity of natural habitats within UK
- Creativity & cultural excellence
Though merit of presenters was acknowledged, aim unclear, style not engaging and content perceived as generic.

2.5 Coverage of Asian bird-flu story – local, regional, national

- Local/regional reporting had been factual, calm and informed
- National had tended towards the sensational, adding little to the story except speculation and occasional pointless reporting [*withheld from published minutes under section 36 of the Act.*].

- Members noted again that London-based personalities had reported for national news

In their discussion, members noted many similarities with Ipswich murders reporting. They also noticed that information seemed to be drip-fed and somewhat conflicting. Local reporting had mentioned the Hungary link before it emerged nationally.

One member who knew the locality including Bernard Matthews' factory commented on an apparent conspiracy of silence between local people and factory employees, to maintain employment.

Clarke Willis declared an interest in the food industry though no link with the Bernard Matthews organisation. Though he felt it was the industry's responsibility to explain itself and its methods, he also believed that there were bigger questions to be covered –

- The balance between cheap food and production methods
- Conditions at the factory itself [in response to news that DEFRA warnings about standards had apparently gone unheeded]

BBC response

Margaret Hyde said that no BBC reporter could report rumour without foundation, hence the very careful references to Hungary in the early stages. The story had indeed unfolded in a rather haphazard way and all the BBC could do was report the latest developments, until there was sufficient information to enable a broader overview. David Clayton explained the necessity for additional reporters because local/regional ones were already fully committed reporting for their region.

Comment from ACE meeting

Peter Lerner reported the consensus at the January ACE meeting that direct reporting from locations by nationally-known reporters and presenters is appreciated and the necessity recognised in view of the normal workload of local and regional staff.

3. Minutes of 9 January 2007 meeting and matters arising

3.1 minutes

The link member for BBC Radio Suffolk wished to clarify that, in saying 'there was a different 'feel' to the station compared to BBC Radio Suffolk – it seemed more lively', he did not intend to imply that Radio Suffolk was dull.

The minutes were then approved and signed by Clarke Willis

3.2 Matters arising

John Sparrow had introduced Helen Hunt to Laura Moss, station manager BBC Radio Northampton.

4. Chair's report

4.1 First ACE meeting

Peter Lerner had deputised for Clarke Willis. The meeting was a different experience from his recollection of former English National Forum (ENF) meetings; it was now clearly for the Trust member for England and Chairs of Audience Councils with BBC representatives by invitation.

A lot of ground had been covered at a fast pace and high intellectual level. Discussion was initially about process, working towards content and achieved in part through breakout groups.

Peter felt that there had been poor attendance by senior BBC staff at the drinks reception.

Alison Hastings had been impressive and overall it had been a good experience.

4.2 Public Purposes Conference

Helen Hunt reported as the council's other delegate. (Clarke Willis had been unable to attend at the last minute.)

The first day was devoted to reviewing the remits of the six Public Purposes, using the workshop and plenary format. The second day focused on service licence consultation. It had been a stimulating two days, with opportunities for dialogue with members from other councils in England and delegates from those in the other nations. Helen had also been impressed by Alison Hastings.

5. Responses to service licence consultation

5.1 Local Radio service licences

(note: comments provided by members maintaining links between RAC and BBC Local Radio stations)

5.1.1 BBC Essex (Link – Marcus Tinworth)

The station matched the Service Licence in all the characteristics listed, with the exception of the Public Purpose *Bringing the UK to the World and the World to the UK*, (heading 5.5): there was insufficient coverage of key international events during its news bulletins (or they were less memorable for some reason)

DAB quality and availability seemed patchy, in particular the North Essex-Suffolk border.

5.1.2 BBC Radio Cambridgeshire (Link – Richard Carter)

The general and specific documents were a fair summary of the station's output and activities.

5.1.3 BBC Radio Norfolk (Link – John Newman)

Remit :

Fulfilled the remit for BBC Local Radio in England:

- aimed to provide 60/40 speech to music ratio which was generally achieved
- targetted 45- 64+ age group which was not well served by local commercial stations; growing in popularity with over 55s
- strong emphasis on interactivity and audience involvement via phone-ins/text messaging to most programmes (with good response)
- radio car visited people in both rural and urban communities; message board on *Where I Live* site.

Scope of licence:

- Station broadcasted 4am- 1am each weekday and 6am- 1am at weekends.
- Programmes available on the Internet
- Some programmes streamed on demand, usually for 7 days after broadcast.

Overview of aims and objectives:

These appear to be fulfilled by the station:

- station championed the local area
- station one of the top performing BBC Local Radio stations, having held number one spot on several occasions
- gave a good coverage of a somewhat diverse area comprising isolated hamlets, rural villages, small market towns and larger urban areas such as Kings Lynn, Gt. Yarmouth and Norwich
- output all speech 7am-9am weekdays
- participation encouraged both through programmes and the *Voices* project. With a growing ethnic and diverse minority population including Portuguese, Poles, Greeks, Chinese and East Europeans, the station was trying to serve these 'hard to reach' communities by holding special events eg. Baltic States Day at the Forum to bring the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian communities together with the people of Norfolk.

The station maintained a very strong local identity and provided a well-established, friendly local voice celebrating a modern, growing and changing Norfolk as well as its traditions.

5.1.4 BBC Radio Northampton (Link – Helen Hunt)

Remit:

Concern that the expression 'primarily speech-based' in the first sentence suggested that music was minimal, and whilst its use varied from station to station, this requirement felt inhibiting overall.

Audience:

Suggest amendment re target audience – should include as a priority listeners of 50 and over (rather than should be listeners of 50 and over) to clarify the focus.

Religious output:

The requirement 'all stations should carry religious output reflecting the faiths followed in their area and all should provide religious output on Sundays' was ambivalent, because Sunday isn't a special religious day for most religions. If stations are expected to carry Christian output on Sundays the remit should say so specifically.

The licence for Radio Northampton seemed fair given that it was necessarily very general.

5.1.5 BBC Radio Suffolk (Link – Michael Deakin)

General

General description in the local radio licence was a close match to what I know of Radio Suffolk.

Note:

The licence referred to buses and open centres in section 5.4 Suffolk had neither.

Specific BBC Suffolk licence

Section 3 referred to the '...urban areas of Ipswich and Felixstowe, together with those in towns and rural parts of Suffolk'. This was slightly odd wording as there were towns in Suffolk bigger than Felixstowe eg Lowestoft, that did not get mentioned; would not count Ipswich/Felixstowe as a single conurbation.

5.1.6 BBC Three Counties Radio (Link - Peter Lerner)

The draft for Three Counties Radio was somewhat disappointing. 3CR actually was a distinctive station, whereas the general and specific documents implied that it was just like the others.

Scope of the licence

Nothing about digital reception which was surely a 'must' if this station close to London is to retain market share.

Overview

- Should include reference to recognising and catering for the growth areas of Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire.
- Should say more about recognition and meeting needs of specific communities such as the African-Caribbean and Asian populations.

The comment about the distinctive speech-led service was the same for the other radio stations. What made 3CR distinctive was that it was almost completely speech - in other words the description failed to reflect sufficiently what was heard. Either the comment for the other stations was overstated or there was a hint that 3CR could end up being like the others, having (too much) music.

On similar territory, the reference to music policy should be omitted for 3CR, as much of the music (DLT, Big George, Asian, African-Caribbean) did not conform.

5.2 Asian Network

No-one on the East RAC was familiar with this service and few could access it owing to limited DAB coverage.

John Sparrow invited comment from Amir Shah, a young British Asian member of the London RAC who used the service. He also asked the Accountability Manager for the East Midlands and West Midlands RACs to initiate similar enquiries among members.

Amir Shah had listened to the radio station at various points in the day, alone and with members of his family, his mother in particular. From what he had heard, he felt it reflected the remit to a high degree, and conformed to the aims and objectives of the remit very well.

The assessment from East Midlands and West Midlands would be available in time for the next ACE meeting, at which service licences were to be discussed again.

5.3 BBC Four

Members who used this service felt that the service licence description was an accurate summary of the channel's content. They enjoyed a wide range of culturally-enriching programmes including a cross-section of music and foreign language films. The channel was eclectic, often thematic, generally with a key programme each evening, providing a reliable alternative to mainstream viewing.

One member noted that the service licence could equally describe BBC Two.

5.4 iPlayer

The Market Impact Assessment and BBC Trust press release (announcing approval in principle) had been circulated.

The service had been demonstrated and discussed at the 12 December meeting; the demonstration was shown again on 9 January and members' comments and observations from those occasions had been forwarded as the East RAC contribution to consultation.

6. Report from BBC Head of Region

Tim Bishop's report had been circulated.

6.1 update

Margaret Hyde felt that all the BBC's Local Radio stations in the East had responded well to coverage of the recent bad weather. She reported new managing editor appointments – Gerald Main at BBC Essex and Peter Cook at BBC Radio Suffolk.

6.2 Members' questions – trailing for *Inside Out East* within *Look East*

One member reported that the first item in an edition of *Look East* seemed only to be a trail for *inside Out East* later in the day, thereby using time that could be devoted to a genuine news story. This question of trailing within programmes had been raised before. Another member noted that there had apparently been no change in response to previous enquiries, calling into question the accountability process.

Action: Tim Bishop

7. Public Purpose Remit Consultation : Sustaining Citizenship and Civil Society

Discussion at the meeting proved unsatisfactory due to time constraints. However, some members commented that though journalism and factual information were clearly the primary means of fulfilling this Purpose, informal and non-journalistic content (eg unfolding story in continuing drama) might have a broader reach and the potential to provide understanding in a less structured or forbidding way. This view was not reflected in responses to a questionnaire (see below).

Members agreed to respond to a questionnaire which was distributed after the meeting. The following was based on eight responses.

7.1 Title of Purpose

Most found this somewhat inaccessible and gave differing summaries of their understanding. It was either about the BBC providing information that would encourage participation in the democratic process, or personal responsibility for involvement in and contribution to it. Younger members recognised the importance of understanding the democratic process.

7.2 Scope and current output

A majority felt that the scope of the remit was 'about right'

- BBC News and current affairs programmes, at national, regional and local levels, were seen as the core of current provision. Few were accessible to younger audiences. Some served only a specific group due to their scheduled broadcast times (eg *Politics Show*) or the profile of the service.
- Two identified the value of authored work (eg film-makers Adam Curtis, Michael Cockerell, newspaper columnists) in stimulating debate. Investigative reporting was also highlighted.
- One member registered concern about the veracity of in-depth reporting based on knowledge of a specific subject area.

7.3 Media literacy

Most understood this as awareness of the breadth of sources, the ability to identify perspective or bias in them and to interpret information accordingly. Provision of helplines and the BBC websites were identified as good examples of reliable information with links to external trustworthy sources.

8. Council outreach

The two papers had been circulated.

Members had understood them, commenting that neither was written in a very accessible style.

Clarke Willis explained that outreach was one of the new Council's roles and invited members to prepare a list of topics and potential interest groups for the next meeting, leading to an agreed workplan for the year April 2007-March 2008.

Typically each Regional Audience Council in England was expected to stage two events per year.

9. Newcastle seminar 25/26 June

John Sparrow outlined the purpose of this event and asked members to indicate their interest in attending.

10. Key points from the meeting, for ACE

- Inaccurate, stereotypical portrayal of the East in national news reporting (Ipswich murders, Asian bird flu/ Bernard Matthews' factory)
- Greater trust between local residents and BBC local/regional reporters than with national reporters, leading to better-informed reporting
- A belief that the back-story about Bernard Matthews' factory – low wages and financial interdependence between locals and the plant – did not emerge.
- Council members continue to comment adversely on items in *Look East* that appear simply to trail *Inside Out East* later in the day, because this creates the perception that they are being denied a news story. There is concern that though this was raised frequently it was not addressed by local management, calling into question the value of the accountability process.

11. Date, time and place of next meeting:

April – MWB Business Centre Cambridge.

12. Workplan for next meeting

- BBC Radio Cambridgeshire overview
- Coverage - bi-centenary of the Bill to Abolish the Slave Trade
- *Comic Relief: 'The Big One'* (16 March)
- BBC School News Day (22 March)

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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