

London Regional Audience Council
Meeting : Tuesday 6 March 2007
35 Marylebone High Street, London W1H 4QA

MINUTES

Present

Steve Ashton
Paul Chapman
Anthony Curran
Michael Davenport
Dr Christine Fanthome
Anne Fendick
Angus Fox link to BBC London 94.9
Elizabeth Heath
Ivor John
Dave Lewis
Shazia Mowlabaccus
Dr Dwain Neil Chair, London RAC
Christiana Ominiyi
Amir Shah
Anne Yan Yan Teoh
Jennifer Vidal

Absent: Patricia Adley, Paul Bakalite, Alexandra Tham

BBC: David Robey, Managing Editor BBC London 94.9
John Sparrow, Public Accountability Manager, England

1. Chair's welcome, introductions and apologies

Dwain Neil welcomed everyone and introduced David Robey (deputising for Mike Macfarlane) and the new Council members.

Apologies were received from Patricia Adley, Paul Bakalite, Alexandra Tham.

He apologised for the cramped conditions in the meeting room and canvassed opinion about travelling to the Television Centre area in West London where larger and more attractive meeting rooms are available.

Action: JS to check meeting room availability
[later: larger accommodation found at Marylebone High Street premises.
Booked for next meeting]

2. Minutes of 16 January 2007 meeting and matters arising

2.1 Minutes

The meeting approved the minutes as a true record. They were signed by Dwain Neil.

2.2 Matters arising

Dwain Neil had sent a letter to Margot Billington in response to her resignation from the council.

3. Response to service licence consultation

3.1 BBC London 94.9

3.1.1 the main service licence

Members felt that this did not accurately mirror the station's demographic. Rather than being age-related it should be considered as psychographic, serving people of a broader age-range than the defined target of 50+, who used a wide range of stations and whose requirement included is a speech-based service of local news, discussion and debate.

3.1.2 The London 94.9 licence document

Though members recognised that efforts had been made to tailor the specific licence to the special requirements of London listeners it still seemed limiting and did not acknowledge the breadth of audience expectation in a very competitive marketplace. In particular, there was no reference to reflecting London's rural communities, which were on the periphery of the service area.

3.2 BBC Radio 1Xtra

A majority felt that the service licence was a fair reflection of what they heard. From listening and dialogue with their communities, members -

- appreciated a service targeted specifically at late teens-early 20s (helping to fill a gap in overall BBC provision for young people); felt it identified and satisfied a market; found it less mainstream than Radio 1
- felt it broadened the range of music available, celebrated British content and encouraged new talent
- recognised its innovation and high production standards (informed DJs, inclusion of club music)
- believed it reflected youth culture effectively (through its journalistic content)

3.3 bbc.co.uk (BBC website)

A majority felt that the service licence was a fair reflection of their experience of the site. It was a site that was widely used and greatly valued. Individual comments included

- a wish for more detailed news coverage of local issues within London by area
- a higher profile for world news
- a concern that programme reliance on providing supporting information via website pages denied availability to those without internet access.
- inability to recognise externally-commissioned content.
- questioning the need for user-generated content (eg message boards, chat-rooms) since these could give uncontrolled prominence to extreme or minority views. [After an explanation of the moderation process, there was a remaining concern about moderators' decisions]

BBC response: David Robey noted that the site was under-going re-design, to facilitate a more personalised home-page among other developments.

3.4 iPlayer

The Market Impact Assessment and BBC Trust press-release (giving approval in principle) had been circulated. There was no further discussion because the service had been considered comprehensively at the previous meeting and notes forwarded for inclusion in a composite ACE response to consultation.

4. Chair's report

4.1 First ACE meeting

Minutes of the meeting had been distributed.

Dwain noted that with Alison Hastings as the new Trustee for England, the meeting had been a different experience from the former English National Forum.

4.2 Public Purposes Conference

Dwain Neil and Anne Fendick attended.

The conference discussed the remits of the six Public Purposes and reviewed service licences.

Anne noted effective participation by Chita Bharucha (acting BBC Trust Chairman) and the trustees of the Nations, including Alison Hastings.

She was pleased that Audience Council members' views were being taken so seriously at this early stage of the BBC Trust and the new Charter. It had been useful to meet other council members from England and the other Nations.

5. Executive Editor's report

5.1. Abolition of slavery

BBC London would contribute to the BBC's season of programmes on the abolition of slavery via all its outlets. Highlights included -

- Kurt Barling investigating modern-day slavery for the London programme
- An edition of *Inside Out London* to be devoted to legacy issues
- A keynote speech by Trevor Phillips to be broadcast from the British Library

5.2 2012 Olympics

BBC London was about to appoint an Olympics correspondent

5.3 BBC London 94.9

David Robey noted the station's best-ever quarter for audiences (Oct-Dec 2006). The Breakfast Show was undergoing re-modelling after Jono Coleman's resignation. A high-profile outside broadcast presence was planned at major London events and the tour of key London boroughs would be repeated. David invited RAC members to attend.

6. Programme review

6.1 Regional sport coverage

A sample DVD had been circulated, showing the range of sport covered on regional services in England.

- Members agreed that BBC London provided good coverage of London sport online and on London 94.9 FM. In particular the Steve Bunce show was engaging and inclusive, with interesting guests.
- Regional television provided sports news headlines and brief features but could do more to highlight sport at amateur level and developing talent.
- Olympics 2012 should be the trigger to cover a wider range of sport by following the progress of those training to take part.

BBC response

- David Robey noted that one of the potential benefits of *Digital Futures* would be to provide facilities for simultaneous reporting of several events, providing more choice and enabling coverage of minority sports.
- *[Withheld from published minutes under section 43 of the Act.]*

6.2 *Nature's Calendar* (tx Friday 16 February BBC Two)

Dwain noted that this had been included for review because it was intended to be the BBC's contribution to National Bird-Box Week. Members' comments included -

- Approval of Janet Sumner (presenter) – knowledgeable
- Covered UK well, but lacked any London content
- Enjoyable 'classic BBC', 'eccentric but great'
- Rambling; felt as though made for another purpose
- Website support inadequate, incomplete
- Some information incomplete eg admission prices not given

Public purposes

Promoting education and learning

- A competent insight, but not sufficiently engaging to stimulate follow-up.

Representing the UK

- Showed the diversity of natural habitats within UK. Little of specific London regional interest

Creativity & cultural excellence

- Merit of presenters acknowledged; lacked focus for some.

7. Public Purpose Remit Consultation:

Representing the UK – its nations, regions and communities

A questionnaire was distributed after the meeting. There were six respondents.

7.1 Represent the nations regions and communities of the UK

- From a London perspective an observation that while there were national programmes for Scotland, Wales and N Ireland, there was no equivalent for England, the closest being regional opt-outs and BBC Local Radio.
- In response to London-centric perceptions, a suggestion that non London/Home Counties examples (interviewees etc) should be sought more often.
- Some members noted that though nationality was a natural and obvious community of interest, there were others including age-band, religion, lifestyle, life-stage (eg young parent, carer) and specific interests (eg sport, motoring, art).
- Younger members noted that they were poorly served as a community

- One member recognised great strides, though with further to travel, in representing the Islamic / Muslim community. Inappropriate choice of representatives was identified as a problem.
- Many found it difficult to respond comprehensively to this because the matrix was so complex that it was almost impossible to assess fulfilment.
- There were mixed feelings about the representation of oriental minorities – with regional coverage of the obvious (eg Chinese New Year) but little inclusion or portrayal otherwise. One felt it extraordinary that *EastEnders* did not feature a cross-section of families in view of its albeit fictional setting.
- One member noted that in general BBC children's programmes tended to be more inclusive than mainstream programmes aimed at broad audiences.

7.2 Shared experience

All endorsed current and typical BBC coverage of national events, which was recognised as a continuing strength. Some recognised that broadcaster-originated occasions fulfil the same expectations (eg key Christmas programming, 'must-see' programmes in all genres, continuing drama, *Reith Lectures / Dimpleby Lecture; Comic Relief/Children In Need*)

7.3 Interest in local communities

Members felt this was achieved adequately through talk radio (BBC Local and Radio 5 Live), related websites, and regional television. Networked series (*Inside Iran*, a season on China, forthcoming programmes on the Slave Trade) provided insights into minority communities. Series such as *Question Time* reflected local concerns to a UK-wide audience.

7.4 BBC religious coverage

No consensus:

- *Thought for the Day* and *The Heaven and Earth Show* appreciated for their diversity of faith
- A minority observation that religion was featured primarily in news or controversial terms, rarely in long-form
- An observation that minority religions rarely received UK wide coverage in styles similar to the Christian faith.

7.5 Support for indigenous languages

- Most approved fulfilling this obligation; one wondered whether it was good use of licence-fee income.

8. Council outreach

Communications & Outreach and Audience Engagement Protocol papers had been circulated with an explanatory note.

Members understood that outreach was one of the new Council's roles and were willing to take part. In common with other councils in England, the London council was expected to initiate two events between April 2007 and March 2008.

One member referred to the outside broadcast series planned by London 94.9 as a potential means of fulfilling this requirement. Another highlighted the importance of a precise focus for any event, to ensure a clear outcome.

Members agreed to devise a list of topics and potential interest groups for the next meeting, as source-material for a work plan. For further discussion at the next meeting.

Action: ALL

9. Newcastle Seminar 25/26 June – first information

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

- Reinforce the council's wish to continue reviewing national programmes, so that it comprehensively reflected the views of Londoners to the BBC.
- A request for more challenging programmes from all genres to be included in the workplan

11. Valedictory comments from retiring members

Paul Bakalite (summary)

Enjoyed participation and lively debate. Had found the formal meeting environment a good way of focusing. Still thought the BBC was a bit cosy – 'the tyranny of niceness'; believed there was more to do re representation and portrayal. Recommended that new members 'make you feel really uncomfortable'.

Amrit Bhat

An enjoyable experience, especially representing London at the English National Forum (ENF, predecessor of Audience Council England) where he became aware that other parts of England were considerably less diverse than London.

Dave Lewis

Agreed with the others. Encouraged new members 'not to let the BBC off the hook'. Complimented Dwain for his chairmanship.

Shazia Mowlabaccus

Has found the experience enjoyable and interesting, meeting great characters. She valued differing points of view. The BBC should serve young people better and the council should review more programmes aimed at the young.

Anne Teoh

A valuable experience. Concerned about 'digital stuff' – found it incompatible with television. Continued to feel that the Chinese community was under-represented on BBC output and wanted more world news.

12. Date of next meeting

April, BBC London Marylebone High Street

13. Workplan for next meeting

- 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.]

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.]