

Regional Audience Council, North East and Cumbria

Minutes of the February 2007 meeting

**Attendees:** Hannah Eyres Deputy Chair  
 Ken Blackwood  
 Tony Gillan  
 Richard Salkeld  
 Colin Boothroyd  
 Eileen Bellett  
 Matt Nash

**Apologies:** Sue Kelly Chair  
 Liz Dodds  
 Arthur Renwick  
 Frank Swinhoe  
 Hemant Desai  
 Martyn Jackson  
 Mark Freeman

**BBC Representatives:**  
 Wendy Pilmer Head of Regional & Local Programmes (HRLP)  
 Charles Runcie Head of Sport, BBC English Regions  
 Matthew Postgate Executive Producer, New Media  
 Carol Cooke Public Accountability Manager

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**1. CHAIR'S WELCOME**

Introductions and apologies for absence.

**2. MINUTES OF MEETING**

The minutes were passed as an accurate record.

Matters arising:

- Radio Cleveland Managing Editor had not been invited due to the full agenda
- The Head of Region reported on the robust debate which took place within the BBC on the decision to broadcast the Ipswich interview. The interviewee gave an off the record interview, then went on to give a similar interview to a Sunday paper. The BBC judged that the interview would not be putting new information into the public domain.
- Television licensing: the BBC had briefed *Age Concern* and *Help the Aged* (among other organisations contacted due to the procurement for over-the-counter TV Licensing services) that the contract was up for renewal and explained the possibility that another supplier might be appointed in place of the Post Office.

During the procurement process, the BBC met with David Sinclair, Policy Manager (Social Inclusion), *Help the Aged*, England, and Gretel Jones of *Age Concern*, England. Ken Blackwood spoke to Gretel Jones who said she had a very short time to respond to the BBC. Ken recommended that the BBC should give more time for consultation.

Action: CC to invited Matthew Barraclough to next meeting

### 3. PROGRAMME REVIEW

#### (i) Regional sports coverage

Charles Runcie, Head of Sport BBC English Regions, outlined his role as covering the broad spectrum of regional sport, working with senior managers and acting as a conduit between London and regional activity; and responded to questions previously sent to him from the RAC.

- One member said that the *Look North* sports slot looked old fashioned, cosy, less modern and in-depth than Sky's coverage
- Other members liked the sport on *Look North* and felt it was short on clichés and was well presented by Jeff Brown.
- One member felt the BBC had chosen to televise the wrong match in the FA cup fourth round: Chelsea was a 'given' result whereas Middlesbrough was not.
- The internet was good at focussing on specialist sports in depth eg [bbc.co.uk/cumbria](http://bbc.co.uk/cumbria)'s Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling section which was well written and researched
- Saturday match reports on the region's 'big' teams were good but other results just scrolled along the bottom of the screen.
- There should be more effort to include footage of Durham County Cricket Club action rather than just showing a scorecard.
- Last season the ECB was supposed to have cameras at all grounds to provide coverage for news organisations but a member did not recall seeing inserts on *Look North*
- *Look North* Sports team would benefit from a female reporter.
- The *Look North* Sports Kids initiative was applauded.
- One member was critical of previous BBC Sport regime's decision not to bid for the right to show England's home Test Matches on TV, but was pleased this had changed. There were now broadcast highlights of the Ashes series. and one-day series highlights from the forthcoming cricket World Cup.
- The idea was suggested for a programme on a day in the life of a football club or Newcastle Falcons
- One member favourably compared *Look North's* sports coverage with other BBC Regional news programmes and said that it was more comprehensive than elsewhere.

### Chair's summing up

- Spotighting of young local talent and minority sports stories was great
- Sports reporting could look too cosy
- More in depth sport coverage would be appreciated
- There could be a link between sport and general exercise and health.
- More coverage of women's sports would be appreciated
- Weekend sport could be covered in a programme on Monday evening.
- The BBC website was good at covering minority sports
- A woman sports reporter would be good
- Members appreciated the fact that *Look North* had a daily sports bulletin and felt *Look North* did a good job covering sport; they suggested that goals could be shown on Breakfast News regional opts and late night regional bulletins.

### BBC response

- Cricket – Charles Runcie said that the BBC retained cricket rights on radio and online, for instance the recent Ashes coverage was behind the red button, and the BBC had retained TV highlights of the Cricket World Cup. Rights for Test Cricket were not available till 2009, and they were expensive. The BBC couldn't just pitch for parts but would have to take the whole package including county coverage. This could wreck summer daytime schedule.
- County Cricket Championship matches were covered on radio.
- Wimbledon –the BBC had the contract for two more years, and hopefully for the future.
- Women's sport – the BBC covered Women's Six Nations and women's sport in China, and planned to cover the Women's Football World Cup later in the year; it would continue to reflect and promote 'sport played by women' across all of the BBC as the editorial occasion demanded.
- The BBC wanted to grow minority sport but had to weigh up whether or not it had value and was interesting to lots of people. Minority sports coverage grew every year; the Paralympics and regional television showcased sport as a news item.
- Pictures and video for the *Where I Live* local website was a matter of resources as to how much of it, and how much time the BBC could spend to put it on the sites
- Pictures of goals on Breakfast News were shown on the main sports news, so would be a waste of time to repeat them, albeit in greater detail, 20 minutes later. There was also the resource issue of getting goals footage to Newcastle overnight, with a match that ended after 22.45.
- Pictures of goals on late night regional bulletins: *Match of the Day* owned the rights to the pictures. They were happy to let the goals go out on the national sports bulletin but would prefer not to let too much be shown until their programme went out in the evening, in order to keep an audience for content BBC had already paid for.

- Sport and health – the BBC were actively working with Sport England to ensure that we led and encouraged active participation in sport. We were now partners with Sport England in the Sports Awards.
- A BBC Sports channel would not solve the problem of schedule clashes between key matches/events so the future strategy was for increased on-demand coverage of sport behind the red button.

Head of Region response: Sport was a huge part of the region's life and the BBC had to appeal to a broad section of the audience. The appetite for sport varied hugely across the region: eg football fanaticism in the north east, and rugby league in West Cumbria vs rugby union in the NE. *Look North* introduced a nightly sports-desks four years ago, which was still unusual for its frequency. However the programme needed to appeal to a general audience rather than polarising a mainstream audience, hence Mark Clemmit's treatment of sport which appealed to non-sports fans too. *Look North* accepted that more detailed coverage for die-hard football fans would be delivered at greater length elsewhere, eg the internet and Sky.

(ii) *Nature's Calendar*

- Only one member saw the programme.
- There was confusion as to how this linked to the nest-box initiative.
- Events were not well enough publicised
- Information was focussed mainly on the nest boxes
- The *Breathing Places* email neglected to mention *Nature's Calendar*
- The BBC was constantly saying 'log on to our website', and there was no alternative offered as a way of getting information.
- The music did not add anything
- The programme was good at identifying the species and was not condescending, although some of the language was complex
- There was some good camera work, especially inside a nest

4. **i-PLAYER (brief update by Matthew Postgate)**

The Trust had decided to have an eight week consultation and asked the BBC to:

- change length of time for programme storage from 13 weeks to 30 days
- offer editorial based criteria as to which programmes could be stacked
- exclude classical music because of potential negative market impact
- discuss modifications around parental guidance
- look at availability to non Microsoft computers, via a syndication code – making BBC programming available on other platforms
- make i-Player available by the summer

Chair's summing up

- Members were looking forward to i-Player
- There was concern about the digitally disenfranchised who wouldn't get any benefit from the i-Player service; and about diverting funds from programme making.

## 5. CHAIR'S REPORT ON FIRST ACE MEETING

Members welcomed the fact that their comments were being raised at ACE meetings.

## 6. HLRP REPORT – TABLED

An RAC member applauded the fact that *Look North* was back on top against ITV, after dropping briefly for November and December, and that *Inside Out* had won three awards for the programme about Sunderland traffic wardens. BBC Radio Cleveland was repackaging and repeating some material to suit the station's listening patterns, eg five minute finance.

## 7. TWO GROUP DISCUSSIONS

### (ii) Responses to service licences (SLs)

- English Local Radio
- BBC Two
- Radio Scotland/nan Gaidheal

Points raised:

- Radio Newcastle also covered Durham City and parts of County Durham.
- Radio Cleveland was not available on digital television platforms.
- Should 'nurture UK talent' be part of the SL - was it appropriate for the over 50's audience profile?
- The remit was accurate now but should be looked at in terms of how to measure success and how to classify the audience.
- Would RACs get information as to whether or not the Service Licence conditions were being met?
- '200 hours of arts and music per year' as set out in Para 5.2 of the licence seemed rather small.
- 100 hours of news per year in Para 5.3. was surely a misprint.
- Para 5.6 - many people didn't understand the process of digital changeover and how it would affect them.

### (ii) Public Purpose Remits (PPR)

- The language was complicated and not helpful as a communication.
- *Sustaining citizenship and civil society* was regarded as a good PPR and would be useful to think about in relation to the regional politics coverage.
- Outcomes should link to impact and what had been achieved.
- The six purposes should be subject to change and discussion.
- How did the RAC measure whether or not the BBC was fulfilling the PPR?

## 8. COUNCIL OUTREACH

Communications & Outreach paper and Audience Engagement Protocol

- Complex activities which needed thinking and planning to be achievable
- One member was worried that 'organisations representing the public' would have a bigger impact on the BBC than they should have. How did the BBC propose to decide who represented the public?

## 9. EVENTS AND OUTREACH PLANNING

RAC members and BBC staff would think about the following as RAC events:

- June Whitehaven Maritime Festival with BBC Sport and News on Tour – topics could include sport or digital switchover.
- BBC Blast on tour – young people's event
- Event at Radio Cleveland Open Centre on diversity
- Event to discuss rural issues

## 10. NEWCASTLE SEMINAR

CC gave a brief outline and asked members to email her if they wanted to attend.

## 11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business

## 12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date and time of the next meeting was circulated

**Programme Review at April meeting:**

Bi-Centenary of the Bill to Abolish the Slave Trade – key date – March 25<sup>th</sup> but also lots of programmes already broadcast

BBC School News Day (March 22) largely online

*Comic Relief*: 'The Big One' (March 16)

Radio Cleveland review with Matthew Barraclough

ends