

**BBC WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL AUDIENCE COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday 12 May 2010 - BBC Birmingham**

Present:

Belinda Channer	Chair and ACE member
Robin Jones	Linda Connor
Beverly Tomkins	Kollette Super
Kenneth Pugh	Sin Ong
Dan Willetts	Paul Taberner
Theresa Evans	Christian Coleman
Valerie Bradley	David Mason

Cath Hearne	HRLP
Carol Webster	Public Accountability Manager

Apologies:

Meena Bose (sent notes for discussions on election coverage and weakest link)

Zubeda Limbada did not attend

Christina Orford-Hall did not attend

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. She particularly welcomed the new members attending their first meeting and invited everyone to give a short introduction.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record.

There were two action points brought forward from the January conference call. The first was a request for a meeting to take place at the Drama Village at Birmingham University. CW reported that this was in train and that the September meeting would take place there. Members agreed to amend the time of the meeting to accommodate the operational time at the Drama Village. CW to keep members updated.

Action: CW

A member had requested information regarding the cost of collection of the licence fee. CW passed on the relevant information which he was happy with.

3. Programme & service review

3.1 General Election coverage

The debates and coverage were felt to have changed the face of politics, and members felt that the BBC could take 90% of credit for that. They felt that the information and coverage was invaluable in contributing to the voting. They felt that the coverage was unbiased and had a high degree of accuracy. They liked the use of technology saying this was excellent. They congratulated David Dimbleby for his coverage on election night.

Members felt that the three national debates were too 'presidential' and that people ended up voting for personality rather than policies. There were heavyweights chairing the debates, but they were unable to probe which gave the sheen, but no depth.

A number of people reported that young people in their networks were engaged with the debates although some didn't understand what was meant by a 'hung parliament'. A younger member said that people in his networks (including social networks) had all watched some of the three debates

and all agreed that the BBC's coverage was better than the other two and that they found it easier to follow. They also liked the map on election night which was very interesting watching over the period. They also visited the website and appreciated seeing what the results meant to each area. He also said that there had been frequent debates since. However, they did miss *Eastenders*!

Another member reported that all the young people (first time voters) she knew came away from the polling booths saying they couldn't find 'Clegg's' name on any forms. They didn't understand the difference between the local and general elections, which highlighted the need for education.

One member who works in a prison said that the community there were very engaged with what was happening.

Some said that this was billed as an internet driven election, but in fact it was driven by TV and radio. There were blogs, Facebook and Twitter use also. BBC News on Facebook was used by a young member who found it very useful

In general members liked the graphics and the map – particularly the proportional representation – although some members felt that they were a bit over the top and overused. One member felt that the BBC pushed the edge in what is possible in TV graphics.

There was some discussion about the presenters and their presentation style. Most had praise for David Dimbleby, some found Jeremy Paxman 'incredibly rude' and some felt that John Humphreys brought some balance.

Local Debates:

Members liked the local debates although there were some concerns regarding the Nick Owen programme. Although most members thought his presentation was excellent, they expected coverage of the region and were disappointed that there was nothing for the more rural areas, and felt that the issues covered were relevant to Birmingham and Wolverhampton only. As a debate it was good but could have related to all areas. One member's feedback from her network was that Nick Owen appeared at times out of his 'comfort zone'.

Some members liked the Radio Shropshire interviews with their local candidates that were informative and engaging and appreciated them being available on iPlayer and for longer than usual.

The last debate coming from Birmingham was tremendous for the city.

Some members listened to coverage on Local Radio, Radio 4 (the *Today Programme*) and some also visited the BBC website. 'The Election 2010 website was fantastic'.

Members congratulated BBC West Midlands, particularly Patrick Burns who was superb, all did an excellent job. The inserts from the *Politics Show* were great.

Overall members felt the BBC coverage was held in high regard.

3.2 Local Radio – link reports

Reports were circulated for Radios Stoke, Hereford and Worcester and Coventry and Warwickshire. The link members didn't have anything to add to their reports.

CW reported that a new link member for WM would be submitting a report for the next meeting and a new member for Radio Shropshire had been identified. A meeting with the Managing editor was planned to take place before the next meeting.

In the absence of a Shropshire report a local member fed back on a feature on grooming young women which was very informative and well presented.

3.3 Regional audience matters

A small number of members commented on the replacement of the desk in the news room with a low table. Some felt that the female presenters particularly looked uncomfortable. The HRLP said that the room had been refreshed to cover some of the clutter that could be seen during transmission and that the table was introduced as the presenters didn't like being behind a desk. The frosting of the large window had improved the look and now viewers didn't see people passing by the news room during broadcast.

4. Reports

4.1 Head of Region's report

The Regional Head's report had been forwarded with the papers for the meeting. The Chair invited her to add to the report and members were asked for any comments.

The HRLP updated with the RAJAR figures which had just been published. She reported the reach for Radios Stoke, Shropshire and Hereford and Worcester had increased. Both WM and Radio Coventry and Warwickshire's reach were up quarter on quarter but were still the main focus. She reported that WM had stabilised which was good news.

One member asked if there was any truth in the press reports that the Mailbox was due to be sold and asked if this would have any impact on BBC Birmingham. CH informed the meeting that all was now sorted.

Members commented on *Late Kick Off* and asked if the schedule was likely to change. The HRLP explained that the series had come to an end with the last programme of the 16 week run earlier in the week and that viewing figures would be looked at before a decision was made.

A member had been personally affected by flight cancellations as a result of the volcanic ash on 15 April when she arrived at Birmingham airport at 5.15am to find it closed asked why there had been no coverage on TV or radio. She did not see any coverage until 11.00am that morning, before this time the reports said there was just a 'possibility' although the airport was closed. The HRLP said that this was covered on WM from 7am, and asked that if members were aware of any news that BBC Birmingham should cover that they should pass it on. CW agreed to make sure that all members had the contact details

ACTION: CW

4.2 Chair's Report

- Audience Council England (Draft April minutes). The Chair highlighted Page 3. Proms: A few members asked if they were able to apply for tickets. The Chair explained that the Controller invited ACE members as his guests.

Point 4: the Chair reported that Richard Addy had attended ACE recently and that he was chairing the local radio task force. BC gave members an overview of the taskforce work.

Members expressed concerns regarding WM being a Birmingham and Black Country station rather than a West Midlands station; WM implies an overlap which doesn't happen. They felt that the station needed rebranding. Why the loss of so many people in a particular age group. See page 6 for age group.

A member local to Radio Hereford and Worcester commented that this station was not on DAB which is a problem as he only had DAB radios. The Deputy Chair explained that the Multiplex is

owned by a private company not the BBC. Members reported losses in frequency in the Shropshire and Stoke areas.

Page 10: Archive Strategy, some members asked how they would access the archive provisions. The Deputy Chair explained that they were available via the website and about project canvas which will give video on demand from the BBC.

A member asked if programme availability on iPlayer would be extended beyond the current one week. The Chair said that this had been discussed at ACE and a submission had gone to the Trust and was being looked at. She also reported that iPlayer was being upgraded. Another member asked if there was a criteria for what was included on iPlayer as he had been looking for the Nigel Ogden programmes which comes up as not being available on iPlayer. Members were asked to monitor this and report back.

ACTION: All

Page 13: Science Impartiality Review: A member who works at Coventry University volunteered to take part in the review.

ACTION: BC/CW

ACE Seminar: The Chair informed members of the seminar to take place on 5/6 July in Exeter.

5. Trust business & feedback

5.1 Strategy Review

Q1. The five editorial priorities:

Members felt that these were pretty much what the BBC was about commented as follows below, and posed questions. Members were concerned about the proposed cuts particularly those around provisions for teens/young adults, and 6Music. Although there were concerns regarding the proposed closure of the Asian Network one member pointed out that the Asian Network didn't represent the whole of the Asian continent.

- Perhaps the BBC should concentrate on what it does best as well as providing for niche markets.
- Focus on news especially instant news.
- The BBC should be providing services and programmes that commercial broadcasters don't.
- On outstanding children's content: members asked what the BBC's definition of a child was, as the United Nation's definition of a child is 11 – 18 or 25 if a special needs. If the BBC's definition was the same as the UN's then why get rid of Switch and Blast which are services appreciated and used by young people.
- If children/ young people stop watching the BBC at 14, what would bring them back?
- If a priority is to provide inspiring knowledge, music and culture why the proposal to get rid of 6Music and the Asian Network as both meet this editorial priority.
- Is the BBC trying to do too much?
- The BBC seems to have an identity crisis which needs to be addressed. Some radio stations have distinct identities.
- The Asian network doesn't cover the whole of the Asian continent, mainly India and Pakistan.
- Events such as the Olympics, which are one offs.

Q2.

- The BBC should be providing other services that commercial providers won't, such as programmes for the older generation.
- I would like to see something about social inclusion.
- What about entertainment, where does this fit in with the priorities?

Q3.

- Why not close BBC 4 rather than 6Music, Asian Network or BBC 3. Sian Lloyd on Breakfast said close BBC 3.
- Members were concerned about the sharing of output on local radio outside of breakfast, mid-morning and Drivetime, as they felt that their areas have distinct needs and that a West Midlands local radio would not serve them well.
- Doing more for less is the current climate.

Q4.

- Members were concerned that responsibility for the teenage years seemed to be being passed to Channel 4. Everyone felt that it was important for the BBC to make provision for that age group.
- The response to the potential loss of 6Music had been huge among members network and the reaction had caused some members to start listening to it. The point that members were being asked to comment upon the closure without knowing how it might be integrated into another radio station was raised. Also as 6Music had only been available digitally up until now, it was felt that it had not had a proper chance to build up a regular audience.

Q5.

- The BBC should be looking at developments in the future to fit how things change/ must keep an open mind – look at things and choose what to use rather than do everything.
- The BBC management need to come up with a strategy on where it wants to be.
- Online is seen as the future for the BBC but what happens to those people not on the internet or not interested in the internet?
- There is an assumption that everyone has access to the internet which isn't the case.

Q6.

- Are these editorial priorities achievable?
- In the last budget there was going to be a tax to upgrade broadband for universal access, is this still the case?

5.2 Science Impartiality Review (for information)

5.3 Trust Video: CW showed the Trust DVD outlining the role.

6. June Outreach

6.1 Members were updated on the topics and target group for the outreach scheduled for Saturday 26 June at BBC Birmingham. Members were all asked to invite at least two people from their networks with a view to getting a diverse group of between 24 and 30 participants. CW was to monitor those invited to ensure that a good spread was achieved.

- Three topics:
 1. What do you want from the BBC?
 2. Localness – what does it mean for audiences?
 3. General Election coverage

The format used in the past had been to invite participants to arrive late morning and for the event to finish with lunch around 1 – 1.30pm. It was suggested that this had worked and should be used for this event.

Action: CW to send out details

7. Burning issues – There were no burning issues

8. Any other Business

- One member reported concerns from her network regarding the loss of *Working Lunch* which is due to go off air. Other members echoed this sentiment saying the programme would be missed.

- *Weakest Link*

Discussion on the *Weakest Link* centred on the appropriateness of the programme. Members were in agreement that a programme that promotes bullying should not be shown at any time. However around 50% of members felt that the contestants knew what they were 'letting themselves in for' when they applied to go on the programme. They also felt that the viewer had a choice to switch off. Some members felt that the programme would still have merit without the personal comments/ attacks, although others felt that the programme was time expired.

Comments included the following:

- Sends out the wrong message.
- Not appropriate at anytime.
- Very bullying.
- The programme would improve if the personal comments were removed;
- Viewers have a choice;
- Entertainment? Lost it ages ago.
- People/ contestants know what they are getting when they choose to go on.
- Find her refreshingly blunt in a politically correct world, but it is a tired format.

9. Date of next event:

Outreach – 26 June

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.]