

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL AUDIENCE COUNCIL MINUTES

Wednesday 15 September
5.00pm Drama Village Tour
7.00pm Meeting at BBC Broadcasting House, The Mailbox, Birmingham

Agenda

1. Welcome and introductions

Present:

| | | |
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| Belinda Channer | Chair | Kollette Super |
| Robin Jones | Deputy Chair | Beverly Tomkins |
| Meena Bose | | Paul Taberner |
| Xin Ong | | Valerie Bradley |
| Ken Pugh | | Daniel Willetts |
| Christian Coleman | | Theresa Evans |

Apologies:

David Mason
Linda Connor
Zubeda Limbada
Christina Orford-Hall – work commitment, and has tendered her resignation

Mark Hayman – Editor West Midlands TV News
Carol Webster – Public Accountability Manager

The Chair welcomed members and Mark Hayman to the meeting. She asked Mark to introduce himself. She then asked each member to give a short introduction for Mark and to include where they live.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising:

There were no matters arising. The minutes were accepted as a true record.

3. Programme & service review

3.1 National Radio Review – Radios 3, 4 & 7

Radio 3:

1. What did you think of the output?

The members who reviewed Radio 3 included one regular listener to one programme. At least two had not listened before, and the others listened infrequently.

For this review, most had visited the website and found it impressive.

Radio 3 was likened to ‘that pile of books you know you will read eventually’ reassuring to know its there. Some of the output was un-accessible for some members. One said listened for an hour, found it arid and so highbrow it was unbelievable. Another member found the speech programmes ‘very heavy and over my head’. One member listened to the opera season, but would usually choose Classis FM rather than Radio 3, as it was much easier to listen to.

2. Was it “high quality” and “distinctive”?

It is high quality, the sound quality is also better than other stations. It was distinctive as there was nothing similar on commercial radio. Some had feedback from their networks that it had gone down market as a result competition from Classic FM. One member felt it was a very expensive niche

market. Coverage of the Proms was high quality and distinctive. One member regularly listened to the weekly Jazz request programme, which she enjoyed.

3. How well does Radio 3 live up to its remit?

In general, members felt that the service met its remit. They had listened to classical music, world music and jazz.

4. How well does it contribute to the public purposes?

The world music was quite good, which met the public purpose of bringing the UK to the world and world to UK.

5. How would you like to see Radio 3 develop in the future?

Members wanted music that was more accessible with more explanation of the pieces featured.

Radio 4:

1. What did you think of the output?

One member's networks general view was that Radio 4 is both Educational and Informative. It keeps it's listeners up to date with world events; has an 'authentic feel' to its output, with very competent presenters. However, they felt that the station is listened to predominately by white middle aged+, with output restricted to that group, and needs to widen its approach.

Another commented on the wide range of programmes at various times throughout the day, likening this to 'opening a newspaper and not knowing what is in it, and is not usually disappointed'. He enjoys the wide-ranging choice of content that never fails to please, and has become particularly appreciative since his American daughter-in-law commented 'you don't know what you have with the BBC and its output, it's brilliant, no adverts!'

One member took exception to the 'Today' programme, feeling it was too stuffy and pompous. Prefers the more laid-back approach of Radio 5 'Breakfast' programme. However most felt it was good to listen to a radio programme and not be bombarded by 'so called music' at frequent intervals.

Programmes were always well produced and time was always adequate

2. Was it high quality and distinctive?

One member felt that nearly all Radio 4's output was of a very high quality and was diverse covering issues and topics to suit the taste of everyone. It had high standards of interviewing techniques that were not pushy or intrusive but of a standard that could be listened to without being aware of the interviewer trying to assert themselves.

Radio 4 could never be confused with other stations; it was distinctive by its polished professional broadcasting.

Another commented that they do not know of another mixed speech service, which offers such consistent high quality programmes. They felt that the plays are what it does best, closely followed by its factual and magazine type output.

Has an authentic tone to topics. High quality, well-reasoned, non-biased approach, professionally very competent.

3. Lives up to its remit?

Members view was that Radio 4 fully lived up to its remit, covering all aspects of speech driven programmes, drama series and one off plays, historical and modern shows. It also covered comedy and serious programmes, interviews, reviews and comments from members of the public.

4. Contribute to the public purposes?

Radio 4 met most of the public purposes including educational and learning, bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK. It also informed and entertained.

5. Do you prefer local radio for news?

The majority of members felt that regional affairs was best covered by local radio.

6. How would you like to see Radio 4 develop in the future?

Most wanted the present level of quality programmes maintained, especially drama and serials. Some thought that more comedy might attract a younger audience. They felt that the service needed to be marketed better and members suggested trails on BBC1 and BBC2 such as those for Radio 3. It was suggested that some regional programmes could be made available across the network.

Radio 7:

1. What did you think of the output?

A unique network catering for the lovers of the 'spoken word' radio. High entertainment value. A refuge from other stations programming music, news, politics and sport. An excellent outlet for creative writing. The only national radio station providing daily children's programming. Relies heavily on archive material so may be seen by listeners as a station of the 'good old days' of radio.

Programmes were repeated within a 4-5 hour block, so may be seen as repetitive and limited in terms of original material.

The service only had a limited appeal for a younger audience.

2. Was it "high quality" and "distinctive?"

Members agreed that all programmes were high quality and distinctive.

'A station that you dip in to listen to a particular genre, dependent on your personal preference at the time'.

3. How well does it live up to its remit?

The station lived up to its distinctive remit very well. Members felt that this made the service one of the most popular BBC digital stations.

4. Does it contribute to the public purposes?

The service covered many of the public purposes including sustaining citizenship and civil society, promoting education and learning, stimulating creativity and cultural excellence and emerging communications.

5. What did you think of its children's programmes?

The output for children was limited, catering mainly for younger children. There was also a perception from parents that programmes were repeated too often.

CBeebies output was the only programming that qualified as 'output rarely found elsewhere on BBC Radio'.

The use of imagery was good.

6. How would you like to see Radio 7 develop in the future?

Members wanted to see more original programming, under the Radio 7 banner. One member was concerned on how the Radio 4 audience would perceive the changing of Radio 7 to Radio 4extra, 'as

this is a unique singular station'. He felt the proposals would disenfranchise dedicated Radio 4 listeners who would be slow to adopt new technologies.

3.2 BBC Local Websites

Most members said that they visited the websites regularly with at least one member saying they visited two or more times a day. One member said they never use the local site, as there was nothing of interest except when it snowed.

Generally members felt that the sites were not updated regularly which was a disappointment. On one site, members saw news items that were over a week old. Members also reported that news they had heard on radio did not appear on the websites.

One member felt that things had gone backwards and that the local stations had lost editorial control. He felt that it was obvious that the online news was inputted remotely and this was evident as there was no apparent local knowledge.

Members wanted to see a link between events covered by the local radio station on the website and to be able to get additional information.

Verbatim Quotes:

"Sometimes the same news is there for two days which can be very frustrating"

"I think things have gone backward; used to be very good, but now seems to come from a central source and is not as local."

"People generally check for the weather and school closures."

3.3 Local Radio – link reports

BBC Hereford and Worcester:

There were no additional points to add to the report. One point noted was a concern that there were no core time female presenters on the station although it was understood that the right person for the job was needed.

BBC Shropshire: There was nothing to add except that there appeared to be a lot football at the cost of other sports.

BBC Stoke: A written report would follow.

BBC WM: nothing to add to the report submitted.

Members had seen the RAJAR figures, which were forwarded with papers for the meeting.

3.4 World Cup

That fans were kept engaged after the UK team had been knocked out was seen as a job well done by the BBC. One member who was not a football fan visited the website and said it was brilliant.

Members questioned the point of the bus going around South Africa, which was described as a very expensive 'white elephant' that broke down frequently!

Some members followed comments on Facebook comparing commentators, which was 'great to watch'.

3.5 Spending Review – Making it Clear (5-10 September) In general, the debate was fair, balanced and informative. A few members felt that this was a series of snapshots from people representing

various authorities and organisations rather than a debate. They appreciated seeing a wide range of contributors including those representing industry, student education, disabled people, the arts, nursing, education, shared local government services. Each of the major political parties was also fairly balanced.

There was praise for presenter Nick Owen. It was obvious that he had done his 'homework' and knew the guests' background. He brought guests into the conversation on a fair and equitable basis and challenged when appropriate. One member however, felt he was slightly uneasy in this role and stated a preference for Patrick Burns as presenter as he was 'so much more experienced at this sort of thing'.

The debate opened up discussion on the problems the Midlands will face due to the spending cuts. However, members from Hereford, Worcester and Shropshire felt that the rural challenges needed to be explored. They suggested a separate TV programme to address the issues that agricultural communities will face.

Members followed up by listening to the programmes on local radio, which addressed issues specific for their communities.

They had also viewed the Nick Robinson programmes preceding the debates.

Verbatim Quotes:

"The downside of the programme was the contribution of commentator Digby Jones, presented as some kind of West Midlands guru, seen as qualified to both address and seek solutions to the regions economic wellbeing. For me he added little to the debate."

"The Bishop of Birmingham clearly had a better understanding of the need to bring all strands of the community (both business and Public Services) together to discuss and address the issues collectively and in a mutually responsible way".

"The negativity which came across was akin to scaremongering from people who, like us ordinary folk, do not yet know what the full extent of the cuts will be".

"Radio Shropshire did have contributions from MPs in the area this morning, so we were not completely forgotten, but I still feel that there is scope for a programme, along last night's lines, for our County!"

3.6 Impact Funded regional programming (August - October)

Wild Weather

A good reflective programme, well formulated using news footage of extreme weather conditions that the region had experienced over recent years. There was none of the 'over the top comments' normally experienced on this type of programme. The programme referred to global warming but this was not over done.

The tornado in Birmingham was addressed in an informative way. The presenter explained what was known about tornado formation while also explaining that it is not known how they really form and what causes them.

The production team researched the region well covering weather phenomena stories from across the West Midlands. This showed that even a small region experiences considerable variations of

weather patterns. The presenter was praised but some found the glider scene where she was sick a little 'off putting'.

It was good to see input from Bablake School in Coventry who have their own weather station (the school contributed to Council outreach a few years ago).

Public Purposes met: Sustaining Citizenship and Civil Society, Promoting Education and Learning.

Verbatim Quotes:

“Good programme for those obsessed by English Weather, but not sure I learnt very much. All these weather phenomena have been happening for decades.”

“Good informative and entertaining programme. Would have liked some more information about weather fronts with high and low pressures and the resultant weather from them as that would be useful for showing my grandchildren. Made a change from cooking, house decorating/buying or selling junk programmes. Keep it up.”

The Pope and the People.

There was a good balance of archive material from the previous Pope's visit to Coventry in 1982. This gave insight into the feelings of those who met Pope John Paul at that time. The stories of people involved this time were good, especially the family who sang for the previous Pope and were singing again this time with the addition of a member who was a baby at the time.

The programme addressed current issues well, including controversial subjects surrounding the visit. There was also balance with the family who were ex Catholics giving their views on the visit and their reasons for leaving the Catholic Church.

There were a few comments regarding the commentators' delivery; he appeared patronising and a little arrogant and as though he wanted to be somewhere else.

A well structured programme.

A comment from the Yorks and Lincs RAC

The Pope and the People:

While this had been a West Midlands region programme, one member had watched on iPlayer and found the programme well balanced, with the views of those for and against the visit represented. The images of the 1982 papal visit had been particularly enjoyed and the response from the member's wider networks to the programme had been positive. 'Well done BBC!'

Pope's Visit (news special)

Members said that this was a good précis of the Pope's visit covering a 24-hour period. The journalistic quality of the programme was adequate. They did not feel that the programme being live gave any benefits. It was felt to be rushed, and an example given was the interview with the Principal of Newman College, which was cut short.

The programme was relevant to the region, Coventry and Birmingham particularly. It served as a round up of the Pope's visit, showing highlights and points of interest.

A good news programme that was balanced and informative.

Verbatim Quotes:

“Nice to see a regional opt out from Network to cover a significant regional event and the production team should be congratulated for their coverage.”

“I still don’t know why Cardinal John Henry Newman has been beatified!”

“Seen as news coverage the programme was good, but had there been more production time much of the material would benefit from factual documentary style presentation-let the people relate their own experiences of the day direct to camera with some narration.”

4. Reports

4.1 Head of Region’s report

Mark Hayman invited questions from the Head of Regions report. He said that he was pleased with the RAJAR figures, which have gone up month on month.

4.2 Chair’s Report

- Audience Council England (May/ June/ July minutes)

There had been three ACE meetings since the last RAC meeting. Members had been sent copies of these. The chair gave highlights from each set of minutes and invited questions from members.

Members were asked to give feedback on the tone and language used during weather reports.

Action: All

The Asian Network was discussed and the possibility of it being lost.

Network production in Birmingham was the highest it had been in 20 years under Nick Patten. Following their visit to the Drama Village, members were reassured to hear this, as the team there wanted to do more.

The Chair thanked CW and RG for their work in arranging the visit.

- ACE Seminar feedback

The ACE seminar took place in Exeter at the beginning of July. The theme was ‘Localness and what it meant to audiences’. Three members and the chair attended the event and gave feedback to the group.

The focus groups had been very interesting and the social networking one was particularly enjoyed. Members found the use of Facebook to give instant news fascinating. The workshop lead by Dr Dan Vickers on localness was also interesting and enjoyed. His conclusion was that there was no such thing as localness!

Members were also informed of the recordings that members made for Video Nation as part of the History of the World programmes. The video’s had been very interesting and one member had contributed. CW had forwarded the link to the site but not all members had received them. She agreed to send them again.

Action: CW

5. Half Year Report – Emerging Issues

A copy of the Chairs introduction to the half-year report was circulated to members. They were asked to forward any comments to CW as soon as possible.

Action: All

6. Outreach

6.1 Members' networks: -

Members were asked to complete a network form to help identify people from their networks they felt would attend outreach.

6.2 June Feedback – For Information: full report to follow

Members who attended the outreach in June gave feedback to the group. A full report would be available to all members.

6.3 Plans for November – parents of young and preschool children

CW gave an outline of the plans for the November outreach. The target group would be parents of young and preschool children. Two members volunteered to look at their networks to attend.

Action: TE, CC and CW

7. Burning issues – Delivering the purposes and matters of trust/integrity

7.1 Blasphemy: was the BBC's response right?

In essence, most members found blasphemy offensive and said that people in their networks felt the same. They were unsure if the response was appropriate and some felt the point had been missed. They asked if the question was not if it was another religion would it be derided as in other religions blasphemy might not be accepted. The fear was that if used too often it would be perceived as acceptable rather than offensive.

One member likened it to the use of the term 'nitty, gritty' and its connotation. She felt that the BBC should set the standards and should not use these words on TV or radio.

Another member felt that a stand should be made and say 'this is the religion of this country and it should be respected'.

Another member pointed out that programmes needed to be realistic (particularly drama) and that blasphemy should not be removed if in context, and that editorial staff should address this and make editorial decisions.

8. Any other Business

8.1 Licence Fee penalties:

The majority of members felt that those affected by licence fee penalties were amongst the most disadvantaged. For this reason, they felt the penalties were unfair.

8.2 BBC Weather: For the members who gave feedback, a little light-hearted banter between the weather presenter and the news reporters was a good thing. The weather forecast was an integral part of the local coverage, which many people rely on. Some felt that the weather presenter all too often appeared as an addition to, rather than a part of the programme. All felt that as long as the banter was not intrusive and did not detract from the presentation of the actual forecast this was fine.

Quotes:

"For most people the weather forecast is an integral part of our local news coverage. Many rely on this for their jobs or when planning events in the very near future as well as helping ordinary viewers decide whether to go out for the day or stay at home; and whether to take an umbrella or put on the sun cream!"

“The best forecaster on TV is Daniel Corbett. He is wonderful to watch and visually expressive as he almost dances across the weather screen. It is nice to see a **natural personality** on TV as opposed to the many contrived offerings”.

8.3 December and February 2011 meetings

CW gave dates for the December and February meetings and agreed to get dates for 2011 to members as soon as possible.

Action: CW

8.4 One member expressed concerns that Breakfast would be moving to Salford. He had understood that BBC had pioneered bringing national TV and Radio news teams together at TV centre for joint working and economies of scale, with a view of moving them to the new Broadcasting House facility by 2012. He wondered how easy it would be to attract key people to Salford. He felt that the real meat of the programme would be lost as a result.

Another member had watched ITV’s new breakfast show *Daybreak*. He felt it looked better than Breakfast, was bright, new, shiny and swishy – although very London centric.

8.5 Digital Switchover: The schedule for the regions switchover to digital had been brought forward and would now happen in 2011.

9. Date of next event:

Saturday 27th November, Outreach