

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL AUDIENCE COUNCIL

Wednesday 11 May 2011, BBC Birmingham, The Mailbox

Present:

Robin Jones Deputy Chair

Chris Coleman

Kenneth Pugh

Kollette Super

Linda Connor

Paul Taberner

Theresa Evans

Valerie Bradley

Saheeb Hussain

Roger Esson

Zoe Mayne

Louise Hall Head of Governance and Accountability, England

Cath Hearne HRLP, West Midlands

Carol Webster Public Accountability Manager, England

Apologies:

Belinda Channer

David Mason

Sin Ong

Meena Bose

1. Welcome and introductions

The Deputy Chair welcomed members to the meeting, with a particular welcome to the new members attending their first meeting. He also welcomed the Head of Region and Louise Hall, Head of Governance and Accountability for England. He informed members that Bev Tomkins had resigned due to pressure of work. He expressed his thanks to Bev for all the work she had done during her term in office, as the link member for BBC Radio Stoke and in supporting the council's work particularly for outreach events. He asked that his thanks and that of the council be recorded and passed on.

The chair invited members to give a brief introduction.

2. Steve Woodhall – Music Manager, BBC Birmingham

BBC Local Radio Music Policy:

The Chair welcomed Steve Woodhall to the meeting and handed over to him for a presentation on BBC Local Radio Music Policy.

Steve introduced himself and told the meeting that he has been involved with this work for around 10 years, covering the whole of England.

He explained that music is about 30 to 40 percent of local radio output, there to support what local radio does and that it must compliment to ensure that listeners do not switch off.

The playlist must reach the target audience and compliment speech, and tries to get the balance right at all times. The playlist has around 800 songs; specialist programmes are additional to this playlist.

A lot of research goes into selecting the playlist, using focus groups of up to 150 people in 'auditorium tests'. At least fifty percent of participants must be listeners of BBC Local Radio. Current tests were focused on people in the 55 to 70 age bracket. At these focus groups, a range of music was played and rated. A playlist panel made up of staff from various local stations across the country selected around 10 tracks in addition to those selected at the auditorium test. Re-testing takes place to check that songs on the list are still popular. New music was also tested during the auditorium tests and could become part of the core playlist. The playlist included songs from the fifties/sixties through to 2011 and music from the 70's and 80's remained very popular. Music that is more contemporary didn't always test well.

A question and answer session followed the presentation. One member referred to the service licence, which states that specialist music should be appropriate to the area and asked how this was decided. The Head of region explained that BBC Radio WM had a specialist new music programme Northern Soul, which was appropriate for the West Midlands but would not be for Devon or Newcastle. The aim is to try to root the specialist music in the area, introducing new music and getting new bands promoted.

Other questions included why local radio didn't do requests; if there was a policy ensuring that all specialist music was represented; if auditorium tests were conducted the same across the country and how long in advance playlists were chosen.

In reply, SW said that requests were not done as they were specific to the person requesting, but dedications were. He said that the specialist music played came back to what came out of the auditorium tests, and that it was not possible to play a completely wide range of music. Auditorium tests were generally conducted in the same way, as it was important to get a wide range of views; however, no significant regional variations had been noticed. Playlists were usually chosen around a week in advance, but on occasion, it could be days.

He explained that the rule of thumb for starting the Christmas playlist is around two weeks before and that by Boxing Day it was all done.

The Deputy Chair thanked SW for his input and for a fascinating insight into the policy.

3. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

Action points –

2.1 Matters arising 4.2 CW had agreed to send out the links to the videos that were recorded at the ACE Exeter Seminar by members as part of the History of the World programmes. This was actioned and members had received the link.

3.3 CW agreed to invite Steve Woodhall to a future meeting to inform members how the playlist for local radio is chosen. SW attended the meeting.

8.0 AOB: CW/BC agreed to include council working on the next agenda. This was in relation to getting feedback on the work the council engaged in. As BC was not present at the meeting and the member who had raised this has sent apologies, this item was deferred.

CW agreed to send members a copy of the BBC top ten programmes to members. This was actioned

At the February meeting one member asked questions regarding the cuts recently published. Sue Owen standing in for the CH stated that this information would need to be put to the HRLP. The Head of Region explained that this was part of continuing improvement in year 4 of a five-year cycle, which resulted in a cut of 25 staff in Birmingham. She explained that the *Politics Show* was now recorded; *Inside Out* would be back for another series. She also explained that as staff are not needed across the year posts were being made freelance.

CW informed members that the June outreach was likely to be looking at Local Radio, in line with the Trusts consultation. Members would be sent more information when it was available.

Action: CW

Members raised concerns at the coverage of the Eastenders storyline about the swapped baby. The chair agreed to put this forward as a burning issue.

Action: BC

A member wanted to know what evidence the BBC had that young people didn't listen to Radio 4. LH said there was a summary and that she would find a copy to forward to members.

Action: LH

It was recorded that the Midlands *Late Kick Off* was the best regional programme in Europe. David Holdsworth had asked at ACE that his thanks be passed on to members for their support for the programme, which had helped to secure it getting a fixed transmission slot.

4. Programme & service review

Royal Wedding coverage:

Pre wedding coverage: For one or two the lead up was off putting, with some saying it was too much and over the top. Members highlighted some good historical coverage of weddings

The day: Most members agreed that the production, presentation and time were superb. They felt the event was covered 'supremely' with decorum fitting the occasion. The reporting was concise throughout and the news reports later rounded up a good day. One member had a group get together watching in two separate rooms, one group watching the BBC the other ITV, with feedback at the end saying the BBC had given the best coverage.

Members commented on the coverage and camera angles particularly in the Abbey, which they described as 'brilliant. Some questioned the use of Fern Cotton and Matt Allwright as roving reporters in the crowd, asking if they were right for the event, however it was agreed that using younger people was a good thing for the BBC to do to appeal to a younger audience.

Members felt that this was an event that brought the country together, and that the BBC coverage, before and during the event helped this. One member watched the lead up to the event in America another was in Pakistan on the actual day and there people were glued to the coverage.

Post wedding: members felt that this was overshadowed by the death of Bin Laden, which they also felt affected coverage of the local elections and the AV vote.

4.2 Local Radio Service Licence - particular reference to Sport, Faith, Minority/Specialist programming, Social media - Facebook, Twitter

Sport: In general, members felt that the sports coverage on their local radio stations was good. The coverage on Radio Shropshire was said to be excellent for both national and local sport. The coverage of local sport on Radio Hereford and Worcester was good, but members who also listened to Radio WM felt their coverage was better. Around half of members said that local radio was their first option for local sport. They felt that coverage was weighted in favour of soccer and mainly premiership matches. They did not think that other matches got as much exposure. Members reported having heard coverage of tennis and ice hockey on their local radio (Radio Shropshire). Some also reported hearing coverage of cricket and golf.

Faith: Most members said they did not tune into faith programmes on their local radio stations, and they did not feel that faith was included in other parts of the output. What members had listened to was described as having an underlying Christian feel, with non-specific dips into different faiths. One member said that the coverage did not challenge, did not make her think and was too syrupy. One member who listened regularly said that she did so to get the list of local events that followed the programme.

Minority and Specialist Programmes: members had evidence of minority/ specialist programmes covered by their local radio. Radio Shropshire had within its programmes items relating to the rural community. Radio WM had a Caribbean section, and local history was covered well. Some members felt that minority/specialist programmes were not covered as well as they were two or three decades ago.

Social Media: members were aware of listeners being encouraged to use social media but only in some programmes.

4.3 Local Radio Link Reports

Reports were submitted by the link members for BBC Radio WM, Radio Coventry and Warwickshire, Radio Shropshire and Radio Hereford and Worcester. Each link member was asked for any update to his or her report.

Radio WM: the link member had nothing to add to his report, but the HRLP clarified that Ed Doolan would be presenting on Friday and Sunday (not Saturday).

Radio H&W: the link member reported that mid morning there was a story of the day. This was not a national story, but a story with local relevance.

Radio C& W: the link member had observed some concerns that parts of Warwickshire were being overlooked and there was a feeling that Coventry wasn't getting enough coverage.

Radio Shropshire: There was a perception that there was too much music. Reports from the link members' network was that they found travel news useful.

5. Reports

5.1 Head of Region's report:

The HRLP's report had been sent to members and was updated at the meeting. She informed the meeting that the RAJARs would be formally published the following day. She reported that all five of

the West Midlands stations had improved reach, building audiences in Coventry and Warwickshire and WM.

Action: CW to forward

She gave an update and some background to DQF: Of the nine work streams, two affect her area specifically, radio and journalism. The overall purpose is to seek advice from BBC staff on how to deliver services from 2013 with a 20% reduction. Ideas from staff will be made into proposals that will go to the BBC Trust. One idea was to merge Local Radio with Radio Five Live. Questions asked included are 12 regions needed; are as my programmes of *Inside Out* needed; can there be more sharing of local radio content; are as many weather presenters needed etc.. Whatever the outcome there will be impact on programming and possibly fewer regional centres i.e. move production away from Birmingham. However, the Director General had said that it is not the will of the Executive to close any services.

The HRLP left the meeting at this point.

5.2 English Regions draft objectives and Local Radio Performance

Members all had a copy of the objectives, which the Controller wanted, shared with the councils although they were still draft.

5.3 Chair's Report

Audience Council England (January draft minutes)

Members had received the draft January ACE minutes with the papers for the meeting, and the Deputy Chair shared some notes from the 19 April meeting.

He reiterated David Holdsworth comments re *Late Kick Off* (minuted earlier).

Members were invited to comment on the minutes and notes.

6. Trust business & feedback

6.1 BBC Trust Work-plan 2011/12

The Trust work-plan for 2011/12 was shared with members, who were asked to look particularly at pages 6 and 7, which was most relevant for RAC members.

6.2 BBC Trust appointments: Chairman and Vice-Chairman:

Members were reminded that Lord Patten of Barnes had taken up his role as the Chair of the BBC Trust on May 1, and that Diane Coyle the post of Vice Chair.

7. Outreach

7.2 Local Radio Service Licence Review

The PAM confirmed that the June outreach would be a review of the Local Radio service licence. It was agreed that three events would take place in the West Midlands, to get feedback from as wide a group from the community as possible. She agreed to keep members informed of progress and asked that they let her know of their availability to support the event.

Action: CW/All

8. Burning issues – Delivering the purposes and matters of trust

There were no burning issues.

9. Any other Business

A member who said that some programmes were failing people with hearing difficulties with the level of music over speech raised the issue of background music. He highlighted two programmes one being the *Weakest Link*, the other was one particular episode of *Eastenders*. He said that subtitles were running well.

LH said that this was something that came up regularly. She said that the BBC Executive had commissioned research on this and that there would be a presentation at ACE in June. She said that the assumption was that this was a problem for older people but research showed that younger people also had difficulties; and that one in five people had a hearing problem.

She agreed to share the information and presentation from the research.

Action: LH

Members welcomed the return of the table on *Midlands Today*.

Members commented on a new Saturday night programme *Don't Scare the Hare*. Those who had seen it were disappointed with the format.

Mrs Browns Boys was loved by all who had seen it. They explained that it was an old Irish story based on a book and that it was like a stage production. This was a BBC Northern Ireland production, which all wanted to congratulate.

Digital switchover: A member reported that some parts of the Sandwell area had experienced issues with retuning. Another member from Stoke had experienced losses of signal during bad weather. The Deputy Chair said that he had experience of people who were not technically minded having issues.

The Deputy Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them a safe journey home.

10. Date of next meeting:

15 June 2011 - Outreach

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.]