

Meeting of the BBC Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee

MINUTES

6 March 2025

Boardroom 3028, Broadcasting House, London

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Minutes of the 16 January Meeting and Matters Arising
2. Ofcom Session
3. Revision of the Editorial Guidelines
4. Emerging Editorial Risks and Issues
5. BBC Arabic: News Response
6. Plan for Reform Voters
7. Editorial Review Updates
8. Senior Editorial Adviser Report
9. Analysis of Stage Two Complaints
10. Papers for Approval/Noting
11. AOB

ATTENDANCE

Members:

- Samir Shah Chair
- Nicholas Serota Non-executive director
- Tim Davie Director-General
- Robbie Gibb Non-executive director
- Deborah Turness CEO, BBC News and Current Affairs

With

Siobhan Walsh	Director, Content Policy (item 2)
Laura Rhea	Interim interim Head of Standards (item 2)
Natalie Rose	Principle, Standards and Audience Protection (item 2)
Rhodri Talfan Davies	Director, Nations
Jonathan Munro	Global Director and Deputy CEO News and Current Affairs
Caroline Daniel	Editorial Advisor
Michael Prescott	Editorial Advisor
David Jordan	Director, Editorial Standards and Policy
Peter Johnston	Director, Complaints and Editorial Reviews
Paul Oldfield	Chief of Staff to the Director-General
Jo Clarke	Secretary to the Committee
Rizwana Rahmani	Executive Lead, Editorial Policy and Standards
David Grossman	Senior Editorial Policy Advisor
Ric Bailey	Chief Advisor, Politics (item 4)
Helen White	Project Manager; Serota Implementation Project (item 7)
Simon Coates	Senior Advisor, Thematic Reviews (item 7)

APOLOGIES

None

EDITORIAL GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE MINUTES

1. Minutes from the 16 January Meeting and Matters Arising

- 1.1 The minutes of the meeting on the 16 January were approved.

Matters Arising

- 1.2 The Matters Arising paper was noted.
- 1.3 Committee members noted an update on the process for investigating the editorial issues with the film *Gaza: Surviving A War Zone*, which had been agreed at the 27 February Board meeting.

2. Ofcom Session

- 2.1 Committee members welcomed Ofcom guests Siobhan Walsh, Director, Content Policy; Laura Rhea, Head of Standards, and Natalie Rose, Standards and Audience Protection.
- 2.2 The session included a discussion about issues with the Gaza film and the importance of maintaining audience trust. Ofcom confirmed that it was content that the agreed BBC First procedures be applied in the first instance.
- 2.3 Ofcom were updated on progress with the thematic review of representation and portrayal and plans for future reviews. It was agreed that the findings of the reviews might prove helpful to all of the public service broadcasters.
- 2.4 The session also covered Ofcom's plan for a Public Service Media Review ahead of Charter Review and further research on impartiality. It was agreed that it would be helpful to share thinking on impartiality audience research methodology and metrics.

3 Revision of the Editorial Guidelines

- 3.1 The Committee discussed a paper detailing the outcome of the public consultation on the draft Editorial Guidelines and the changes made by the Editorial Policy team since discussion at EGSC and the Board in October 2024.

- 3.2 The Committee noted that 34 organisations/academics and 12 individuals had responded to the consultation, but that response rates to similar consultations historically had always been low.
- 3.3 The Committee discussed the changes to the Editorial Guidelines, noting the difference between them and the additional guidance contained in the Style Guide. Committee members agreed that the relevant areas of the Style Guidelines would also come back to the Committee, once updated.
- 3.4 The Committee approved the revised Editorial Guidelines for submission to the Board meeting on 19 March.

4. Emerging Editorial Risks and Issues

- 4.1 The Committee discussed current and upcoming editorial risks, including ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and the assisted dying debate. The Committee also discussed the reporting of the new US presidency.

Local Election Guidelines

- 4.2 The Committee approved the Local Election Guidelines ahead of the start of the election period for the May local elections.
- 4.3 The Committee noted that all five parties (Labour, Conservative, Lib Dems, the Greens and Reform) would be treated equally on network coverage, with allowance for local adjustment.

5. BBC Arabic: News Response

- 5.1 The Committee discussed the response from the Director, Global News to the Senior Editorial Adviser's report on BBC Arabic, which had identified issues with the *Press Review*; the quality of editorial oversight and the overall leadership of the area.
- 5.2 The Committee noted that important structural and management changes had recently been made to the oversight of World Service operations, including BBC Arabic. In response to the report a number of additional actions had been implemented. These include an overhaul of the *Press Review*, a senior appointment to champion and safeguard quality, and the announcement of a complete reworking of accountability across BBC's worldwide operations.

- 5.4 The Committee discussed the report. A number of additional actions were agreed, including incorporating BBC Arabic output in the scope of the future thematic review of BBC coverage of the conflict in the Middle East. The Committee would continue to monitor any issues arising whilst the changes took place.

6. Plan for Reform Voters

- 6.1 The CEO, News and Current Affairs provided the Committee with a presentation on plans to address low trust issues with Reform voters.
- 6.2 The Committee discussed the presentation. Committee members recognised the importance of local BBC teams in the plan, given their closeness to audiences. Directors discussed how story selection and other types of output, such as drama, also had a role to play. An update on progress would return to a future meeting of the Committee.

7. Editorial Review Updates

Future Review of BBC Coverage of Conflict in the Middle East

- 7.1 The Committee considered a proposal for a thematic review to take place on BBC coverage of the Israel/Gaza conflict.
- 7.2 The Committee approved the proposal and it was agreed that it would be recommended to the full Board in March. If agreed, a full terms of reference would be developed along with a protocol regarding journalists on the ground.

Future Topics for Review

- 7.3 The Committee agreed that the thematic review following that will be on the BBC's coverage of energy policy in the UK and climate change.

Update on the Thematic Review of Representation and Portrayal

- 7.4 An update on the Thematic Review of Representation and Portrayal was noted. Its authors would attend the June meeting of the Committee to present their findings.

Internal Content Reviews: Review of Impacts and Lessons

- 7.5 The Committee noted a paper providing a summary of lessons from the Internal Content reviews undertaken to date, and proposals agreed by the Executive Committee for future development.

8 Senior Editorial Adviser's Report

- 8.1 The Committee discussed the Senior Editorial Adviser's Report, which this month contained two proposals for internal review on business and local coverage.
- 8.2 The Committee agreed that the review of business coverage would be undertaken first, followed by the review of local content.

9. Analysis of Stage 2 Complaints

- 9.1 The Committee noted the stage 2 complaints report.

10 Papers for Approval/Noting by Exception

- 10.1 The Committee noted the stage 1 complaints reporting for January.
- 10.2 The Committee noted the Ofcom monthly complaints reports for the same period.

11. AOB

- 11.1 A response to the Senior Editorial Advisers report on coverage of the US Election would come to the next meeting of the Committee.