

BBC BOARD - ENGLAND COMMITTEE

Minutes

25th September 2024, 14.30 - 17.00

BBC Radio Lancashire

Members:

Robbie Gibb Non-Executive Director (Chair)

Rhodri Talfan Davies Director, Nations

Nick Serota Non-Executive Director

Jason Horton Director, Local Production

With:

Adrian Mills Business Operations Director, Local

Mark Grinnell Executive Lead, Nations (secretary)

Patricia Hidalgo Director, Children's and Education

Rebecca Davis Head of Audience Research (item 5)

Chris Rick Executive Editor, Radio Lancashire (item 6)

Chris Brindley Senior News Editor, North West (item 6)

Andrew Scadding Head of External Affairs (item 4)

Anjla Kumar Senior Finance Business Partner (item 7)

Agenda:

- 1 Welcome and previous minutes
- 2 Director England, report
- 3 Director Nations, update
- 4 MP engagement
- 5 Audiences
- 6 Regional update
- 7 Impartiality in the region
- 8 Finance
- 9 AOB and Close

1. Welcome and Previous Minutes

1.1 The minutes from the previous meeting (9th May 2024) were approved with no conflicts.

1.2 The Committee heard an overview of partnerships between the Childrens and Nations Divisions, including the Christmas panto in Edinburgh, where there would be partnership working with the BBC Scotland team.

2. Director England Report

2.1 The Director gave an overview of a busy summer of content in BBC Local, including General Election coverage - for which new working partnerships with network News were established.

2.2 The investment in new TV sets in England enabled better use of graphics and digital story telling during the General Election.

2.3 The *Your Voice Your Vote* series of stories was designed by BBC Local and used across the BBC.

2.4 The Director encouraged the Committee to offer feedback on regional output a year after the Local Value for all changes had been implemented.

2.5 Research into the role of local media in communities will be discussed at the BBC Nations Board.

2.6 The Committee discussed staff wellbeing and editorial coverage of riots in some parts of the UK during the summer.

2.7 The Voluntary Redundancy window is open for staff as part of future savings plans within Local and the wider BBC.

2.8 The Director outlined the areas in which savings might be made across the BBC Local teams.

2.9 The Committee discussed hybrid working and changes to working routines in BBC Buildings since Covid19. The figure on workplace optimisation in BBC Local would be shared with the Committee members.

2.10 The Committee discussed the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) and the renewal of the contract with local commercial media.

2.11 Local commercial media stakeholders would be invited to a future Committee meeting.

3. Director, Nations report

3.1 The Director outlined the savings challenge across the Division and would update the Committee on progress before the next meeting.

3.2 As part of the Across the UK plans, the BBC in the West Midlands would be supported by Apprentice activity and enhanced commissioning of content. A dialogue with the new Midlands Mayor would follow.

3.3 The Committee next year would visit Bradford, during the year-long City of Culture celebrations. The Committee heard that there would be partnership working within the BBC and *The One Show* would broadcast live for the launch.

3.4 The Committee heard about Generative AI pilots taking place across the BBC. Within England, a project called 'rewriter' could repurpose LDRS services and ready for human oversight. The ability to rewrite wire copy from external sources into house style could have further potential. Live radio commentary captured by Gen Ai can repurpose audio into text for human checking then publishing onto the BBC Sport website.

4. MP Engagement

4.1 The Head of External Affairs gave an overview of engagement with the new Parliament members following the General Election.

4.2 A BBC constituency mapping tool keeps a data set of information across the UK.

4.3 There is a contact list for MPs so they can keep in touch with BBC Local teams.

4.4 Local MPs are now routinely invited to BBC activity within their constituency, including filming for network television content.

4.5 The BBC has a stand at each of the political party conferences.

4.6 There will be a regular series of regional MP breakfast meetings during 2024 and 2025.

5. Audiences

5.1 The Committee heard about audience trends across English Regions up to Q2 2024.

5.2 Impartiality scores amongst audiences in the second quarter of the year remained stable during the General Election.

5.3 The BBC *Radio 2 In the Park* event in Preston has had a positive impact on audience scores in Lancashire and the North West for local and network content. The Committee would have a report on whether this audience increase stabilises permanently.

5.4 Content set in the region, including Series 2 of *Time* and *The Responder* (both set in Liverpool) has over indexed amongst audiences in the North West and increased positive perceptions.

5.5 Within Nations; TV news had large audiences with coverage of the General Election, the story about Southport stabbings and subsequent unrest in England and big sporting events including the Euros and Olympics.

5.6 Live listening to BBC Local Radio is just above target in the second quarter of 2024 but still significantly down on the year.

5.7 Audience survey sessions are underway and will be reported to future committee.

6. Regional Update and Impartiality

6.1 The Committee discussed BBC Local in the region, including BBC Radio Lancashire and BBC Radio Cumbria performance and team culture.

6.2 The Editor talked about the local geography and his role in leadership in the region.

6.3 Across the BBC Local estate, the impartiality review recommendations have been cascaded in team meetings. Across Nations, there would be a set of key calendar moments to tie into Editorial training.

6.6 Impartiality workshops have been undertaken in the East and West Midlands and now would be rolled out across the rest of the country.

7. Finance

7.1 The Committee noted the changes in spending due to inflation and costs following BBC Local Value for all.

7.2 Tech group changes across the BBC have impacted on local spend.

7.3 In hours, following LVFA, news hours have increased with the breakfast and longer lunchtime bulletin on television.

8. AOB

8.1 There were no other matters arising.

8.2 The next meeting would be held on Feb 13th 2025 in BBC London.