



Meeting of the BBC England Committee

MINUTES

**6 October 2021
14.30 - 18.00
Held via video conference**

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Introduction from the New Chair
2. Minutes from the Meeting on 13 October 2020
3. Director England Report
4. Finance and Regulatory Report
5. Audience Report
6. Audience Session Briefing
7. Audience Session
8. AOB

ATTENDANCE

Members:

- Robbie Gibb Non-executive director for England (Chair)
- Tanni Grey-Thompson Non-executive director
- Rhodri Talfan Davies Director, Nations
- Helen Thomas Director, England
- Adrian Mills Chief Operating Officer, BBC England

With:

- Jo Clarke Secretary to the Committee
- James Holden Director, Marketing and Audiences, Nations (item 5 and 6)

APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

ENGLAND COMMITTEE MINUTES

1. Introduction from the New Chair

- 1.1 Robbie Gibb, the new Board member for England and Chair of the Committee, welcomed the members to its first meeting since the departure of Ashley Steel, the previous member for England in 2020.
- 1.2 The Chair opened the meeting by reflecting on some of the high-level recommendations arising from the Serota Review and how they might impact the work of BBC England. The Committee discussed how embedding editorial values more fully within the organisation could be achieved and the most effective ways to review programme output to ensure impartiality.

2. Minutes and Actions from the 13 October 2020 Meeting

- 2.1 The Committee approved the minutes.

3. Director England Report

- 3.1 The Director, England provided the Committee with an update on activity. Work had taken place to implement Covid-safe working conditions in all local and regional sites and plans to ensure broadcast continuity had been rolled out. The new hybrid working model had been piloted on a number of bases and was working well. England was on track to return 30% of the workforce back to the office by the end of the month.
- 3.2 The Committee noted a briefing on the implementation of the England transformation plan. The savings targets had been realised and the redundancy programme completed (which amounted to 27% of the existing headcount). The Chairman commended the team on the scale of this achievement, particularly during the period of the Covid pandemic.
- 3.3 Progress with other areas of the transformation process included the use of new mobile technology for filming; re-organisation of digital teams; the re-branding of general news and its move to Salford; *Inside Out* had now been replaced by a new current affairs programme *We Are England*; HD upgrades to the studio galleries were taking place and the *Make A Difference* campaign had now drawn 5.5 million contacts.
- 3.4 The Committee also noted an update on the establishment of creative partnerships in the West Midlands and Newcastle.

4. Finance and Regulatory Report

- 4.1 The Committee noted the Finance and Regulatory Report. With regard to quota hours, planning work was taking place for future years and this would ensure that the spend

and hours quotas were exceeded from 2021 onwards. Ofcom were currently in consultation about out of London definitions.

4.2 The Committee noted that investment proposals to improve the local digital offer were currently with the Director-General.

5. Audience Report

5.1 James Holden, Director, Marketing, Nations, introduced the Audience Report.

5.2 The Committee noted that the average weekly reach of BBC regional TV news across England so far this year was 16.8m. This was naturally down on the figures seen during spikes in the pandemic last year (2020 weekly average was 18.0m). The average audience for the 1830 regional news on BBC One is 4.2m, the highest of any news bulletin across the country. Similarly, the regional politics programmes across England continued to attract relatively large audiences, having seen figures increase substantially at the beginning of the pandemic. The average audience across England between September 2020 and June 2021 was 838k; down from 924k for the previous series, but well ahead of the 725k from 2019.

5.3 A number of big stories resulted in very large audiences coming to BBC England News online. So far this year, England content on the website had reached more than 16m UK browsers. The highest weekly reach was the week of the shootings in Plymouth, when 20.8m browsers accessed BBC England online content.

5.4 *Yorkshire Firefighters*, a BBC 2 documentary commissioned by BBC England, reached 4.4m across its four episodes this Summer with a further 650k requests for the series on iPlayer. The series reached 10% of the population of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire compared with 7% nationally. The series attracted an AI score of 84, with a higher score of 86 amongst C2DE viewers, a target audience for the BBC. The Committee discussed the positive response of audiences to seeing their communities authentically portrayed on screen.

6. AOB

6.1 The Committee noted and approved the Terms of Reference which had been updated regarding membership of the Committee.

7. Audience Engagement Session

- 7.1 James Holden, Head of Audience Research, joined the Committee to brief members on the Audience Engagement session held via video conference and explained how it would run.
- 7.2 The session was to be held with residents from Luton to discuss their programme preferences, the services they most used and their perceptions of the BBC and would be facilitated by Nicola Crowther, Head of Audience Research.