



**Meeting of the BBC England
Committee
MINUTES**

8th February 2024

BBC Bristol

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- 1 Introduction and minutes of previous England Committee
- 2 Regional Report
- 3 Director, Local Production report
- 4 Audiences
- 5 Finance
- 6 AOB and close

ATTENDANCE

Members:

- Robbie Gibb (Chair), Non-Executive Director
- Nick Serota, Non-Executive Director
- Jason Horton, Director of Production, BBC Local
- Adrian Mills, Business Operations Director

With:

- Stephanie Marshall, Senior Head of Content Production, West and South West and Channel Islands (item 2)
- Rebecca Davis, Head of Audience Research (item 5)
- Anjla Kumar, Finance Business Partner (item 6)
- Mark Grinnell, Executive Lead, Nations (secretary)

Apologies:

- Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director, Nations

ENGLAND COMMITTEE MINUTES

1. Introduction and minutes of previous England Committee

- 1.1 The minutes of the last Committee meeting (9th November 2023) were approved and no new conflicts were presented.
- 1.2 The Chair congratulated Samantha Sing on her appointment to the role of Financial Director, Nations and invited her to observe the meeting as part of her BBC induction.
- 1.3 A local stakeholder meeting would follow the formal Committee.

2. Regional Report, BBC Local

- 2.1 The Senior Head of Content Production welcomed the England Committee members to the region.
- 2.2 The Committee heard about significant staff changes as part of the '*local value for all project*' (LVFA). There is a new breakfast show presenter on BBC Radio Bristol and full line up change on Radio Gloucestershire and other stations in the region. The most recent RAJAR audience report doesn't capture listening figures during the changes to the line-up as surveying was carried out before the reorganisation.
- 2.3 The Committee noted the success of BBC Radio Wiltshire in the most recent RAJAR audience listening survey.
- 2.4 The Committee heard how recent changes to newsgathering ways of working have delivered bigger audiences on digital platforms in the West and South West and secured the path of content to network output.
- 2.5 The numbers of digital stories in the region have increased by 350% at the weekend, from an average of 4 to 18 stories per index.
- 2.6 The Committee discussed the afternoon show output in local radio. The Devon and Cornwall afternoon show piloted the new model for the rest of the network. Listeners in Bristol and Somerset are used to shared daily content historically. There is some development work underway in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.
- 2.7 The Director England highlighted the improved confidence in the relationship between local and network newsrooms, with good examples of sharing stories including, most recently, storm coverage.
- 2.8 There is an audience dashboard which shows the contribution to the overall delivery of targets in local newsrooms.
- 2.9 The Chair asked a question about 'click bate' stories and perverse incentives for journalists to perform to stories which attract high numbers. The Regional Lead

said there is more care and thought into advance planning; monthly, weekly and daily (which accounts for 97% of the content) along with the usual breaking stories.

2.10 The Chair expressed a desire to further strengthen the impartiality of local journalism and show diversity of opinion within news content.

2.11 The appointment of the new leadership team in England gives a stronger depth of editorial control on multiplatform output.

2.12 The proposition for the future of the BBC Whiteladies Road site in Bristol is for network and local audio production to stay on the existing site and refurbish the space needed rather than move into a new site in the city.

2.13 There would be a meeting to review the property used by BBC Local in England.

3. Director England Report

3.1 The Committee heard an update on the completion of the *LVFA* plan.

3.2 The Director placed on record his thanks to the project team and Senior Leadership Team in England for the successful delivery of the project. Any outstanding matters relating to implementation are now considered 'business as usual'.

3.3 There are outstanding union agreements to be signed off for rota implementation in the South East and West Midlands.

3.4 There are 30 colleagues who remain 'at risk' as a result of the *LVFA* programme. There is a plan for those individuals to take redeployment, re-training or complete attachments within the BBC.

3.5 The Chair expressed a desire to see robust data on the impact of the changes in online news growth in terms of story count in England. Across England there is a daily target of four stories per index post rota implementation which is tracked by tableau. This would be presented at the next England Committee.

3.6 Investment in space and kit in new television studios, galleries and sets has enabled increased creativity.

3.7 The 1830 regional news programme content reviews occurred at the end of 2023. And will be presented at the next Committee and sent beforehand.

3.8 Audience figures in Local Radio in the most recent quarter are down on the year.

3.9 The Committee discussed the annual staff survey engagement scores from the previous 12 months. The Director outlined the strategy for driving the scores higher, including improved creativity, leadership and newer ways of working.

4. Regional Report

4. Audiences

- 4.1 The Committee heard analysis of the latest pan BBC audience performance in England and discussed the regional differences.
- 4.2 The Chair expressed concern about the trend of news online and sports online consumption on the website specifically, a review of sport online coverage would be shared in the next Committee with comparison to performance on the sports app.
- 4.3 The Committee would discover local rail click targets and increased consumption of BBC Sounds.
- 4.4 The path to target for RAJAR performance in England on Local Radio is below target. BBC Radio overall has declined, particularly in speech content and local radio has also shown a significant decline. The most recent survey does not account for the period of time in the changes to radio output in England through LVFA.
- 4.5 1.7 million local radio listeners do not consume any other BBC audio content.
- 4.6 News TV and online figures is above target in the most recent data set.
- 4.7 The prominence of local content on the app has driven a perception change from audiences.
- 4.8 There is a Commissioning round for content in podcasts from the LR Commissioning team. This would surface content in March 2024.
- 4.9 There are 'big six' metrics available for all local areas which define accountability and performance of audience consumption. The dashboard is automated and available to staff in England.

5. Finance

- 5.1 The Committee noted the finance report which included a forecast to increase local content spend.
- 5.2 TV and Radio spend shows an increase year on year due to the pay increases in August.
- 5.3 There is a drop in TV hours due to the closure of Oxford and Cambridge offset by the extension of the breakfast bulletin.

6. AOB

- 6.1 The next meeting of the England Committee would be held in Derby or Leicester. The date is to be confirmed.

Meeting Ends.