



Meeting of the BBC Northern Ireland Committee

MINUTES

Thursday 1st August 2024

BBC Blackstaff House, Belfast

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- 1 Chair's introduction
- 2 Director, BBC Northern Ireland, report
- 3 BBC Northern Ireland centenary
- 4 Director, BBC Nations, report
- 5 Audiences
- 6 Editorial Reviews
- 7 Finance
- 8 AOB

ATTENDANCE

Members:

- Michael Smyth, Non-executive Director, Member for Northern Ireland (Chair)
- Nick Serota, Non-Executive Director
- Adam Smyth, Director, BBC Northern Ireland
- Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director, BBC Nations

With:

- Mark Adair, Head of Corporate and Community Affairs, BBC Northern Ireland
- Fiona Campbell, Channel Controller, BBC Three
- Rab McConaghy, Head of Audience Research, BBC Northern Ireland (for item 5)
- Jeremy Ankers, Finance Business partner, Northern Ireland (for item 7)
- Mark Grinnell, Executive Lead, BBC Nations (secretary)

1. Chair's introduction

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked attendees for accommodating a revised meeting date, due to a clash with voting day in the General Election.
- 1.2 Minutes of the previous meeting (1st February 2024) were approved with no conflict.
- 1.3 The Committee noted the publication of the Annual Report and Accounts relating to BBC Northern Ireland.
- 1.4 The Chair welcomed Fiona Campbell, Channel Controller of BBC Three.
- 1.5 There were no apologies for absence.

2 Director Northern Ireland report

- 2.1 The Committee discussed General Election coverage and noted:
 - i) A strong working relationship between Network News and Nations.
 - ii) Robust editorial coverage across BBC Northern Ireland output during the campaign.
 - iii) The visibility of Northern Ireland politics on the network stage during the campaign.
 - iv) The Chair praised the news team for their coverage of the General Election and thanked them for accommodating him in the newsroom to watch the transmission of Election night coverage.
- 2.2 The Committee heard about plans to integrate production of the *Stephen Nolan Show* with the News department in BBC Northern Ireland.
- 2.3 The Committee received an update on the *Belfast Transformation Project*, to regenerate BBC Broadcasting House, Belfast. The office block work would be completed by Christmas 2024. The new outside broadcast vehicle would become operational this year.
- 2.4 The Director is meeting Northern Ireland Screen and Belfast City Council representatives later in the month to discuss studio provision in central Belfast.
- 2.5 The Committee discussed the publication of the OFCOM review of local media and noted areas of the report relating to Northern Ireland.

3. BBC Northern Ireland Centenary

- 3.1 The Committee heard a progress report on the *BBC Comes to Town* series of outside broadcasts and public engagement activities.
- 3.2 The Committee noted there had been strong engagement from local schools and from the public at preview screenings of new BBC content.
- 3.3 A BBC Northern Ireland centenary concert at St Anne's Cathedral would take place in September with guests by invitation.
- 3.4 Audience tickets would be released in August for a televised concert at the Waterfront Hall, supported by Belfast City Council, celebrating 100 years of BBC Northern Ireland programming.
- 3.5 There would be a parliamentary reception to commemorate the BBC centenary.
- 3.6 Plans were on track to install a heritage plaque on the East Street Bridge Power Station site in Belfast, where the first BBC transmitter was erected.
- 3.7 The Four Nations Committee meeting would be held in December in Belfast.

4. Director Nations Update

- 4.1 Work on the BBC Nations budget plan for 2025/26 would be concluded by the end of the quarter.
- 4.2 Members would be briefed on savings and buying model plans, particularly for portrayal content, in the autumn.
- 4.3 The Committee reviewed a slide on news consumption per nation, split by network stories. Roughly 45% of all consumption of BBC News in Northern Ireland is driven by stories coming from local teams. Prominence of local story telling provides a significant growth opportunity.
- 4.4 The local Democracy Reporting Service partnership (funding local journalists in the commercial sector) would be renewed, with an anticipated increase in the value of the contract. Proposals would be shared with members.

5. Audiences

- 5.1 The Committee discussed the performance of BBC Radio Ulster in the most recent RAJAR survey.

- 5.2 Radio listening, in general, in Northern Ireland is increasing with a strong local commercial radio market and offset by network radio performance.
- 5.3 The second series of *Blue Lights* was the big TV and iPlayer hit of the past six months. *Hope Street* continued to attract good audiences on the iPlayer.
- 5.4 There had been a successful summer of televised sport content including the All-Ireland Hurling on BBC Two.
- 5.5 The Committee discussed the potential for local opts onto BBC Radio 2 for Northern Ireland content. This area would be explored further.
- 5.6 The Committee discussed RTÉ's new strategy, new funding position and potential opportunities for collaboration.

6. Editorial Reviews

- 6.1 The Committee heard about the most recent Editorial review into Migration.
- 6.2 Further staff engagement sessions would be arranged locally.
- 6.3 A review into Portrayal and Representation is underway with interviews being scheduled.

7. Finance

- 7.1 The Committee reviewed the latest accounts and early estimates for spend in 25/26.

8. AOB

- 8.1 There were no other matters arising.
- 8.2 Date of next meeting, 23rd October 2024.

Meeting ends.