



## **Meeting of the BBC Northern Ireland Committee**

### **MINUTES**

Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2025

BBC Broadcasting House, Belfast

#### **ITEMS OF BUSINESS**

- 1 Chair's introduction
- 2 Director, Northern Ireland, report
- 3 Charter Renewal and stakeholder engagement
- 4 Indigenous languages
- 5 Orchestra
- 6 Interim Director, Nations update
- 7 Belfast Transformation Project
- 8 Audiences
- 9 Finance
- 10 AOB

## ATTENDANCE

### *Members:*

- Michael Smyth, Non-executive Director, Member for Northern Ireland (Chair)
- Caroline Thomson, Non-Executive Director
- Adam Smyth, Director, BBC Northern Ireland
- Rhuanedd Richards, Interim Director, BBC Nations

### *With:*

- Mark Adair, Head of Corporate and Community Affairs, BBC Northern Ireland
- Fiona Campbell, Interim Head of Unscripted, BBC Content
- Lesley Farquharson, Head of Audience Research, BBC Northern Ireland (*item 8*)
- Mark Grinnell, Executive Lead, BBC Nations (*Secretary*)
- Luke McCullough, Director of Corporate Affairs, Nations (*item 3*)
- Mervyn Middleby, Business Operations Director, BBC Northern Ireland (*item 7*)
- Samantha Sing, Finance Director, Nations (*item 9*)
- Mark Truesdale, Finance Business partner, Northern Ireland (*item 9*)

## **1. Chair's introduction**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all to the Committee.
- 1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025 were approved. There were no conflicts of interest or matters arising.

## **2. Director Northern Ireland report**

- 2.1 The Committee noted the Director's written report.
- 2.2 The Committee heard about a stakeholder event held to launch the new season of *Blue Lights*. Members of the cast and crew along with representatives from local political parties and civic society attended.
- 2.3 The Committee noted recent sports coverage using the new outside broadcast vehicle which had been procured as part of the *Belfast Transformation Project*.
- 2.4 The Committee discussed editorial coverage of the 12<sup>th</sup> July parades. The Director and Northern Ireland Board member reported on their meeting with the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland the week before.
- 2.5 The Committee heard about new drama commissions in Northern Ireland and discussed the potential for future audio commissions.
- 2.6 The Director General had today visited teams in BBC Belfast, held an all-staff briefing and met members of the news team.
- 2.7 The Committee received an update on work to improve BBC NI workplace culture.

## **3. Charter Review and stakeholder engagement**

- 3.1 The Committee discussed possible sectoral and stakeholder engagement and briefing plans ahead of the publication of the DCMS Green Paper on plans for Royal Charter. It was agreed that it was too early to formulate a detailed programme.

## **4. Indigenous Languages**

- 4.1 The Committee discussed and noted the importance of future plans for minority language provision on the BBC in a news environment in which the issue remains

contentious. *The Nolan Programme* has led on this issue recently.

## **5. Orchestra**

- 5.1 The Committee discussed the latest developments in the conversation about the BBC's relationship with the Ulster Orchestra, to include a financial and broadcast commitment.
- 5.2 The Committee heard about a proposition for evolving the existing Orchestra relationship into a higher profile public value partnership which has the potential to increase exposure at the *BBC Proms* and increased audio coverage on Radio 3 and elsewhere. This matter would be taken to BBC Nations Board.

## **6. Director Nations Update**

- 6.1 The Interim Director of Nations had recently spent time in Belfast and had met with teams in News, current affairs, sport and operations.
- 6.2 The Committee heard of plans for a pan-BBC Northern Ireland content 'moment' in 2026.
- 6.3 The Nations Executive teams had recently met in Salford to talk about implementation of BBC priorities in the Nations.
- 6.4 The Committee heard about other work being undertaken including work on a new commissioning buying model in partnership with Content division and a strengthened working relationship with the BBC News division.

## **7. Belfast Transformation Project**

- 7.1 The Committee reviewed progress on the Belfast Broadcasting House redevelopment work and noted funding update. The project retained an amber risk rating.

## **8. Audiences**

- 8.1 The Committee noted a paper on Audience consumption of BBC content in Northern Ireland on TV, digital and audio platforms.

- 8.2 The Committee noted the importance of availability of local news on the BBC's iPlayer product given declining linear numbers of consumers.
- 8.3 The *Assume Nothing* brand of content had delivered considerable growth amongst audiences in Northern Ireland and wider afield.
- 8.4 British and Irish Lions and Masters Golf coverage had delivered considerable consumption figures within Northern Ireland.
- 8.5 The Committee discussed a 'commissioning for social' paper.

## **9. Finance**

- 9.1 The Committee discussed and noted a paper on Finance.

## **10. AOB**

- 10.1 There were no other matters arising.
- 10.2 Date of next meeting, Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

ENDS