



Meeting of the BBC Northern Ireland Committee

MINUTES

Wednesday 23rd October 2024

BBC Blackstaff House, Belfast

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

- 1 Chair's introduction
- 2 Matters Arising
- 3 Director, BBC Northern Ireland, report
- 4 BBC Northern Ireland centenary update
- 5 Belfast Transformation Project & Premises update
- 6 Finance
- 7 AOB

ATTENDANCE

Members:

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

With:

- Samir Shah, Chair, BBC Board
- Mark Adair, Head of Corporate and Community Affairs, BBC Northern Ireland
- Fiona Campbell, Channel Controller, BBC Three
- Jeremy Ankers, Finance Business partner, Northern Ireland (for item 5)
- Mark Grinnell, Executive Lead, BBC Nations (secretary)

Apologies:

- Rhodri Talfan Davies, Director, BBC Nations

1. Chair's introduction

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the BBC Chair.
- 1.2 The Director of Nations had been called away urgently and sent his apologies.

2. Matters Arising

- 2.1 Minutes of the previous meeting (1st August 2024) were approved with no conflict.
- 2.2 The Committee and BBC Nations Board members had met during their visit to BBC Northern Ireland on the day of the Committee.
- 2.3 The Chair praised the work of the Ulster Orchestra for their contribution to the BBC Proms season.
- 2.4 The Chair had met with the Director of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.
- 2.5 The Committee heard an update on the Local Democracy Reporter Service and the re-tender process.
- 2.6 The Committee heard a summary of topline figures from the radio listening survey, RAJAR which had been published on the day of the meeting.

3. Director Northern Ireland report

- 3.1 The Committee discussed the audience performance of content on TV, Radio and Online in Northern Ireland which is often particularly strong when Northern Ireland is portrayed.
- 3.2 The Committee discussed planned news coverage of forthcoming high profile legal trials.
- 3.3 The Committee heard about plans for delivery of *the Nolan Show* to iPlayer audiences which would complement the late night terrestrial television transmission.
- 3.4 The Committee discussed achieving a high scale of output for News investigations with the potential to extend beyond the geographical footprint of Northern Ireland.
- 3.5 The Committee noted the success of the TV show *Dead and Buried*, which had gone straight to iPlayer before terrestrial broadcast. Strong performance on iPlayer is a good indication of how it will perform on BBC One when it is transmitted on November 17th and 18th 2024.
- 3.6 The *NorthWest 200* motorcycle event would be covered by BBC One Northern Ireland in

2025 and a highlights reel would be prepared for the Committee to review.

- 3.7 The 153rd Open Golf Championship 2025 will take place at the Royal Portrush Golf Club in Northern Ireland between the 13th July and 20th July 2025. Coverage would be planned with presentation on BBC One in Northern Ireland.
- 3.8 The new outside broadcast truck is being used for live events across Northern Ireland and Scotland.
- 3.9 The new network Audio Unit based in Northern Ireland is continuing to attract new commissions.
- 3.10 The transformation savings process continues with a view to maximising the Voluntary Redundancy pool to avoid compulsory redundancies where possible.
- 3.11 The Committee heard that the *Sunday Politics* programme will soon include a visualised radio offer.
- 3.12 The Director Northern Ireland is building a working relationship with the Belfast Stories project and would consider future partnership proposals.
- 3.13 The *Stephen Nolan* production team would move to the News department from February 2025.
- 3.14 The Chair praised the *Nolan Show* team for the coverage of the summer riots in Belfast.
- 3.15 The Director General would, on November 14 2024, visit BBC NI to give the Dan Gilbert memorial lecture.
- 3.16 The Four Nations Committee of the BBC Board would meet in Belfast on December 5th.

4. BBC Northern Ireland Centenary

- 4.1 The Committee heard a progress report on the *BBC Comes to Town* and *Book Week* series of outside broadcasts and public engagement activities.
- 4.2 The Committee heard about plans to continue similar events after the anniversary year.
- 4.3 The Committee discussed the *Living Air* Concert at Belfast Cathedral (available via BBC Sounds) and praised the Head of Corporate and Community Affairs for his curation of the programme.

5. Belfast Transformation Project

- 5.1 The Committee heard about the project to refurbish and regenerate BBC Broadcasting House in Belfast. The project is on track and within forecasted budget.
- 5.2 A pilot scheme called 'simplified delivery' as part of the project has exclusively used local subject matter expertise for the building works.
- 5.3 Radio studios in the refurbished building would be equipped with TV cameras for recording interviews.
- 5.4 The new studios have scope for network TV and radio output.
- 5.5 The Chair praised the progress made to date, notwithstanding the pressures on the budget.
- 5.6 The Committee discussed the potential for landscaping around the rear of the building.
- 5.7 The Director NI would revert on the potential for a ribbon cutting ceremony at a key moment in the refurb to mark the launch of the public art commission. [italised]

6. Finance

- 6.1 The Committee reviewed the latest accounts and noted where spend had shifted to the next financial year in commissioned programmes planned for transmission.

6. AOB

- 6.1 There were no other matters arising.
- 6.2 Date of next Northern Ireland Committee meeting, 20th March 2025.
- 6.3 The Four Nations Committee would be held in Belfast on December 5th 2024.

Meeting ends.