

Broadcasters' Liaison Group – 23 November 2023

Note of conclusions and action points

Present: Tabby Karamat (BBC) Ric Bailey (BBC) Alice Hickey (BBC), Tim Burke (BBC), Alasdair MacLeod (BBC Scotland), Gwyneth Jones (BBC NI), Ailsa Chalk (ITV), Meriem Anou (Channel 4), Siôn Pugh (S4C), Mark Sunderland (ITV), Martin Forward (BBC Wales), Claire Telford (Wireless Group), George Yates (BBC) and Niki Nixon (Electoral Commission) for Agenda Item 3 only.

Natalie Rose (Ofcom) for Agenda Item 6 only.

Professor Dominic Wring (Loughborough University) for Agenda Item 7 only.

1. Notes from last meeting

The meeting notes of the last BLG annual meeting of 24 November 2022 were circulated ahead of the meeting and were approved. These meeting notes do not purport to be a full record merely a note of the conclusions in action points.

2. Retrospective 2022/2023

English Locals

There was a discussion between members about the inclusion of links and/or QR codes in PEBs/ PPBs. The members noted that the use of broadcasters' logo and materials still occasionally posed an issue. There was also discussion about the challenges of obtaining details from parties about individuals who appear in the PEBs/ PPBs, particularly in the context of candidates in their local areas.

Subtitles

There were some on-going issues with parties not subtitling their PEBs for deaf or hard of hearing viewers or for when the PEB/PPB contains content other than in English.

Party Political Broadcasts

It was noted that the timing of the Rutherglen and Hamilton by-election had a knock-on effect on the scheduling of PPBs as two of the five broadcasts had been scheduled in the run up to the by-election on 5 October 2023. The conclusion was to reschedule the broadcast of the PPBs. Broadcasters reserve the right to reschedule PPBs where it is appropriate in the circumstances.

It was noted that some parties do not deliver radio PPBs. The group discussed issues with late delivery.

3. Electoral Commission Update

(Niki Nixon attending)

The Electoral Commission considered that the 2023 elections were well run and that in their view confidence in the electoral system remained high. In terms of challenges, their main concern remained voter ID. The Electoral Commission informed the BLG that they had made a number of recommendations to the Government about voter ID.

The close of nominations dates are:

- London Assembly and Mayor – Wednesday 27 March.
- Rest of England and Wales - Friday 5 April.

A member of the BLG flagged that the election period for the Greater London Authority started on 19 March and for all the other elections it is 26 March. The Election Commission indicated that they would report back on this point.

The Electoral Commission also laid out other changes outside of voter ID: how to apply for postal and proxy votes; and that parties have to include certain information on digital campaign material. There have also been boundaries changes but this is not within the remit of the Electoral Commission.

A member of the BLG raised concerns about the ease of access to details on the Electoral Commission website and the availability of updates.

4. Party Representations

The Christian Peoples Alliance had asked for the criteria to qualify for party election broadcasts and will be written to in due course to advise when the information is available.

The BLG discussed parties' approaches to delivery and the technical requirements.

5. Looking forward 2024

The BLG discussed there were the following elections to come:

- England local elections;
- Greater London Authority and Mayoral election; and
- General Election (before January 2025).

6. Ofcom

(Natalie Rose attending)

Ofcom indicated that they are preparing for whenever the General Election was called.

Ofcom opened three investigations which were connected to election issues although none required Ofcom to convene its election committee. Two were concerned with presenters of programmes also standing for election. Another investigation related to the question of at what point does something become a constituency report when discussing a national issue but in a local context.

The BLG flagged that it would be helpful if the publication of Ofcom's digests of current and past electoral support could happen as early as possible before any election. Ofcom also anticipated that guidance would continue to be published alongside the digest.

The BLG highlighted some issues with the preciseness of the one-sixth threshold criteria in first past the post elections, and what happens when parties fall just short of the required candidature. Ofcom confirmed they would consider this issue further.

There was some discussion about the aforementioned scheduling of PPBs during the recent by-election.

7. Matters Arising

Professor Dominic Wring of Loughborough University kindly attended and provided a brief history of party political broadcasts. The group discussed plans to commemorate 100 years of party election broadcasts.

8. Production Guidelines

The group discussed proposed updates to the production guidelines.

9. BLG Website

The group considered the possibility of adding FAQs to the BLG's website.

10. AOB

Nothing material was discussed.