

Broadcasters' Liaison Group (BLG) meeting – 24 November 2022

Note of conclusions and action points

Tabby Karamat (BBC) Ric Bailey (BBC) Mark Sunderland (ITV), Alice Hickey (BBC) Joan Darroch (STV), Tim Burke (BBC), Alasdair MacLeod (BBC Scotland), Chris Hagan (UTV), Jacqueline McIntyre (BBC NI), Eleanor Steyn (Viacom), Natalie Threlfall (BBC), Awen Gravell (S4C), Lucy Moorman (Wireless Group), Meriem Anou (Channel 4)

Niki Nixon – Electoral Commission (Observer Member)

The group welcomed David Powell of the Local TV Network

For item 5 only, the Group was joined by Natalie Rose and Caitlyn O'Brien from Ofcom.

1. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

- The meeting notes of the last BLG annual meeting of 23 November 2021 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 FOR 2022

Northern Ireland Assembly

- There was a discussion among the members in respect of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections on 8 May 2022 and the possibility further Assembly elections in the next 12 months.
- Members discussed one complaint and other communications relating to the allocation of PEBs.

English Locals

- Members discussed issues in respect of PEBs being delivered late.
- Members noted that it was the responsibility of the parties to meet any requirements imposed on production of PEBs by applicable legislation e.g. when working with children.

Scotland Locals

- Members discussed continued issues with late delivery but were grateful for parties sending viewing copies of PEBs.
- There were concerns about content of some of the parties' PEBs which Members agreed, in these circumstances, were an issue for the relevant parties and not the broadcasters.
- Members considered that the BLG guidelines should be pro-actively given to independent production companies by political parties.
- Members discussed the impact of the last minute withdrawal of candidates on a party's potential qualification for a PEB.

Welsh Locals

- Similar issues were experienced to those seen in local elections in the other nations in 2021.

PPBs – Winter, Spring and Autumn

- Members noted that the winter and spring calendars made for a tight schedule and noted that parties may therefore choose to repeat PPBs.
- In NI there may need to be contingency plans for PPBs if a further Assembly election was called.
- Members noted that Northern Ireland parties were often slow to respond when broadcasters were trying to confirm PPB dates.
- Schedule changes had arisen from the death of the Her Majesty the Queen.

3. THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION UPDATE

- The Electoral Commission were contingency planning for future elections but considered the last set of polls to have been well run.
- The Electoral Commission explained that the intimidation of candidates was emerging as a theme and the Commission was looking at the role they could play.
- Voter ID was a significant change and the Electoral Commission was working to reach specific communities.
- Members discussed the potential impact of the Coronation on local elections and noted potential difficulties with voter ID in Scotland where it would be required for national but not local elections.

4. PARTY REPRESENTATIONS

- The BLG discussed correspondence from the Christian Peoples Alliance and the Scottish Family Party.

5. OFCOM UPDATE

- Ofcom had published its election digest mid-February and queried whether this was in sufficient time in order for broadcasters and others to use the information for the election period.
- Ofcom had not seen any concerning complaints but had had a small number of investigations. They had considered issues on presenters potentially standing as candidates.
- Ofcom had given a statement in 2021 on its position on independent candidates and PEBs.
- Members raised potential challenges when calculating criteria thresholds for PEBs in respect of particular types of elections.

6. MATTERS ARISING

- Members discussed a project being undertaken by a university professor to study PEBs in advance of the centenary in 2024.

7. LOOKING FORWARD

- In 2023 there would be the following elections:
 - English Local Election
 - Northern Ireland Local Elections
- Members also discussed the possibility of further unscheduled elections.
- The broadcasters discussed the timing of each broadcaster finalising their proposed allocation criteria for the PEB and notifying the parties of the same. As always it is a matter for each broadcasters on how they want to decide such an issue and the broadcasts allocated to each qualifying party.

8. PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

- Members considered whether the guidelines could be clarified in respect of the restriction on explicit references to a candidate's constituency where that individual featured in the party broadcast.
- Updates would be made in respect of references to European Elections and major news events, noting that broadcasters have the right to reschedule.
- Guidelines would be reviewed in respect of material not being delivered to the correct technical specifications and providing correct releases and consent forms.

9. BLG WEBSITE

- Members discussed adding FAQs to the website and undertaking a health check for broken hyperlinks.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Members agreed that the annual meeting should continue to be in person but that they would reconvene virtually if there was an unscheduled event or election before the next annual BLG meeting.