



Meeting of the BBC Board

MINUTES

14 November 2019
Broadcasting House, London, W1A 1AA

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest
2. Minutes from the 17 October Meeting
3. Executive Reports
4. Ofcom's Annual Report on the BBC
5. BBC Sounds
6. Finance Approvals
7. World Service Overview
8. Local Radio Strategy
9. Online Contestability
10. Committee Reports
11. AOB

ATTENDANCE

Present

- David Clementi Chairman
- Tony Hall Director-General
- Tim Davie Chief Executive Officer, BBC Studios
- Shirley Garrood Non-executive director
- Tanni Grey-Thompson Non-executive director
- Ian Hargreaves Non-executive director
- Tom Ilube Non-executive director
- Ken MacQuarrie Director, Nations and Regions
- Steve Morrison Non-executive director (items 1-6)
- Nicholas Serota Non-executive director
- Elan Closs Stephens Non-executive director
- Ashley Steel Non-executive director
- Fran Unsworth Director, News and Current Affairs

With

- Phil Harrold Company Secretary
- Jo Clarke Secretary to the Board
- Bob Shennan BBC Managing Director (items 1-6)
- Glyn Isherwood Group Finance and Operations Director
- David Jordan Director, Editorial Policy and Standards (items 1-3 and 7)
- Charlotte Moore Director, Content (1-3)
- James Purnell Director, Radio & Education (items 1-3 and 5)
- Gautam Rangarajan Director, Strategy (items 1-5)
- Kerris Bright Chief Customer Officer (item 3)
- Jonathan Wall Controller, BBC Sounds (item 5)
- Matthew Postgate Chief Technical Officer (item 6)
- Clare Sumner Director, Policy (items 4-5 and 9)
- Jamie Angus Director, World Service (item 7)
- Helen Thomas Director, England (item 8)
- Chris Rowsell Head of Policy, (item 9)

1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest

1.1 There were no apologies or new conflicts of interest to be declared.

2. Minutes from the 17 October Board Meetings

2.1 The minutes from the 17 October were approved.

2.2 The Board noted the Matters Arising.

3. Executive Reports

Editorial Complaints Handling: Update

3.1 The Board noted an update from Chris Banatvala who was looking at the handling of editorial complaints at the BBC and whether there were improvements that could be made to the processes. Any recommendations he made would go to the Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee for consideration in December.

Board Report

3.2 The Director-General reported that *His Dark Materials* had launched with strong audiences. The impact of the current weekend schedule was high, including as it did programmes such as *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Seven Worlds, One Planet*, many of which had been produced by BBC Studios. Britbox had launched and, with the addition of Channel Four, now showcased a full range of British content.

3.3 The Board noted a briefing on preparations for the General Election. The Election Guidelines had been published and coverage plans announced. A wide range of programming would include a head-to-head debate between Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson, a series of interviews with party leaders by Andrew Neil and a number of *Question Time* debates. The BBC's *Reality Check* service would be of critical importance to audiences at a time of distrust of both politicians and the media.

3.4 The Board noted a briefing on the Samira Ahmed employment tribunal.

3.5 The Director, Strategy, briefed the Board on the overall audience performance in September. Pan-BBC time spent by audiences had increased in September for all age

groups, helped by the return of *Peaky Blinders* and *Strictly Come Dancing*. It was still down on the year, although young audiences had held up better than in the rest of the broadcast TV market.

- 3.6 The Director, Content, provided an update on performance. BBC Three had had its best week ever with the return of *Ru Paul's Drag Race* and *The Young Offenders*. *Ru Paul's Drag Race* had performed very strongly on iPlayer and was by far the top show for bringing 16-34s to iPlayer. Autumn staples *Strictly Come Dancing* and *Celebrity Masterchef* were also significant factors in driving up viewing levels.
- 3.7 The Director, Radio and Education, provided an update on performance. The most recent RAJAR figures showed Radio One and 1Extra breakfast up on the year, which had helped raise BBC radio's reach among 15-24 year olds. BBC productions had featured as five of the top ten podcasts on the Apple UK Chart. *Tunnel 29*, *The Missing Cryptoqueen* and *You're Dead to Me* had all performed well.
- 3.8 The Director, News and Current Affairs provided an update on performance. Ofcom had published its Review into the BBC's news and current affairs output. The review concluded that the BBC remained the UK's primary source for news and despite an uncertain political environment had maintained its reputation for trusted and accurate reporting.
- 3.9 The Director, Nations and Regions, provided an update on audiences and activities. BBC local radio coverage had proved invaluable to those affected by the floods in Yorkshire. The *Troubles* season on BBC Northern Ireland had been highly acclaimed and would remain available on BBC iPlayer for the extended period of one year, as part of a wider portfolio of content marking the anniversary.
- 3.10 The Chief Executive Officer, BBC Studios provided an update on performance. Trading for the year was on track and UKTV was performing strongly with audiences. Four new creative leaders had been appointed across the comedy, factual, drama and documentary genres.
- 3.11 The Board noted the Editorial Standards Report. Directors noted that the number of complaints was likely to increase during the General Election campaign, as was usual in election periods. In the absence of additional resource there was a high likelihood that the targets for response times across complaints handling areas would not be met this month.
- 3.12 The Board considered the Operational Performance Report, which included updates on the BBC's critical projects. The first staff had moved into BBC Wales' new headquarters in Central Square. Income from licence fee revenue was stable, but General Election programming would increase the projected cost of programming this year.

3.13 The Board noted the Commercial, Finance and Operations Quarterly Report.

Licence Fee Unit: CMOD Programme Update

3.14 The Board were provided with an oral status update on the implementation of a new campaign management system in the Licence Fee Unit, and requested additional information on the current status of the project.

4 Ofcom's Annual Report on the BBC

4.1 Ofcom had recently published its Annual Report on the BBC. The Board considered a paper summarising the Report and associated work.

4.2 The Board noted that Ofcom had judged that the BBC was broadly delivering on its remit; had met the public purposes, and complied with the Operating Licence with two minor exceptions which were not judged to be breaches. However, Directors also recognised that Ofcom still had concerns around the BBC's delivery of services to young people, transparency, and diversity data. Next year's Annual Plan would demonstrate more clearly how those concerns were being addressed.

5. BBC Sounds

5.1 The Board were briefed on the performance of BBC Sounds to date and plans for the next phase of its development.

5.2 The Board endorsed the overall vision and plan for BBC Sounds. Directors discussed the regulatory requirements associated with some of the proposals and how those would be managed.

5.3 The Board approved the supplementary materiality assessment for podcast aggregation, which found that the plans were not material, to be shared with Ofcom.

6 Finance Approvals

[paragraphs 6.1 onwards redacted for commercial confidentiality]

Access Services Agreement

6.1 The BBC's Access Service Agreement with Red Bee Media (RBM), which covers subtitling, signing and audio description on the BBC's TV channels to meet ongoing regulatory requirements, is due to expire in March 2022. The paper sought to obtain

approval from the Board to enter into a new agreement with RBM securing these broadcast critical services

- 6.2 Directors discussed the paper. The Board approved the recommendation for the BBC to enter into a new agreement with RBM for Access Services on the terms outlined in the paper

Extension Option to Major Technology Contracts

- 6.3 Three of the BBC's critical technology service agreements were due to start reaching the end of their initial contract terms from 2022 onwards. Each of the contracts, the investment cases for which had been approved prior to the inception of the Board in April 2017, included an option for a three year extension of term. The Board was asked to approve the extensions to all three contracts.
- 6.4 The Board discussed the paper, noting that the contract agreements remained within the originally approved funding mandate for their maximum terms.
- 6.5 The Board approved the extensions to the three technology contracts.

7 World Service Overview

- 7.1 The Board received a briefing on the work of the World Service covering the operational and financial issues faced in delivering news and information services around the world; the editorial strategy and the risks to local staff overseas.
- 7.2 The Board discussed the briefing. Directors were pleased to see that increased investment in the World Service had focused on original and innovative journalism to deliver regional and global impact. Recent examples included investigations by the award-winning *Africa Eye*, including forensic analysis of a video showing Cameroonian soldiers killing women and children, investigations on codeine addiction, football match fixing in West Africa, and the recent programme on sex-for-grades in West African universities. Significant investigations were also core to BBC Arabic, including a recent report on Shia clerics in Iraq undertaking grooming through 'pleasure-marriage' arrangements. Directors noted that the BBC could tackle issues and taboos that local media were very reluctant to address. Directors agreed that a piece of work should be undertaken exploring the extent to which content from World Service TV could be used on iPlayer for diaspora audiences in the UK.
- 7.3 The Board discussed the structure and oversight of the World Service. The Board noted that the Board and Committee Evaluation Review this year would include consideration of whether international matters required the specific oversight of a dedicated Board committee.

8. English Local Radio

- 8.1 At its October meeting the Board had requested that the England Committee consider the proposals for English Local Radio and make recommendations to the Board at its November meeting. In addition to members of the England Committee, non-executive Directors Nick Serota and Ian Hargreaves also attended its meeting to consider the proposals.
- 8.2 The Chair of the England Committee summarised the main themes of the discussion of the proposals for English Local Radio. The Committee had agreed that an overarching strategy for England, which encompassed all local and regional services including regional television and online services, should be developed for consideration by the Board early next year to ensure that the radio services were considered in context as part of a broader strategy for England. Committee members also asked that the strategy be aligned with developments taking place in BBC Sounds, Network News and iPlayer.
- 8.3 The Board noted that in the view of the Committee a number of interim actions could be taken to advance the proposals including the refreshed editorial offer and changes to the operational model, which had been set out in full in the paperwork to the England Committee. A full implementation plan would come to a future meeting of the Board.
- 8.4 The Board agreed that an overarching strategy for local and regional services in England, of which radio would be a part, should come to the Board in the first quarter of 2020. The Board also approved the recommendations for interim editorial and operational changes outlined in the paper.

9 Online Contestability

- 9.1 The Board noted a paper on the BBC's online contestability obligation.

10. Committee Reports

- 10.1 The Chairman of the Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee reported on its most recent meeting. Chris Banatvala had attended the meeting to discuss his work looking at complaints handling; and the Election Guidelines had been approved.
- 10.2 The Chairman of the Fair Trading Committee reported on its most recent meeting, which had included a discussion session with guests from Ofcom.
- 10.3 The Chair of the Commercial Holdings Board reported on its most recent meeting. Items for discussion had included the first look 2020/21 budgets and Britbox.

11 AOB

11.1 An update on the Eastbank Stratford project would go to the Audit and Risk Committee in December.

11.2 The Board noted an update on plans for its meetings in February.