



## **Meeting of the BBC Board**

### **MINUTES**

23 September 2021  
Held at Broadcasting House, London, W1A 1AA  
And Via Video Conference

#### ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest
2. Minutes and Matters Arising
3. Committee Reports
4. Executive Reports
5. LF2022 Settlement
6. The Serota Review
7. Optimising Licence Fee Income
8. Content Investment Approvals
9. Joint Policy Projects: Update
10. The BBC's Relationship with Big Tech
11. AOB

## **ATTENDANCE**

### Present

- Richard Sharp                      Chairman
- Tim Davie                            Director-General
- Shirley Garrood                    Non-executive director
- Robbie Gibb                        Non-executive director
- Tanni Grey-Thompson            Non-executive director
- Ian Hargreaves                    Non-executive director
- Charlotte Moore                    Chief Content Officer
- Steve Morrison                    Non-executive director
- Nicholas Serota                    Non-executive director
- Elan Closs Stephens              Non-executive director
- Leigh Tavaziva                    Group Chief Operating Officer
- Fran Unsworth                     Director, News and Current Affairs

Apologies: There were no apologies

### With

- Phil Harrold                        Company Secretary
- Jo Clarke                            Secretary to the Board
- Gautam Rangarajan                Group Director, Strategy and Performance
- Glyn Isherwood                    Chief Financial Officer (item 4a)
- Nick Wilcox                        Legal Director, Litigation (item 4d)
- Clare Sumner                        Director, Policy (items 5 and 9)
- Gareth Tuck                        Serota Review Team (item 6)
- Victoria Wakely                    Serota Review Team (item 6)
- Kerris Bright                        Chief Customer Officer (item 7)
- Helen Charles                      Head of Policy (item 9)
- Kieran Clifton                      Director, Distribution (item 10)

## BOARD MINUTES 23 SEPTEMBER 2021

### **1. Apologies and Conflicts of Interest**

- 1.1 There were no apologies for this meeting.
- 1.2 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

### **2. Minutes and Matters Arising**

- 2.1 The minutes from the 22 July and 25 August Board meetings were approved, subject to a draft amendment to item 10.
- 2.2 The Board noted the Matters Arising paper and updates on the actions from the last meeting.

### **3. Committee Reports**

- 3.1 The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee reported that the meeting had been joined by Richard Sharp, Chairman, as a temporary member of the Committee until new non-executives joined the Board. The NAO had presented their outline audit plan for the year which had been agreed. The main focus for the meeting had been on two key risk issues: security and sustainability. Simon Adair, Director, SSR, provided a briefing on the overall approach to security risk and the situation in Afghanistan. It was agreed that an item on the security risks around social media use would come to the December meeting of the Committee. James Stacey, an external expert, joined the Committee for a discussion on sustainability. The Committee was clear that the right way to approach the challenge was to aim for deep reductions in carbon use, rather than to pay for offsets. The major projects list was reviewed and it was noted that more detail would be in place on the Across the UK and Diversity and Inclusion projects at the next meeting. Nick Serota joined the meeting for an update on the number of whistleblowing cases and outcomes. The Committee had also noted an update on the response to the recent fire at the Bilsdale transmitter.
- 3.2 The Chair of the Editorial Guidelines and Standards Committee reported on its most recent meeting. Although it had not considered the full report, the Committee had received an update on the Serota Review and considered the draft recommendations, ahead of today's Board meeting. The Committee welcomed the practical nature of the recommendations and the emphasis on the need to embed editorial values in the BBC's culture. The Committee had also considered the recommendations of the Stage 1

Complaints Handling Review and was supportive of the Executive in approving the implementation of operational changes to the Stage 1a of the complaints process, based on a test of “proportionality” in relation to use of licence fee money. The Committee also noted the Internal Audit regarding online safeguarding and the actions arising from it and the complaints reports for the period.

#### **4. Executive Reporting**

- 4.1 The Director-General opened the meeting by updating the Board on the management of the evacuation of BBC Staff in Afghanistan. He recognised all the work that had been done by teams across the BBC in recent weeks to support and protect staff in Afghanistan and their families and to resettle those now in the UK.
- 4.2 Plans for a return to work based on a hybrid working model were being rolled-out carefully, with tests in place to make sure output was protected. Implementation of the modernisation plans for BBC News teams was underway.
- 4.3 The Director-General briefed the Board on plans to help develop the creative sector in the North East, building on similar agreements that had been signed this month in Wales.
- 4.4 The Board welcomed Ofcom’s provisional approval to launch the BBC Three linear channel.
- 4.5 With regard to content, it had been a good period for arts and events coverage – from the Proms to the Reading and Chelsea Festivals, with new talent both on TV and on Radio 4.
- 4.6 Fran Unsworth, Director, News and Current Affairs, and member of the Board, had announced her retirement. The Director-General thanked her for her significant contribution to BBC News and Current Affairs and to the work of the Board.
- 4.7 The Director, Content provided an update on divisional matters. It had been a strong summer for sport from the FA Cup final to the Olympics, the inaugural Hundred cricket finals and Wimbledon, all of which had drawn 84% of the population to watch sport on BBC TV during the period. The Board noted that the BBC had been prohibited from carrying the Emma Raducanu US Open final because of the level of Amazon sponsorship branding required on-screen. The Board discussed planning for the 2028 Olympic Games.
- 4.8 *Vigil* had launched with an excellent consolidated audience of 10.2m. It was the biggest new drama launch this year across TV and the most-watched episode of the month on iPlayer with over 14m iPlayer requests so far. In Radio, the return of commuting had helped to lift drivetime listening. The Board discussed the pressures on recruitment and

retention of talent and access to production resource in what was becoming an increasingly competitive market.

- 4.9 The Director, News and Current Affairs, provided an update on divisional matters and performance. The high levels of reach to BBC News' 6.00 news bulletin, while still above target, had dropped as the pandemic had receded, although the 6.30 regional bulletins were still doing well. News stories related to climate issues were proving popular with audiences. The Board noted an update on the News modernisation programme.
- 4.10 The Board noted the audience performance update.
- 4.11 The Chief Operating Officer provided a briefing on the major fire at the Bilsdale transmitting station which had interrupted terrestrial TV (Freeview) and Radio services to Teesside, parts of N.Yorkshire and County Durham. Around 300,000 Freeview-only households initially lost services. By early September approximately 85% of those affected had had their service restored and Arqiva was now focussed on deploying a shorter temporary mast at a location near to the original Bilsdale site to restore coverage to the majority of the remainder. Licence refunds would be available to those affected.
- 4.12 The Board noted an update on operational matters, including progress with major projects.
- 4.13 The Board noted a financial update from the Chief Finance Officer. Licence fee income was ahead of forecast and commercial performance continued to improve.

#### *Afghanistan*

- 4.15 The Director, News and Current Affairs provided the Board with an update on the evacuation and security of staff still in Afghanistan and arrangements for the resettlement of those who had arrived in the UK.

#### *Dyson Actions*

- 4.16 The Board noted an update on progress completing the actions arising from the findings of Lord Dyson's report into the circumstances around Martin Bashir's interview of Diana, Princess of Wales for *Panorama* in 1995.

#### *Compensation Claims Update*

- 4.17 The Board noted the approach to the claims for compensation set out in the paper and approved the proposals relating to the payment of compensation and legal costs.

## *Panorama: Commercial Returns*

- 4.18 The Board noted the proposal from the Director-General that the proceeds of the commercialisation of the *Panorama* programme featuring Diana, Princess of Wales, would be donated to charity from BBC Studios.

## **5. 2022 Licence Fee Settlement**

- 5.1 The Board noted an update on the 2022 Licence Fee settlement.

## **6. The Serota Review**

- 6.1 The Serota Review was commissioned by the Board, in the light of failings identified in Lord Dyson's Report into the 1995 *Panorama* interview with Diana, Princess of Wales, as part of its duty to ensure that the BBC's editorial standards are being upheld. The purpose of the Review was to report on the effectiveness of the BBC's current editorial policies, processes and governance and to make recommendations for further improvement.
- 6.2 The Review had been led by Nicholas Serota, as Senior Independent Director of the BBC Board, supported by a panel including two Board non-executives, Robbie Gibb and Ian Hargreaves, and two external experts, Caroline Daniel and Chris Banatvala. The panel had received submissions from both within and outside the BBC and had consulted a wide range of past and present staff working across editorial, news and content as well as external media practitioners, other organisations and Ofcom.
- 6.3 The Board noted that the Review found that much had changed at the Corporation since 1995 and that the overall culture and editorial oversight in today's BBC would make similar events highly unlikely today. However, the Board had commissioned this Review because it wanted assurance that the Corporation was equipped to deal with present and emerging challenges, as well as to learn from the mistakes of the past. To that end, the Review team had made a number of recommendations to provide additional assurance to the Board and to audiences.
- 6.4 The Board considered the report produced by the Serota Review and its associated recommendations. Directors welcomed the practical nature of the recommendations and the emphasis on further embedding editorial values in the BBC's culture.
- 6.5 The Board agreed that the draft report should return to the next meeting alongside a response from the Executive.

## **7. Optimising Licence Fee Income**

- 7.1 The Board noted and discussed a presentation about optimising Licence Fee Revenue. Discussion of the data set and customer revenue management strategy for the year would return to the Board.

## **8. Content Investment Approval**

[redacted for commercial confidentiality]

## **9 Joint Policy Projects: Update**

- 9.1 The Board received a briefing on upcoming Ofcom and Government processes: Ofcom's consultation on BBC operating licence reform and their periodic review; the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's mid-term review of BBC regulation and governance; and the upcoming Media Bill.

## **10. The BBC's Relationship with Big Technology**

- 10.1 The Board received an overview of the BBC's strategic relationships with the major technology companies.

## **11. AOB**

- 11.1 The Board noted an update on the expulsion of Sarah Rainsford, the BBC's Russia correspondent, from Moscow.