



Meeting of the BBC Northern Ireland Committee

MINUTES

Thursday 12th February 2026
BBC Broadcasting House, Belfast

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Chair's introduction
2. Director Northern Ireland report
3. Interim Director Nations update
4. Content and Production Priorities and Challenges
5. Belfast Transformation Project
6. News
7. Audiences
8. Finance
9. AOB

ATTENDANCE

Members:

- Michael Smyth, Non-executive Director, Member for Northern Ireland (Chair)
- Caroline Thomson, Non-Executive Director
- Adam Smyth, Director, BBC Northern Ireland
- Rhuanedd Richards, Interim Director, BBC Nations

With:

- Mark Adair, Head of Corporate and Community Affairs, BBC Northern Ireland
- Lesley Farquharson, Head of Audience Research, BBC Northern Ireland (*item 7*)
- Emma Dunseith, Senior Head of Content Production, BBC Northern Ireland (*for item 4*)
- Mark Grinnell, Executive Lead, BBC Nations (*Secretary*)
- Damien Magee, Interim Head of News, BBC Northern Ireland (*for item 6*)
- Berangere Michel, Group Chief Financial Officer
- Mervyn Middleby, Business Operations Director, BBC Northern Ireland
- Samantha Sing, Finance Director, Nations
- Mark Truesdale, Finance Business partner, Northern Ireland (*item 8*)

Apologies:

- Fiona Campbell, Commissioning Director, Unscripted

1. Chair's introduction

1.1 The Chair welcomed the newly appointed BBC Group Chief Finance Officer to the meeting.

1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 2nd October 2025 were approved.

1.3 No conflicts of interest were declared.

2. Director Northern Ireland report

2.1 The Committee received a summary of recent work including leadership training and action plan made after the most recent staff survey.

2.2 The Committee noted a positive audience response to recent commissioning investments.

2.3 Updates were provided on leadership coaching and development for line managers.

2.4 The Committee noted plans for future portrayal spend and progress on the joint commissioning plan with BBC Content division. Key titles such as *Blue Lights* Series 3, *Titanic Sinks Tonight*, and *Confessions of a Killer* had received critical and audience acclaim.

2.5 The Committee noted that a senior member of staff was honoured with a long-service award at the BBC News Awards.

2.6 The Committee noted recent stakeholder and political engagement activities.

2.7 Minority language output commitments were discussed.

2.8 The Committee discussed the Ulster Orchestra funding model in comparison with BBC orchestras in the other devolved nations. The Chair noted that the Northern Ireland position remained anomalous and that further work was required.

2.9 *The Traitors Ireland*, acquired with portfolio funding, was broadcast following the BBC network series and Series 2 is now in production.

3. Director Nations update

3.1 The Committee heard about work to evaluate future production spend levels across BBC Nations and other divisions, with proposals to be taken to the BBC Board.

3.2 Work continues to strengthen the partnership between BBC Nations and BBC News.

3.3 The Committee noted the BBC Nations contribution to the BBC Annual Plan for 2026/27.

3.4 A new YouTube partnership was highlighted, including pilots and content for News and Sport, along with plans to enhance local online sports services.

3.5 Rhodri Talfan Davies has been appointed Interim Director General from 3 April 2026, and joined the BBC Board as Executive Director on 1 February.

3.6 The Interim Nations Director will continue in role during the recruitment of a new Director General.

4. Content and Production Priorities and Challenges

4.1 The Committee noted strong performance of high-impact output on BBC Radio Ulster and digital platforms. Programmes such as *Assume Nothing*, *Crime Next Door*, and *Mystery Of...* continue to feature in the BBC Sounds top ten of most listened to Nation's programmes.

4.2 The Committee reviewed sports audio performance.

4.3 A proof-of-concept project using virtual production facilities at Studio Ulster to visualize narrative audio content was noted.

4.4 Children's minority language audio provision will be reviewed by Nations Board as part of the forthcoming Green Paper response and education planning.

4.5 Forthcoming editorial and events were noted including: Queen's University 180th Anniversary (Alfie Boe in concert), and 12 July coverage.

4.6 An audio co-commissioning strategy will be brought to a future Committee meeting.

5. Belfast Transformation Project

5.1 The Committee reviewed progress on the Belfast Transformation Project, noting it remains on schedule.

5.2 New audio editing and playout technology will be piloted at BBC Foyle.

5.3 The new outside broadcast truck had been deployed for the current series of *Winterwatch*.

6. News

6.1 The Committee was briefed on how the News teams are continuing to operate effectively while the building works are underway.

6.2 Recent BBC Northern Ireland news stories were discussed.

7. Audiences

7.1 The Committee reviewed the latest audience figures for BBC Northern Ireland.

8. Finance

8.1 The Committee noted financial spend and forecast for BBC Northern Ireland.

8.2 The Committee discussed ways of more fully reflecting portrayal spend and Children's content spend in future Committee papers.

8.3 Apprentice numbers were noted.

8.4 Production differences relating to the out-of-London Ofcom target (11.7%) were discussed.

8.5 Forward planning for the autumn Board meeting was discussed, including Children's commissioning, education, and independent-sector production in drama and animation in Northern Ireland.

9. AOB

There were no other matters arising.