

## **Black Country Radio News and Editorial Policy**

Black Country Radio seeks to operate as a trusted news provider across the Black Country. We can only achieve this trust by delivering news that the public believe to be reliable, free from interference, and accurate.

This document represents the main editorial policies, and broadcast code, that underpin the production of news content at the station.

The terms producer, writer, and editor, as used to define those who are responsible for the production, writing, and drafting of news material.

The term piece, material, or programme, is used to define any output under the control of the news team at the station.

All those involved in the production of news content should operate with an honest interest of inquiry, and approach the production of all material with an open mind. Pieces should not be one-sided or dismissive of ideas by virtue of the personal viewpoint of those creating it. Our work should be fair, representative, and open. Those who feature in articles should have a right-of-reply.

Our policy is that we provide a local trusted news service.

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### **Statutory obligations in relation to Radio**

#### **Broadcasting**

**Black Country Radio, as a licenced radio station, is under an obligation to adhere to the broadcasting code.** The regulations in this document do not supersede those laid down by Ofcom in the Broadcasting Code. Anything in this document which appears to contradict the Broadcasting Code should:

- a) be alerted to the station management; and
  - b) be considered non-operative until clarified
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#### **Policy review schedule**

*The landscape around news changes on a frequent basis. Therefore, these policies are reviewed annually. These policies remain in force for a calendar year from the date of their approval.*

## **News editorial policy**

### **1. Geographical consideration**

1.1. Local news is the key focus for our news provision. Most news activity should focus on events in Dudley, Sandwell, surrounding areas across the Black Country and any impacts on local people within our broadcast area, including regional public services such as the Combined Authority, Police, NHS, Fire and Transport systems.

1.2. National news should only be included if it is likely to be of relevance to the local community, and shouldn't constitute the primary activity of the news section.

### **2. Due impartiality and accuracy**

2.1. "Due" is an important qualification to the concept of impartiality. Impartiality itself means not favouring one side over another. "Due" means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme. So "due impartiality" does not mean an equal division of time has to be given to every view, or that every argument and every facet of every argument has to be represented. The approach to due impartiality may vary according to the nature of the subject, the type of material and publication mechanism, the likely expectation of the audience as to content, and the extent to which the content and approach is signalled to the audience.

2.2. News, in whatever form, must be reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality.

2.3. Significant mistakes in news should normally be acknowledged and corrected on air or in publications quickly.

2.4. No politician may be used as a newsreader, interviewer or reporter in any news programmes unless, exceptionally, it is editorially justified. In that case, the political allegiance of that person must be made clear to the audience.

2.5. Due impartiality on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy must be preserved on the part of any person providing news coverage. This may be achieved within a programme or over a series of programmes taken as a whole.

2.6. The broadcast of editorially linked programmes dealing with the same subject matter (as part of a series in which the broadcaster aims to achieve due impartiality) should normally be made clear to the audience on air.

2.7. Views and facts must not be misrepresented. Views must also be presented with due weight over appropriate timeframes.

2.8. Any personal interest of a reporter or presenter, which would call into question the due impartiality of the programme, must be made clear to the audience.

2.9. Presenters and reporters (with the exception of news presenters and reporters in news programmes), presenters of “personal view” or “authored” programmes or items, and chairs of discussion programmes may express their own views on matters of political or industrial controversy or matters relating to current public policy. However, alternative viewpoints must be adequately represented either in the programme, or in a series of programmes taken as a whole. Additionally, presenters must not use the advantage of regular appearances to promote their views in a way that compromises the requirement for due impartiality. Presenter phone-ins must encourage and must not exclude alternative views.

2.10. Due impartiality must be preserved on matters of major political and industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy.

2.11. In dealing with matters of major political and industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy an appropriately wide range of significant views must be included and given due weight in each programme or in clearly linked and timely programmes. Views and facts must not be misrepresented.

2.12. Writers, presenters and editors should not give undue prominence to the views and opinions of particular persons or bodies on matters of political or industrial controversy and matters relating to current public policy in all the programmes included in any service.

2.13. Any commercial references in written material should be made appropriately clear.

2.14. No commercial reference, or material that implies a commercial arrangement, is permitted in or around news bulletins.

### **3. Ensuring fairness**

3.1. All writers and producers for Switch Radio must avoid unjust or unfair treatment of individuals or organisations in programmes.

3.2. Where a person is invited to make a contribution to a programme (except when the subject matter is trivial or their participation minor) they should normally, at an appropriate stage:

3.2.1. be told the nature and purpose of the piece/programme, what the piece/programme is about and be given a clear explanation of why they were asked to contribute and when (if known) and where it is likely to be first broadcast or made available in online form;

3.2.2. be told what kind of contribution they are expected to make, for example live contribution to bulletin/content, pre-recorded, interview, discussion, edited, unedited, etc.;

3.2.3. be informed about the areas of questioning and, wherever possible, the nature of other likely contributions;

3.2.4. be made aware of any significant changes to the piece/programme as it develops which might reasonably affect their original consent to participate, and which might cause material unfairness;

3.2.5. be told the nature of their contractual rights and obligations and those of the station in relation to their contribution; and

3.2.6. be given clear information, if offered an opportunity to preview the content, and have a clear understanding about whether they will be able to effect any changes to it.

3.3. If a contributor is under sixteen, consent should normally be obtained from a parent or guardian, or other person of eighteen or over in loco parentis. In particular, persons under sixteen should not be asked for views on matters likely to be beyond their capacity to answer properly without such consent.

3.4. In the case of persons over sixteen who are not in a position to give consent, a person of eighteen or over with primary responsibility for their care should normally give it on their behalf. In particular, persons not in a position to give consent should not be asked for views on matters likely to be beyond their capacity to answer properly without such consent.

3.5. When material is edited, contributions should be represented fairly.

3.6. Guarantees given to contributors, for example relating to the content of a final production, confidentiality or anonymity, should normally be honoured unless in exceptional circumstances. All deviations from this policy require approval from the station management.

3.7. If a piece alleges wrongdoing or incompetence or makes other significant allegations, those concerned should normally be given an appropriate and timely opportunity to respond.

3.8. Where a person approached to contribute to a piece chooses to make no comment or refuses to contribute, any coverage should make clear that the individual concerned has chosen not to contribute and should give their explanation if it would be unfair not to do so.

3.9. Where it is appropriate to represent the views of a person or organisation that is not actively participating in the piece, this must be done in a fair manner.

3.10. Writers/editors should not normally obtain or seek information, audio, pictures or an agreement to contribute through misrepresentation or deception. Deception includes surreptitious filming or recording. However:

3.10.1. it may be warranted to use material obtained through misrepresentation or deception without consent if it is in the public interest and cannot reasonably be obtained by other means;

3.10.2. if the individual and/or organisation is/are not identifiable in the final product then consent for broadcast will not be required;

3.10.3. material involving celebrities and those in the public eye can be used without consent, but it should not be used without a public interest justification if it is likely to result in unjustified public ridicule or personal distress.

3.11. All material that is likely to fall into the categories in 3.10. should be cleared through the station management first.

## **4. Privacy**

4.1. Any infringement of privacy in pieces, or in connection with obtaining material included in pieces, must be warranted.

4.2. Writers/editors wishing to justify an infringement of privacy as warranted, should be able to demonstrate why in the particular circumstances of the case, it is warranted. If the reason is that it is in the public interest, then they should be able to demonstrate that the public interest outweighs the right to privacy. Examples of public interest would include revealing or detecting crime, protecting public health or safety, exposing misleading claims made by individuals or organisations or disclosing incompetence that affects the public.

4.3. Information which discloses the location of a person's home or family should not be revealed without permission.

4.4. When people are caught up in events which are covered by news items, they still have a right to privacy in both the making and the broadcast of such material, unless it is warranted to infringe it. This applies both to the time when these events are taking place and to any later programmes that revisit those events.

4.5. Where people have a legitimate expectation of privacy, this should not be breached by news producers. Legitimate expectations of privacy will vary according to the place and nature of the information, activity or condition in question, the extent to which it is in the public domain (if at all) and whether the individual concerned is already in the public eye. There may be circumstances where people can reasonably expect privacy even in a public place. Some activities and conditions may be of such a private nature that filming or recording, even in a public place, could involve an infringement of privacy. People under investigation or in the public eye, and their immediate family and friends, retain the right to a private life, although private behaviour can raise issues of legitimate public interest.

4.6. Producers should ensure that words, images or actions filmed or recorded in, or broadcast from, a public place, are not so private that prior consent is required before broadcast from the individual or organisation concerned, unless broadcasting without their consent is warranted.

4.7. If any produced content would infringe the privacy of a person or organisation, consent should be obtained before the relevant material is utilised on air or online, unless the infringement of privacy is warranted.

4.8. If an individual or organisation's privacy is being infringed, and they ask that the filming, recording, or interaction be stopped, the broadcaster should do so, unless it is warranted to continue.

4.9. The means of obtaining material must be proportionate in all the circumstances and in particular to the subject matter of the piece.

4.10. Producers can record telephone calls between Switch Radio and the other party if they have, from the outset of the call, identified themselves, explained the purpose of the call and that the call is being recorded for possible broadcast (if that is the case) unless it is warranted not to do one or more of these practices. If at a later stage it becomes clear that a call that has been recorded will be broadcast (but this was not explained to the other party at the time of the call) then the

broadcaster must obtain consent before broadcast from the other party, unless it is warranted not to do so.

4.11. Surreptitious filming or recording should only be used where it is warranted. Normally, it will only be warranted if:

4.11.1. there is prima facie evidence of a story in the public interest; and

4.11.2. there are reasonable grounds to suspect that further material evidence could be obtained; and

4.11.3. it is necessary to the credibility and authenticity of the piece.

4.12. Producers should not take images or broadcast audio/video of people caught up in emergencies, victims of accidents or those suffering a personal tragedy, even in a public place, where that results in an infringement of privacy, unless it is warranted or the people concerned have given consent.

4.13. People in a state of distress should not be put under pressure to take part in a programme or provide interviews, unless it is warranted.

4.14. Producers should take care not to reveal the identity of a person who has died or of victims of accidents or violent crimes, unless and until it is clear that the next of kin have been informed of the event or unless it is warranted.

4.15. Producers should try to reduce the potential distress to victims and/or relatives when making or broadcasting news content intended to examine past events that involve trauma to individuals (including crime) unless it is warranted to do otherwise. This applies to all types of material.

4.16. Producers should pay particular attention to the privacy of people under sixteen. They do not lose their rights to privacy because, for example, of the fame or notoriety of their parents or because of events in their schools.

4.17. Where a programme features an individual under sixteen or a vulnerable person in a way that infringes privacy, consent must be obtained from:

4.17.1. a parent, guardian or other person of eighteen or over in loco parentis; and

4.17.2. wherever possible, the individual concerned;

4.17.3. unless the subject matter is trivial or uncontroversial and the participation minor, or it is warranted to proceed without consent.

4.18. Persons under sixteen and vulnerable people should not be questioned about private matters without the consent of a parent, guardian or other person of eighteen or over in loco parentis (in the case of persons under sixteen), or a person with primary responsibility for their care (in the case of a vulnerable person), unless it is warranted to proceed without consent.

4.18.1. Vulnerable people may include those with learning difficulties, those with mental health problems, the bereaved, people with brain damage or forms of dementia, people who have been traumatised or who are sick or terminally ill.

## **5. Harm and offence**

5.1. Generally accepted standards must be applied to the contents of all material produced for the station.

5.2. News content or items or portrayals of factual matters must not materially mislead the audience.

5.3. In applying generally accepted standards producers must ensure that material which may cause offence is justified by the context. Such material may include, but is not limited to, offensive language, violence, sex, sexual violence, humiliation, distress, violation of human dignity, discriminatory treatment or language (for example on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership). Appropriate information should also be broadcast where it would assist in avoiding or minimising offence.

5.4. Produced material must not include content (whether in individual pieces or in a series when taken together) which, taking into account the context, condones or glamorises violent, dangerous or seriously antisocial behaviour and is likely to encourage others to copy such behaviour.

5.5. Methods of suicide and self-harm must not be included in material except where they are editorially justified and are also justified by the context.

5.6. Demonstrations of exorcism, the occult, the paranormal, divination, or practices related to any of these that purport to be real (as opposed to entertainment) must be treated with due objectivity.

5.7. Demonstrations of exorcism, the occult, the paranormal, divination, or practices related to any of these (whether such demonstrations purport to be real or are for entertainment purposes) must not contain life-changing advice directed

at individuals. Life-changing advice includes direct advice for individuals upon which they could reasonably act or rely about health, finance, employment or relationships.

5.8. Simulated news (for example in documentaries) must be broadcast in such a way that there is no reasonable possibility of the audience being misled into believing that they are listening to, or watching, actual news.

5.9. Material that might seriously impair the physical, mental or moral development of people under eighteen must not be released for publication/broadcast.

5.10. Where statutory or other legal restrictions apply preventing personal identification, producers should also be particularly careful not to provide clues which may lead to the identification of those who are not yet adult (the defining age may differ in different parts of the UK) and who are, or might be, involved as a victim, witness, defendant or other perpetrator in the case of sexual offences featured in criminal, civil or family court proceedings:

5.10.1. by reporting limited information which may be pieced together with other information available elsewhere, for example in newspaper reports (the ‘jigsaw effect’);

5.10.2. inadvertently, for example by describing an offence as “incest”; or

5.10.3. in any other indirect way.

5.11. When covering any pre-trial investigation into an alleged criminal offence in the UK, editors/writers should pay particular regard to the potentially vulnerable position of any person who is not yet adult who is involved as a witness or victim, before releasing their name, address, identity of school or other educational establishment, place of work, or any still or moving picture of them. Particular justification is also required for the use of material relating to the identity of any person who is not yet adult who is involved in the defence as a defendant or potential defendant.

5.12. The use of illegal drugs, the abuse of drugs, smoking, solvent abuse and the misuse of alcohol:

5.12.1. must not be featured in pieces or programmes made primarily for children unless there is strong editorial justification;

5.12.2. must generally be avoided and in any case must not be condoned, encouraged or unless there is editorial justification;

5.12.3. must not be condoned, encouraged or glamorised in pieces likely to be widely seen, heard or accessed by under-eighteens unless there is editorial justification.

5.13. Violence, its after-effects and descriptions of violence, whether verbal or physical, must be appropriately limited in material generated for broadcast or publication.

5.14. Offensive language should be avoided in all publications and broadcast material.

## **6. Religion**

6.1. Producers must exercise a proper degree of responsibility in relation to religious content. Religious content is anything which deals with matters of religion as the central subject, or as a significant part, of the piece.

6.2. The religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or religious denomination must not be subject to abusive treatment.

6.3. Where a religion or religious denomination is the subject, or one of the subjects, of a religious piece, then the identity of the religion and/or denomination must be clear to the audience.

6.4. Material that contains claims that a living person (or group) has special powers or abilities must treat such claims with due objectivity and must not publish such claims without appropriate scrutiny.

## **7. Elections**

7.1. Black Country Radio, as a licenced radio station, has specific obligations in relation to elections and their coverage. The content of this policy document does not supersede any guidance provided by Ofcom in regard to election coverage.

7.2. For the purpose of this section, elections include a parliamentary general election, parliamentary by-election, local government election, mayoral election, Police and Crime Commissioner election, Scottish Parliament election, Welsh, Northern Ireland and London Assembly elections, and European parliamentary election.

7.3. For the purpose of this section a referendum is a statutory referendum (to which the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (“PPERA”) applies

or to which section 127 of PPERA is applied) which includes a UK-wide, national or regional referendum held under the provisions of an Act of the UK Parliament or the Scottish Parliament. Although Ofcom does not oblige stations to consider local referendums under restrictions, it is station policy that the same protections be afforded to local referendums.

7.4. Due weight must be given to the coverage of parties and independent candidates during the election period. In determining the appropriate level of coverage to be given to parties and independent candidates, the station must take into account evidence of past electoral support and/or current support. We must also consider giving appropriate coverage to parties and independent candidates with significant views and perspectives.

7.5. Due weight must be given to designated organisations in coverage during the referendum period. Editors/writers must also consider giving appropriate coverage to other permitted participants with significant views and perspectives. Designated organisations and permitted participants are those that are designated by the Electoral Commission.

7.6. Discussion and analysis of election and referendum issues must finish when the poll opens.

7.7. No article or piece may publish the results of any opinion poll on polling day itself until the election or referendum poll closes.

7.8. Candidates in UK elections, and representatives of permitted participants in UK referendums, must not act as news presenters, editors or writers during the election period.

7.9. Due impartiality must be strictly maintained in a constituency report or discussion and in an electoral area report or discussion.

7.10. If a candidate takes part in an item about his/her particular constituency, or electoral area, then the station must offer the opportunity to take part in such items to all candidates within the constituency or electoral area representing parties with previous significant electoral support or where there is evidence of significant current support. This also applies to independent candidates. However, if a candidate refuses or is unable to participate, the item may nevertheless go ahead.

7.11. Any constituency or electoral area report or discussion after the close of nominations must include a list of all candidates standing, giving first names, surnames and the name of the party they represent or, if they are standing

independently, the fact that they are an independent candidate. Where a constituency report on-air and repeated on several occasions in the same day, the full list need only be broadcast on one occasion. If, in subsequent repeats on that day, the constituency report does not give the full list of candidates, the audience should be directed to an appropriate website or other information source listing all candidates and giving the information set out above.