

BCE/2011/Paper 40

REVIEW OF COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA FOR INITIAL CONSULTATION PERIOD

Introduction

1. This paper provides an evaluation of the communications and media activity implemented by the BCE before and during the initial consultation period for the 2013 Review. It outlines the approach taken with regards to the consultation and the key learnings which may be useful when planning future consultations and similar communications activity. This paper is for information.
2. The paper will be supplemented in the New Year by more detailed post-consultation research (this is underway, but will only become available after this evaluation paper is submitted).

Summary

Communications strategy - summary of approach taken

3. Preparations for the launch included the setting up of a consultation website, which went live on the launch day, and the roll out of a press and radio advertising campaign from the same day. Approximately 20 media interviews were carried out on 12 & 13 September.
4. During the hearings phase, approximately 20 media representatives attended at least one of the 36 hearings. Several journalists attended Manchester and Truro. Most required interviews - the media interest around the Manchester (opening) hearing was harnessed in a series of interviews and that was replicated across the hearings ensuring BCE met media demands successfully.
5. To promote the final two weeks of the consultation, a media release was sent out as the hearings came to a close on 18 November.
6. Media coverage has been monitored by the whole team and proven to be more intense where more change has been proposed, as expected. The BCE fulfilled expectations that it would promote the consultation, including the hearings, right across England and it maintained an open front when accommodating the media and other enquirers.

Key learnings and recommendations - launching initial revised proposals

7. A large pack of information needs to be handled under this process and organised so that it is available in a format other than on the web and accompanied by shape and vector files. Both the print and broadcast media seemed to obey embargo instructions; several online publications / bloggers appeared not to.
8. For a launch of initial proposals in future years, a number of options are available and discussed below. One is that select journalists could be briefed - orally and with

limited documentation – and whilst this wouldn't guarantee that an embargo won't be broken it may reduce the likelihood. The briefing model would be most secure if the briefing were verbal and the materials issued at an agreed time (this could still be 0001hrs), not under embargo.

9. For the release of revised proposals, the timing is the key issue. BCE would presumably still wish to provide MP's with their respective materials in advance of the release of those to the media. However careful consideration is required as to how to do this in a way which does not risk the embargo being breached.

Detail

LAUNCH PHASE

10. BCE launched its initial proposals for a revised constituency map of England on September 13th 2011.

Advertising strategy for initial consultation

11. Beginning on Tuesday 13, and continuing on 14, 15 and Sunday 18 September, there were quarter page adverts in all the main national daily and Sunday newspapers covering England. The adverts were designed to bring people's attention to key messages, rather than to attempt to inform them of the details of the proposals themselves. These messages included where people can find further information, the importance of participation in the consultation exercise, the ways in which people could respond and the closing date for comments.
12. For a period of two weeks beginning 13 September, a 30 second radio advert was run on local radio stations, the aim of which was to raise awareness and direct people to where they can find out more information.
13. Taken together, it is anticipated that the press and radio activity combined reached 77% of all adults in England.

Online strategy

14. The advertising campaign focused on directing people to the BCE website and the BCE enquiry line, as did all publications, the initial proposal reports, summaries, the review leaflet, banners used at public hearings and press releases.
15. During the consultation period, the BCE website was re-focused to act as a one-stop-shop for the consultation process, making readily available all reports and maps, an online form for submission of written representations, and a separate online form for public hearings bookings. The monitoring activity revealed the following:
 - a) Online representations submitted by 25 Nov: **4,600**
 - b) Visits to website between 13 Sept and 21 Nov: **160,476**
 - c) Pages viewed between 13 Sept and 21 Nov: **685,151**
 - d) People registering an interest in attending public hearings – **1000** (around 46% of all who attended)

- e) How people found out about hearings: **25% from BCE website** (see **Appendix 1** for full breakdown).
16. From the start of the 12-week period of the initial proposals consultation, we paid for an online service to ensure that searches on key words associated with the consultation and the Commission would return the consultation website at the top (or near the top) of the results and/or appearing as a 'sponsored link' on the results page for the search. The service has been secured in relation to a number of words connected with boundary changes until the end of March 2012. An initial analysis shows that over 50% of traffic to the consultation website was via search engines.
17. The BCE also set up a Twitter account to most efficiently disseminate key messages to social media communities. Over 200 people are now 'following' the BCE through this medium, comprised mainly of a mix of members of the public, Members of Parliament, local government councillors, Councils and journalists (for more details on our use of Twitter, see **Appendix 2**).

Media and MP's - distribution and liaison

18. Media interest was evident and widespread in the lead up to the launch and on the day itself – the BCE received many enquiries; the information was eagerly anticipated.
19. Distribution to MP's of full materials – reports and mapped information – was accompanied simultaneously by the distribution of electronic versions of the same materials to the media via a closed web portal run by the Government's COI (Central Office for Information). The BCE set out to make the relevant reports and supplementary information available to every MP, from a base in the House of Commons, from noon on September 12th under embargo until 0001hrs 13 September. At the same time it released similarly embargoed information, including a Media Release, to the media and held pre-recorded interviews that afternoon on Monday 12 September with:
- a) BBC TV;
 - b) ITN (for ITV & Channel 4); and
 - c) BBC regional TV & radio
20. A series of interviews were undertaken on Tuesday 13 September with:
- a) the Today Programme (live);
 - b) BBC Radio 4 (live);
 - c) BBC News Channel (live);
 - d) Sky News (live); and
 - e) Sky (pre-record)
21. Also on 13 September were a series of regional radio live interviews, covering:
- a) Peterborough;
 - b) York;
 - c) Hereford & Worcester;
 - d) Devon-Plymouth;
 - e) Humberside;
 - f) Leeds;
 - g) Essex;
 - h) Cornwall;
 - i) Luton;

- j) Devon,
- k) Wiltshire; and
- l) Manchester.

22. Overall, this activity was successful in launching the consultation period and the BCE was able to deliver all its key messages during each interview opportunity. The interviews served to raise awareness of the consultation, the background to the development of the proposals and how people could express their views.
23. It became evident that production teams wished to have vector / shape files to manipulate in order to produce maps. Whilst this was never part of the BCE's original planning, in the spirit of the consultation the BCE listened to this view and resourced the production of a set of shape files that were an accurate reflection of the pdf files issued on the 12th; it issued the additional files on October 13th prior to embarking on the media relations activity planned for the hearings.

Key learnings and recommendations

24. The most relevant lessons to learn from the handling of the publication of the initial proposals relates to the use of an embargo, and the implications for the handling of the revised proposals.
25. Members will recall that for the initial proposals, the BCE gave 12 hours' grace to MP's and journalists alike to absorb the initial proposals. MPs received their own packs of information in hard copy; journalists received information by logging on to a secure Government web-portal run by COI. Members will also recall that all of the information relating to the initial proposals was leaked on the Guido Fawkes website towards the end of the afternoon of the 12th.
26. It is possible that electronic distribution of the initial proposal reports via the COI website increased the ease by which the information could be leaked. For a launch of initial proposals in future years – and for the release of the revised proposals – one alternative way of releasing the information to the press could be for select journalists to be briefed in person in a “locked room”. However, given that a large volume of information needs to be handled this method may not be appropriate for the BCE's future publications.
27. We would suggest that it would be inappropriate to brief MPs verbally on the proposals and, should the BCE wish to disseminate information to MPs in advance of their publication, it would still be appropriate for the BCE to provide MPs with their respective materials in advance of the release to the media.
28. One final option that BCE may wish to consider is not to have any embargo at all, and to release all information to the media, the public and the MPs at the same time.

Hearings Phase

29. The consultation remained open until 5 December. Between 11 October and 18 November, the BCE ran a programme of 36 public hearings across England – holding several in each of the nine regions during those six weeks.

Media Activity

30. Enquiries remained at the same level for a couple of weeks after 13 September, although the nature of the enquiries changed. During the first few days most calls were from journalists asking to be added to the distribution list to receive the media pack but as journalists began to consider the pack they began calling to ask for information relating largely to the map files; the amount of time required for call handling and managing responses was the same but increasingly the demand came from fewer, frequent enquirers (both calling and emailing). In addition a couple of journalists submitted FoI requests.
31. A media session was held with the Secretary to the Commission one hour before the start of each lead hearing during which he carried out interviews, and camera / recording crews set up their equipment.
32. The following organisations were represented at the hearings:

Manchester

BBC Politics Show

Bolton News (no show)

Manchester Evening News

Leeds

BBC Leeds

Sheffield

BBC Radio Sheffield (no show)

Reading

BBC South

Yorkshire & Humber

Channel 4 - filming

Birmingham

BBC R4 PM Programme

BBC TV – filming

Channel 4 – filming

Dan Wainwright, Express & Star

Bristol

BBC Radio 4 - recording

Ludlow

BBC Radio 4

Truro

ITN

Pirate FM

Western Daily Press.

Warwick
BBC Radio 4

Cambridge
BBC Radio 4

Pre-records by telephone
BBC Somerset, 20/10/11

33. Most media attended to report on proceedings immediately or shortly afterwards. The Manchester Evening News reporter blogged from inside the room. Meanwhile, BBC Radio 4 attended several events to identify interesting contributions and personalities whom they could then contact, with a view to tracking how their views are taken into account over the coming year.
34. Permission to record / film was at the Assistant Commissioners' discretion – most agreed to allow recording but asked for cameras to be turned off after the BCE representative and the AC had given their introductions. Once this policy was determined, the media obliged; where recording was taking place, speakers were advised of their opportunity to ask that audio equipment also be turned off (other than that of the BCE's transcription service). This was not taken up by anyone.
35. Media coverage in the regions was monitored and was found to be variable in all respects, depending on the degree of change and ensuing sensitivity; coverage served to raise awareness of the hearings – sometimes in real time – and to maintain the momentum of the debate as well as bring it to a wider audience. The BCE hope this resulted in more representations being submitted and to support this aim it went on to issue a Media Release on the last day of the hearings to underline the fact that two weeks of the consultation remained.

Resourcing and analysing media monitoring

36. BCE undertook its own media monitoring, resourcing it through regional team members in order to track coverage at a regional level, together with keeping abreast of national coverage and blog activity. This did have its limitations, as most staff were also out of the office – at least for some of the period - actively delivering hearings.
37. A media monitoring service would inevitably have provided a more accurate / immediate picture of local and national opinion. However, the BCE gained a good sense of that and was able to manage all enquiries from journalists needing information to maintain their reporting activity accurately (there became an increasing interest in what would be the next steps after the consultation deadline was reached).
38. Inevitably, what emerged online and in hard copy was a greater strength of feeling, across many more square inches, from the areas where the greatest degree of change has been proposed. So resources were a little more stretched in some areas than others. This strength of opinion was reflected in the attendance and contributions made at the hearings, particularly for instance Manchester, Birmingham, Maidstone and Truro. As expected, there was little coverage in some areas where there was little

change.

39. Online, the technical blogging community became very engaged with the file formats provided by the BCE. They spent the greatest proportion of time engaging in prolonged blog debate and liaisons with the BCE regarding their wish to receive shape files; the BCE had some enquiries from academics asking for shape files and also asking to be added to media distribution lists (the BCE responded to these individually without adding them to the media distribution list).

Next Steps

Pre and post wave evaluation

40. The BCE commissioned market research to evaluate both broader political awareness and awareness of the BCE's review specifically.
41. Research was undertaken before and after the consultation period (and its associated promotional activity). The BCE will receive the post-consultation research for review in the latter half of December and will provide supplementary information to this evaluation paper in the light of those results.
42. This body of research will not produce succinct conclusions as to which channels and activities (media relations, advertising, digital etc) were the most effective. It may be advantageous for future research activity to ask questions on 'how' people hear about the BCE and its activity.
43. Such analysis can incorporate audience's responsiveness to wider channels, including not-paid-for media relations, and this may be beneficial in future, should the BCE know early on that it will be able to access media handling resource. The BCE would benefit from dedicated media handling resource around the time of the secondary consultation and at key points during the Review.
44. Broadly speaking, the research should lead to a greater understanding of people's awareness of the BCE and wider political matters and it is hoped that the consultation will serve to play a part in how political matters are brought to and understood by the people they affect.

Secondary consultation and beyond

45. A repeat of the press advert will be run to alert public to the four week secondary consultation.
46. The BCE will not run a radio campaign, but will maintain the paid-for search optimisation facility to guide the public to the BCE consultation website.
47. The post-consultation research report, commissioned at the start of the campaign, will help inform the advertising campaign. The BCE will still have an obligation to inform the public on the revised proposals and the eight week consultation, so a series of adverts in press and radio are likely. The insight from the evaluation report will enable any future advertising campaign to be focused on where it will be most cost-

effective.

48. It should be noted that the BCE commissioned COI to manage the advertising campaign for the initial proposals, but its services will cease in March 2012. From April 2012 the BCE will be required to manage and procure the media buying and design of press and radio adverts necessary to run such a campaign itself.
49. The website will be used for the secondary consultation, where the public will be able to view and comment on all the written representations we received, as well as transcripts from the 36 public hearings. The combination of media adverts, press releases and Twitter messaging will aid getting information to public.
50. COI has been managing the day to day project management of the web agency but as their services will cease in March 2012 they are working with us to arrange for the BCE to manage the contract with the web agency directly from January 2012.
51. The website will again be a key part of the communication strategy for the Revised Proposals. Once the campaign has been evaluated the BCE will be able to adjust the overall website strategy where that may be beneficial.

PUBLIC HEARINGS SURVEY

How attendees heard about public hearings

How did you hear?	Answer	%
BCE website	251	24
Press and media	160	15
Political party	157	15
Council	110	10
Internet	91	9
Member of Parliament	53	5
Advertising	37	3
Email	37	3
BCE (inc reports, documentation)	36	3
Informal networks	32	3
Work	30	3
formal networks	27	3
Letter	25	2
Academic research	10	1
General awareness	7	1
	1063	100

KEY FACTS ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA (TWITTER)

Key statistics:

- Followers – **236**
- 112 added since the review started on 13 September 2011 (**47%**)
- Followers a mix of members of the public, MP's, Councillors, Councils, Journalists
- Our tweets – **52**
- Direct mentions – around **60**

Key Messaging

- Public Hearings (dates, locations)
- New releases
- Reminders (start of consultation, how to make representations, end of consultation)
- Updates (timelines, what's next)

When

- Key milestones throughout the 2013 Review
- Day before public hearings
- When a new release is published
- In line with BCE key messaging

How often

- Checked daily
- Updated most weeks, when relevant
- Regular intake of 'followers'

Key response

- Good response, active tweets
- Positive and negative
- Key campaigns coming through (Keep Leigh in Leigh, Wimbledon United etc)

Benefits

- Allows BCE to promote messaging further and widen audience
- Highlights key/burning issues for initial proposals, by exposing us to campaigns that are active on twitter relating to the 2013 review.

Negatives

- Very few negatives, people generally understand that it is not a way of engaging in conversation with us.
- Some negative campaigns, but this is also useful for us to be aware of.

Feedback/Future planning

Hopefully this increased attendance and participation at public hearings. Our hearings tweets have been 're-tweeted' by others, and therefore people are promoting our message for us through the use of social media.