

**Minutes of the 37th meeting of
RTHK Board of Advisors
held at 9:15 am, 28 July 2017
at Conference Room, G/F, Broadcasting House
30 Broadcast Drive, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon**

Present

Dr Eugene CHAN Kin-keung, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Mr Robert CHUA Wah-peng
Mr Mohan DATWANI
Ms Helen KWAN Po-jen
Dr Agnes LAW Koon-chui, JP
Mr LEE Luen-fai
Mr Augustine WONG, JP
Prof WONG Kam-fai, MH
Mr LEUNG Ka-wing, Director of Broadcasting

In attendance from RTHK

Ms Lisa LIU, Deputy Director of Broadcasting (Programmes)
Mrs Sharon YIP, Deputy Director of Broadcasting (Developments)
Miss CHAN Man-kuen, Assistant Director (TV & Corporate Businesses)
Mr Albert CHEUNG, Assistant Director (Radio & Corporate Programming)
Ms Liane CHENG, Controller (Television)
Mr Brian CHOW, Controller (Radio)
Ms Amen NG, Head/Corporate Communications & Standards
Mr Henry DOO, Head/New Media (Agenda item 3)
Ms Amy KWONG (Board Secretariat)
Ms Alice CHAN (Board Secretariat)

Absent with apologies

Mr Walter CHAN Kar-lok, SBS, JP
Ms Mimi CHEUNG Yee-may
Mr Leslie CHING Pui-wai
Ms Anna HUNG Wing-chee
Mr Douglas LAM Tak-yip
Dr Carol MA Hok-ka

Secretary

Ms Vivian LI (Board Secretariat)

Agenda Item 1 : Confirmation of the minutes of the last meeting

1. Mr Walter CHAN, Ms Mimi CHEUNG, Mr Leslie CHING, Ms Anna HUNG, Mr Douglas LAM and Dr Carol MA sent their apologies for not being able to join this meeting.
2. The Chairman informed the Board of the amendments made to paragraphs 15 and 26 of the minutes of the meeting on 24 March 2017. The revised minutes had been circulated to Members and no comments were received. The minutes of the meeting on 24 March 2017 were therefore confirmed.
3. The Chairman said that the Secretariat had circulated the draft minutes of the last meeting held on 26 May 2017 for Members' review and no comments were received. The minutes of the last meeting were then confirmed.

Agenda Item 2 : Matters arising

4. Members raised no other item for discussion.

Agenda Item 6: Any other business

5. The Chairman noted that some Members would need to leave the meeting early. Agenda Item 6 was therefore moved forward for discussion.
6. The Chairman informed the Board that he received two letters from the public, both of which expressed views on the episode of City Forum on 2 July 2017. The letters were circulated to Members for information.
7. The Chairman reiterated that, in accordance with the Charter of RTHK, the functions of the Board included advising the Director of Broadcasting (DB) on all matters pertaining to editorial principles, programming standards and quality of RTHK programming as well as receiving reports on relevant complaints. DB should give due weight and consideration to all advice provided by the Board. DB should also report and explain to the Board the reasons for not following the advice of the Board. The Board would however not be involved in the day-to-day operation or staff matters of RTHK. Members should give advice to the RTHK according to the stipulations as set out in the Charter.
8. The Chairman observed that there were recently press coverage on a number of issues relating to RTHK, including the controversy over City Forum, the rescheduling of

Headliner, a complaint on the use of government resources by the management and privatisation of RTHK. The Chairman invited Mr LEUNG Ka-wing to elaborate RTHK's stance on these matters so that Members could give suitable advice to RTHK and help to explain RTHK's positions to the public.

9. In response, Mr LEUNG Ka-wing briefed the meeting that in respect of the controversy over City Forum, the management recognized the importance of giving due weight to public feedback and had conducted critical review on the taglines chosen for the programme. The rescheduling of Headliner was related to the licensing requirements and was therefore being handled by the Communications Authority. The complaint on the use of government resources by the management was related to staff matter which had been handled according to relevant government procedures. The subject of privatisation was beyond the remit of RTHK.
10. As regard to the controversy on the 2 July episode of City Forum, Miss CHAN Man-kuen supplemented that it was the four-sentence tagline “一國兩制大智慧，「呢足廿年」不堪提？主席贈言「信國家」，黑布紫荆慶回歸？” posted on the Facebook fan page of the programme that sparked public complaints. She explained that the vision of the programme was to provide an open and pluralistic platform in which public figures from different camps could be brought together to discuss current issues in that particular week. With this vision in mind, the programme producer juxtaposed the stance and slogans adopted by different political camps for the 20th anniversary of HKSAR, which were put inside quotation marks and separated by punctuation marks, in the tagline with a view to reflecting the political tension smoldering in the city during that week. The descriptive tagline therefore served to accentuate the vision of the programme and in no sense represented RTHK's position. In that episode, a broad political spectrum of guests as well as 21 members from the public freely exchanged their views and the discussion was conducted without favor and partiality. No insulting words towards the nation were expressed during the discussion. The content of the programme thus further manifested the spirit of the programme.
11. A Member commented that the tagline of the City Forum gave the impression that RTHK had taken side politically. Another Member concurred and remarked that the incident reinforced the stereotype of RTHK for having strong political stance and being more sympathetic towards particular political groups. In fact, one of the letters complained that the programme host was biased during the discussion.
12. A Member also pointed out that the general audience would not instantly recognize that the words were extracted from slogans of political parties and might easily misread the slogans as a representation of RTHK's position. It was more desirable to explicitly

show that they were quotations or to simply avoid using quotations in future. Another Member shared the same view and remarked that some knowledge widely known amongst journalists and media workers might not be equally accessible to the general public. The political sensitivity of the frontline officers should be enhanced. Miss CHAN Man-kuen agreed that quotations that might provoke controversy or misunderstanding would be avoided in future and the political sensitivity of the frontline officers should be strengthened. To this end, a review had already been conducted after the incident. Ms Amen NG added that all the hosts of RTHK programmes were required to observe the Producers' Guidelines and would maintain a balanced view in the programmes.

13. In respect of the procedures for assessing the suitability of programme taglines, a Member suggested that a team should be set up to examine the taglines of RTHK's programmes every one or two months. In case the team found out that some specific officers tended to use sensitive taglines, it could give advice to the officers concerned. Another Member enquired who assumed the role of gatekeeper to make final decisions under the current procedures. The Chairman brought up the fact that DB as the editor-in-chief should be accountable for editorial decisions of the programme producers. He asked how this function could be fully exerted in the existing system.
14. Miss CHAN Man-kuen clarified that a programme team instead of a particular officer was responsible for creating taglines. After the incident, the team would submit the proposed taglines to the Head of Public and Current Affairs Section for clearance. The Board was assured that the responsible officers possessed adequate professional knowledge to make appropriate assessment. Given the large number of programmes produced by RTHK, it was not administratively feasible for DB to act as the gatekeeper for editorial decisions of every programme. Mr LEUNG Ka-wing supplemented that he had maintained close communication with Miss CHAN Man-kuen all along and was kept in full picture of the incident. A Member appreciated that the management had made immediate changes to the checking mechanism to address the issue.
15. On the issue of checking mechanism, a Member criticised that the tagline in question was unprofessional and clumsy. According to his past experience, the established mechanism should be able to prevent the controversial tagline from going public. He queried why it had happened and hoped that the existing mechanism could be further refined to prevent similar controversy from happening again. Another Member added that it was not desirable to rely on certain officers to act as a gatekeeper. The management should also provide clear guidelines to the frontline officers on the selection of taglines. Miss CHAN Man-kuen responded that after the incident, the management had agreed on some rules of thumb in considering the suitability of a

tagline, including the ability to encapsulate the issue to be discussed; the flexibility to leave ample room for discussion; and the avoidance of sensitive phrases. It was hoped that with the revised checking mechanism and more objective guidelines, the frontline officers could exercise better judgment on the taglines.

16. Concerning the dispute over rescheduling of Headliner, Ms Amen NG briefed the Members on the background. According to the licensing requirement, the Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB) was required to air RTHK programmes during 1800-1830. If TVB requested a programme preemption, it used to inform RTHK at least one day before the airtime unless the slot was used to make way for breaking news. In the present incident, however, RTHK received a notice from TVB only eight minutes before the airtime and was informed that the slot was required to broadcast some breaking news. While RTHK emphasised that Headliner was a time-critical programme, TVB alternatively suggested that the programme could be rescheduled to the next day at the same time slot or after midnight. The programme was eventually broadcast after midnight. Subsequently, many members from the audience gave feedback that the programme broadcast during TVB's preemption was pre-recorded content instead of latest breaking news. While the row later escalated and became increasingly politicised, it was RTHK's long-standing position that it was important to air time-critical programmes according to licensing requirement on a prescribed channel at the pre-scheduled time.
17. A Member remarked that the format of Headliner was fine and RTHK should keep it on in future. The issue arose due to the sensitivity of the programme content and the timing of the broadcast which was during the week of the 20th anniversary of the HKSAR when the national leader visited the city. Another Member opined that RTHK should stand firm in face of TVB's hitting back. It was a distorted argument of TVB to state that the licensing requirement to air RTHK's programmes was "outdated". The government had the right to oblige the commercial licensees to broadcast government-funded programmes on its prime time slot even when RTHK had its own analogue TV channels which only had limited viewership. Ms Amen NG explained that RTHK took a firm stance on the issue during the whole process. As the case was now being handled by the Communications Authority, RTHK would not comment on the issue publicly at this juncture and would follow up with it only after the investigation was completed.
18. On the issue of privatisation of RTHK, a Member considered that although the final decision did not rest with RTHK, RTHK could still initiate an internal discussion and take a more proactive role in the process with a view to safeguarding the existence, dignity, independence and professionalism of a public service broadcaster.

19. To conclude, the Chairman thanked Members for their genuine concerns and care about RTHK. As mentioned in previous meetings, it was always his wish that RTHK would become the most credible public broadcaster in China. The controversy over the 2nd July episode of City Forum was an unfortunate incident as the negative reaction aroused by the tagline obscured the strenuous efforts of RTHK put in the whole 20th anniversary campaign of HKSAR. The tagline concerned was a very bad choice and he hoped that DB, as the editor-in-chief of the department, would consider the advice provided by the Board. He looked forward to seeing RTHK make better judgments in future.
20. The Chairman made apologies for leaving the meeting earlier due to urgent family matters. He invited Mr Mohan DATWANI, the most senior Member, to take over the role of the Chairman in the remaining time of the meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Youth engagement

21. Mr Brian CHOW, Ms Liane CHENG and Mr Henry DOO introduced to Members the youth engagement initiatives of the Radio Division, TV Division and New Media Unit respectively.
22. The Chairman commended the initiatives for succeeding in catching the pulse of the young generation. A Member agreed and suggested that the mobile app developed by the New Media Unit could serve as educational materials and should be put on more social media platforms. Mr Henry DOO replied that the Unit would continue to enrich the content of the app with interactive elements in future.
23. In response to a Member's enquiry on whether some of the youth-related radio programmes would also be broadcast on TV31, Mr Brian CHOW said that the Division was planning to do so in order to maximise the synergistic effect.

Agenda Item 4: RTHK Controlling Officer's Report

24. Ms Lisa LIU briefed the meeting on the RTHK Controlling Officer's Report (COR) 2017-18.
25. The Chairman appreciated RTHK's efforts as shown in the report. Other Members had no comment on the report.

Agenda Item 5(a) : Updates on programmes (BOA Paper 8/2017)

26. Ms Lisa LIU introduced the paper. Members had no comment on the paper.

Agenda Item 5(b) : Updates on complaints (BOA Paper 9/2017)

27. Ms Lisa LIU introduced the paper. Ms Amen NG introduced a summary of direct feedback from the public. Members had no comment on both documents.

Date of next meeting

28. The Chairman informed the meeting that the next meeting was scheduled for 29 September 2017.

29. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 am.

Secretariat

RTHK Board of Advisors