

STAFFORDSHIRE NEWS

Staffordshire was one of the first parts of the UK to be served by three distinct local broadcast services. The BBC local radio station, Radio Stoke, covers north Staffordshire and south Cheshire. The commercial radio station, Signal 1, part of the UTV group, has a similar transmission area. In December 2005 they were joined by BBC Local Television for the county of Staffordshire, run from the Radio Stoke studios.

Radio Stoke (indicated in roman type throughout the section) has a news editor and nine journalists including three district reporters in Leek, Stafford and Crewe. The station is on air 24 hours, with speech-based radio from six in the morning until seven in the evening.

Signal Radio (indicated in italic type) has a news editor, a sports editor and an early morning newsreader. The early shift runs Monday to Friday from 04.30 a.m. until 12 noon and the news editor and sports editor flip-flop their shifts 9 a.m. –5 p.m. and 10 a.m. –6 p.m. They have freelance cover over the weekends and for holidays. Signal Radio has two stations, Signal 1 and Signal 2. Signal 1's main target audience is 15–44 year olds with a 'best variety of hits' format, and Signal 2 aims itself at the over 35s with a mix of music from the past four decades. Signal 1 goes on air at 6 a.m. and runs through until 10 p.m. and Signal 2 goes on air at 6 a.m. and runs through until 6 p.m. Both stations then go on to an automated service taking national IRN (Independent Radio News) bulletins throughout the night. There is no local news overnight.

BBC Local TV (indicated in bold type) has seven full-time video journalists, including a community-content producer and a faith producer. They produce short video reports which are available on broadband and on digital satellite TV. There's a ten-minute bulletin, which runs at ten to the hour on the same digital satellite stream as five other local services for other parts of the West Midlands region.

Here we look at a day's broadcasting, comparing the output and the editorial decision making of all three services.

0320

Signal's morning newsreader, 28-year-old Tom Cooke, leaves home in Coventry to drive to the studios in Stoke-on-Trent. He's been home for the weekend. He rents a small flat just opposite Signal's newsroom where he lives during the week, but today is Monday so it's an early start.

0420	<i>Tom is driving through Fenton in Stoke-on-Trent, when he sees about five cars with blue flashing lights drive past him.</i>
0430	<p><i>Tom arrives at Signal. He is the first in. He unlocks the front doors into reception and turns the alarm off. He then re-locks the front doors and enters the code to get into the newsroom. The newsroom is long and thin. The news team share the room with the mid-morning show on Signal 1. There are three news work-stations at the end of the room. Tom sits at the main operational work-station. His first bulletin is at 6 a.m. Waiting for him is a handover note left by the freelance journalist who did the Sunday shift. She informs him there was a major crash locally on the A53 at Endon on Saturday evening. A car carrying four young men had careered off the road and hit a tree. Two men died and a further two had been taken to the main hospital critically ill.</i></p> <p><i>His next job is to check overnight feeds from IRN. Tom says: 'IRN churn out stuff from the paper; they don't check the figures. IRN overnight staff are even younger than me – much less experienced.' He rewrites some of the IRN copy, and takes some of the figures out of the stories. He needs to write a three-minute bulletin using some of the IRN stories and audio, and his own local stories which he needs to find. Signal has its own style for a three-minute bulletin: Tom is looking for a maximum of seven local stories and a maximum of three national stories. Signal's (and UTV's) policy is that 70 per cent of the news must be local.</i></p>
0455	<p><i>Tom pops to the kitchen to make his first cup of tea of the day. He then looks for audio cuts for the bulletins. Signal's policy is to have a maximum of three clips, unless they are really short. The normal maximum length for an audio clip is 15 seconds – 16 seconds at a push, but never 17 seconds. Tom says: 'You get rid of all the breaths, and all the ums and ers, you can take 40 seconds of audio and knock it down to 15 or 16 seconds easily.'</i></p> <p><i>The minimum length of an audio clip is five seconds. Tom says: 'I've heard Paul [Sheldon, Signal's news editor] use short stabs of audio at the beginning, and it has worked really well. The hardest thing is to identify cuts. You want the cuts to add to the story, but so that it isn't going to take too long to say it.'</i></p>
0500	<p>BBC Radio Stoke's early reader Lizzie Meek arrives for work. A bulletin has been left for her. The lead story previews an announcement later in the day of revised plans for the rebuilding of the city's main hospital. The University Hospital of North Staffordshire's trust recently announced a thousand job cuts. Senior managers have resigned. The new management team have to stop losses of £3 million a month. Cuts of £40 million are needed over three years.</p> <p>Two men are critical after a car crash at the weekend in which two people died. There's a police appeal for witnesses.</p> <p>Early presenter Den Siegerts is on air. He'll be available to report for the breakfast programme when he finishes at seven.</p>
0515	<i>In the Signal newsroom, Tom is continuing to prepare his bulletin for 6 a.m. He checks the latest weather and celebrity news, writes them up for the early morning show presenters, and takes the scripts into their studio.</i>

0520	<p><i>Tom rings the local police about the blue flashing lights he saw on his way into work. The Signal news team have an excellent relationship with the police in Stoke-on-Trent, and Tom charms his way to getting the information he wants for his bulletin. He is told three people have been arrested in the Birches Head area of Stoke, and three vehicles recovered, over the suspected theft of a vehicle. Tom asks: 'Oh, did you use a stinger? I like those . . . Very helpful. Right then, mate, is that the lot?'</i></p> <p><i>He checks on the two people in hospital from the car crash on Saturday night: 'Are you still appealing for witnesses?'</i></p>
0525	<p><i>Tom comes off the phone to the police and checks an e-mail from Staffordshire Ambulance Service updating stories from last night. A microlight crashed yesterday in the Staffordshire Moorlands, near Leek.</i></p>
0530	<p><i>Tom starts writing up the Birches Head vehicle theft story. He's hoping this will be an exclusive for Signal.</i></p> <p><i>The news editor, Paul Sheldon, has been at Signal since the station opened in 1983 – he thinks he's the second-longest-serving commercial radio news editor in the country. Tom says: 'Paul's taught me so much here. One of the main things is to get to the point. The Beeb say if you've two lines for a story, you've not got enough in that story. Paul says you've got too much in that story!'</i></p> <p><i>When Tom finishes writing a story, he saves it on the computer: 'I must save the stories in the right place on the computer. It's all well and good me knowing where the stuff is, but when Paul gets in he must know as well.'</i></p>
0535	<p><i>Tom rings the Cheshire Police voice-bank. The recorded message gives details of a misper – a man from Nantwich has gone missing.</i></p>
0540	<p><i>Tom rings Staffordshire Fire Service's voice-bank. A horse has been rescued by the fire brigade at 2100 last night near Leek. The horse was trapped in mud by a stream. It was rescued using ropes and slings. Tom comes off the phone and starts to write the story. He comments: 'Everything has gone out of the window this morning. It is so busy.'</i></p>
0548	<p><i>Tom rings the Cheshire Newslines again to double-check the facts of the misper. He then writes up the Nantwich missing person.</i></p>
0551	<p><i>Tom rings the Cheshire Newslines again. There's something else he needs to make sure of.</i></p>
0552	<p><i>Tom finishes writing the misper and decides to drop the microlight crash: 'Nobody has died.' He checks the timings, generated by the scripts in the computer. He has two minutes 52 seconds for his three-minute bulletin – seven seconds under. Tom usually reads slightly more slowly than the computer's estimate, so he reckons he should be OK: 'You must always read your script out live when you're writing it. It helps you to get the right feel.'</i></p>

0555	<i>Tom puts an audio cassette into the cassette recorder on the floor of the newsroom to record Radio Stoke's bulletin at 6 a.m.</i>
0556	<i>Tom throws sports headlines into his script on the computer.</i>
0557	<p><i>Tom leaves the newsroom and goes through into the tiny studio next door. He double-checks his handwritten prompts are in place. There are three scraps of paper propped up on the desk – each one reading slightly differently:</i></p> <p><i>'The latest at six. I'm Tom Cooke.'</i></p> <p><i>'That's the latest. It's three minutes past six.'</i> and</p> <p><i>'That's the latest news and sport on Signal 1. It's . . . (TIME CHECK).'</i></p> <p><i>He has no paper copy of the news stories he's written. He reads the scripts he wrote on the newsroom computer direct from the computer screen in the studio. Tom checks he has his cuts (audio) in the right place.</i></p>
0559	<i>Tom reads the stories out loud. He finds a typo error and quickly changes it, using the keyboard in the studio.</i>
0600	<p><i>Tom goes on air, broadcasting live on both Signal 1 and Signal 2. He checks timings as he reads and plays out audio clips. He decides he has no time for the horse story and drops it. As an audio clip is playing, one of the presenters from the early morning breakfast show, Andy Goulding, buzzes through from another studio to say hello. (He'd arrived at Signal while Tom has been working in the newsroom, but hasn't disturbed him because he knows what a busy time Tom has before he goes on air with his first bulletin.) With just seconds to go before the audio finishes, Tom quickly says: 'Hi. No time,' and continues to read the bulletin. The early morning show is pre-recorded from 6 a.m.–7 a.m. So Andy is under less pressure than the newsreader.</i></p>
 Tom Cooke	Radio Stoke breakfast presenter Janine Machin, producer Ros Chimes and sports presenter Phil Bowers start their day. Lizzie is in the NPA (news production area) in the corner of the newsroom, reading the bulletin.
 Lizzie Meek	
0603	<i>Tom comes off air but stays in the studio to pre-record the heads (headlines) for later. He goes through the script and changes the wording where he fluffed reading the script live a few minutes earlier.</i>

0606	<i>Tom records the heads for 0630 for Signal 2. He says: 'When I first arrived here at Signal, I was thinking: "How am I going to get it all done?" Now, I look at the clock and I think: "Oh, I've got plenty of time." You only learn by going through it. No matter how many newdays you do at university, nothing can prepare you for the times when you ring up the voice-bank and the police say they're investigating four deaths from arson, or you're on your own in the newsroom and the London bombings kick off.'</i>
0610	<i>Tom finishes his pre-record for Signal 2 and rehearses the heads for Signal 1.</i>
0617	<i>Tom pre-records his heads, using different music beds for the different sponsors.</i>
0622	<i>Before leaving the studio Tom writes himself a prompt to remind himself what to do at seven. The 7 a.m. bulletin will probably be the same as the 6 a.m. depending upon any breaking news. Tom returns to the newsroom.</i>
0630	Radio Stoke's team discuss the lighter material for the show. There's a feature on the decline of working men's clubs, and talking points in the papers include the return of K9, the mechanical dog, to <i>Doctor Who</i> , and a survey which suggests women prefer housework to sex.
0632	<i>Tom listens back to the cassette of Radio Stoke's 6 a.m. bulletin. He discovers that over the weekend someone has changed the station, and he's recorded Virgin Radio instead!</i>
0633	<i>Tom rings Staffordshire Fire Service's voice-bank. It hasn't been updated. He rings the fire service direct to find out more about the microlight crash. He learns that nobody from the fire service attended the crash. He rings the ambulance service.</i>
0646	<i>Tom takes a call from Staffordshire Police. He is asked if he knows anything about the Home Secretary, John Reid, coming into Signal Radio. Tom says he knows nothing about it: 'He came in just a couple of weeks ago, so I doubt if he'll be in again. But I'll ring back after nine if I find anything out.'</i>

<p>0650</p>	<p><i>Tom collects the newspapers from reception. He starts checking through them.</i></p> <p>Clutching a handful of newspapers, scripts and an orange, Janine makes her way to the studio downstairs. Ros is still in the newsroom, editing some vox-pops from the boy band Take That's first reunion concert the previous evening. Local interest is reduced because the band's most famous member Robbie Williams, who's from Stoke, is not on tour with the others.</p>
<p>0657</p>	<p><i>Tom checks his script for seven o'clock. He has nine stories. Two are national; one of them is about the boy band Take That, who are re-forming for a tour. There's a Robbie Williams line in the story, but Signal still class it as national, even though Robbie Williams is from Stoke-on-Trent.</i></p>
<p>0658</p>	<p><i>Tom sets the cassette recorder to record Radio Stoke's 7 a.m. bulletin. As Tom walks into the studio, he hears Louise Stones, the early morning presenter, reading the weather he put in her studio before she arrived.</i></p>
<p>0700</p>	<p><i>Tom reads the news live. When he finishes his read, he listens to the live output of Signal 1: 'They sometimes speak to me after the news and we have a bit of banter. The ad libs keep it real.'</i></p> <p>Mick Tucker, a young freelance, arrives for work. He'll be doing a live outside broadcast in just under an hour from some allotments in the Longton area. The story is that local people are taking over the management of allotment sites from the council. There's a briefing sheet Mick can print out from ENPS. He'll read it when he gets to the location.</p>
<p>0710</p>	<p><i>Tom returns to the newsroom and listens back to the Radio Stoke bulletin he recorded. He discovers their running orders are very similar, and comments: 'Maybe they're leading from me!' Radio Stoke have used different wording and have more detail in some of the stories.</i></p> <p>The first news feature of the day is a two-way with reporter Stuart Fear about the hospital crisis. It was recorded three days earlier. It was decided to take the unusual step of recording the contribution so Stuart wouldn't have to get up early. He has to be at the trust meeting that afternoon to find out which of the plans for a new hospital is chosen. The meeting is expected to run late and Stuart will then have to report live into evening programmes and prepare material for the next day's breakfast.</p> <p>When the scale of the hospital's financial difficulties became clear, news editor James O'Hara changed Stuart's shift pattern so he could concentrate on the story. James explains: 'It would be a big story if a thousand jobs were cut at any of our big local employers, Michelin, Doulton or Wedgwood, but this is in the public sector <i>and</i> we know that health is a big driver for our target audience. Now Stuart knows more about it than anybody else here, producers know he's the specialist on the story, and he's usually available to broadcast live at a moment's notice.'</p> <p>Stuart is normally the station's South Cheshire reporter, working from an office in Crewe. He welcomes the challenge of tackling such a big running story: 'It's very rare in local radio these days to have the time to get your head round such a complicated story. I have to boil it all down and present it in a way that isn't going to be a turn-off.'</p>

0724	<i>Tom looks at his scripts for the 8 a.m. bulletin and rewrites a few words.</i>
0727	<i>Tom goes into the studio for the live headlines at half past. He listens to output: Andy and Louise are in full swing with their show.</i>
0731	<i>Tom reads the 7.30 headlines live. They're the same news headlines as at 6.30, with sports headlines as well.</i>
0734	<i>Tom finishes the news and sport and then ad libs with Andy and Lou about what he's done over the weekend, and about pub quiz questions. They also ask Tom how happy he is on a scale of 1–10.</i>
0735	<p>Mick has arrived at the allotments, but parking the radio car is a problem. He has to be on the highest point of the site, near the entrance, to ensure his radio transmission will work but has to waste valuable seconds driving the length of the site before there's a turning place.</p> <p>The lead story in sport is an exclusive. Stoke City football manager, Johan Boskamp, has told Radio Stoke he's not prepared to wait to resolve his contract dispute with the club. The suggestion is he'll quit.</p> <p>In the ops room (studio control room), Ros is trying to call Nina Flemming, a staff nurse from the University Hospital. She's due to be interviewed on an ISDN line from the Royal College of Nursing's conference in Bournemouth. Ros can't get through on her mobile. Janine fills time on air chatting about working men's clubs.</p>
0737	<i>Tom comes out of the studio and returns to the newsroom. He begins to rewrite the stories for the eight o'clock news with new lines. Tom's worked at Signal for nearly a year: 'I've worked at stations as a freelance, where the Internet has gone off because they haven't paid the phone bill, or there's no loo roll and you have to go to the loo in the pub opposite. But you're a freelance, so you have to learn to bite your lip.'</i>
0738	<p>Mick has started to put the radio car's mast up, and introduces himself to his three interviewees.</p> <p>Nurse Nina Flemming has arrived at the ISDN point in Bournemouth and is live on air. Clips from her interview will run in later bulletins.</p>

Mick and the radio
car mast

0742	<i>Tom rings Cheshire Newsline to check the details on the misper. He rewrites the story.</i>
0745	<p>The computer in the ops room crashes. The screen freezes. As Ros restarts the computer, Janine copes on air, linking to the traffic report. Her style is chatty with plenty of ad-libbing. She reads most of her links from the screen, but has hard copies in front of her. 'The screen controls ENPS, e-mails and text messages from listeners, and I switch between them, so it makes sense to have a script in front of me.'</p> <p><i>Tom rewrites the Endon crash story and puts in a new line about the police appealing for witnesses.</i></p>
0748	<i>Tom rewrites the Birches Head story.</i>
0750	<p>Mick Tucker is live on air. With a script in one hand, microphone in the other, and headphones through which he hears talkback and programme output, he has a radio link to the radio car parked on the other side of an allotment shed. He enters the plot, clanking the gate behind him as he sets the scene. He chats in turn to members of the local Community Gardens Association.</p> <div>    </div> <p>Mick at the allotment</p>
0751	<i>Tom finishes his rewrite and starts to build the eight o'clock bulletin. The eight o'clock is Signal's main bulletin of the day when most people are listening. Tom says: 'You have to keep across all the national stories as well as the local ones. I missed a big local story in Cheshire the other week about Volkswagen losing jobs. I didn't know that Volkswagen own Bentley, who are obviously based in Cheshire and Paul (Sheldon) said: "Ooh you've missed a big one." And I thought: "Well, if I don't know Volkswagen own Bentley, then who else will?"'</i>
0758	<i>Tom checks the police newslines and puts a cassette in to record Radio Stoke's bulletin.</i>
0759	<i>Tom arrives in the studio.</i>

<p>0800</p> 	<p><i>Tom starts speaking at exactly eight o'clock: 'The latest at eight o'clock . . .'</i></p> <p><i>Tom knows Signal's news editor, Paul Sheldon, will be listening at home. The early bulletins are usually pre-planned from the day before. Paul says: 'If Tom hasn't rung me, I know nothing big has broken.'</i></p> <p><i>Paul makes the executive decisions: 'I tell him what we're doing.'</i></p> <p>News Editor James O'Hara has arrived and pops in to the ops room. The bulletin lead is the hospital story, with the car crash second.</p>
<p>0803</p>	<p><i>Tom comes off air. He had been worried that he wouldn't have time for the Take That story – so he cut the last paragraph during the live read.</i></p>
<p>0809</p>	<p>There's another interview on the health story: a recorded piece with Ian Syme, from the pressure group North Staffordshire Healthwatch. Clips from this interview will also run in later bulletins.</p>
<p>0812</p>	<p><i>Tom starts to update the website. He plans to have it all updated by nine o'clock: 'If someone hears a story on their way into work, and they want to know more about it, research shows there is a spike on the website hits when people get into work and log on to their computers.'</i></p> <p><i>Tom copies and pastes his news scripts on to the website. He doesn't rewrite the stories, he just puts the numbers into numerals and loses the back announcements. Tom says: 'This is my favourite part of the day – I get to come up with puns for the website story headlines.'</i></p>
<p>0820</p>  <p>Ros Chimes</p>	<p>A live interview down the line to Westminster correspondent Paul Rowley focuses on the Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt's comment that it has been 'the best year ever' for the health service. How can she say this with thousands of jobs being lost? Rowley explains that she was talking about targets for the number of operations performed, but her comments have not gone down well with the unions representing health workers.</p> <p>Station manager Sue Owen is in the ops room discussing programme content. Ros is unhappy with a two-minute package in the <i>Inside Lives</i> series. This is user-generated content, part of the BBC's commitment to engage listeners in digital story-telling. Ros thinks today's piece is poorly made, and doesn't even make it clear where the story-teller is from. If it was by a reporter, she would have dropped it or asked for it to be re-edited. But the 'producer', a listener, is not available to do that. Ros is concerned that there is a 'three-line whip' to run <i>Inside Lives</i> pieces even when they're not very good. Sue reassures her that she can drop it if she wants to.</p>

0827	<i>Dave from the Police rings with information about thefts from cars. Tom says he'll ring him back after the 0830 headlines. Tom goes into the studio and listens to Signal 1 output. He looks at the TV monitor in the news studio which is tuned to the BBC regional news from Birmingham. He notices that they're using the wrong pictures of the A53. Tom recognises the pictures as being the Leek to Buxton stretch of the A53, not the part of the road at Endon where the fatal crash happened. But he learns from BBC Midlands that the police are due to release the names of the two dead young men later today.</i>
0830	<i>Radio Stoke's breakfast show becomes less speech-based once it is assumed people are arriving at work. The first record after the news and sports bulletin is Michael Jackson's <i>Thriller</i>. The production team do not control the play-list, although they are free to include relevant tracks, such as Take That to go with the reunion story.</i>
0831	<i>Tom reads his headlines and ad libs with the presenters.</i>
0836	<i>Tom returns to the newsroom. Simon Humphries, Signal's sports editor, has arrived.</i>
0842	<i>Tom checks for anything breaking and has another look at the eight o'clock bulletin to see if he needs to change his script. He decides to use some fresh audio, and deletes the audio he used in the earlier bulletins.</i>
0855	<i>James, the news editor, asks Mick to check out who the RCN reps are for other hospitals in the transmission area. They may want to comment on the health debate from the conference in Bournemouth. Later he'll ask Mick to check another health story, the closure of Westcliffe Hospital, a geriatric unit with about 30 patients.</i>
0856	<i>Tom goes into the studio to read the nine o'clock bulletin. He reads the same bulletin as at eight.</i>
0903	<i>Tom returns to the newsroom as news editor Paul Sheldon arrives. They catch up on the morning's stories. Tom does 'a bit of housekeeping' with his scripts on the computer to help Paul and Simon access the bulletins. He goes through the draft bulletins for the day, dragging over any filler stories that haven't been used already: 'I can remember when I first left university, making the calls to the voice-banks, and saying to myself: "Oh no, please don't let anything have happened," because I was worried about being able to write everything up in time. I would panic thinking I had to get all the details in. These days I can do my police check calls at three minutes to the hour, and if there's anything, I'll jot it down and say, "Breaking news . . . We'll bring you more in the next hour". I've learnt to drip-drip the detail of the information over the bulletins using the carrot-and-stick method, keeping the listening audience interested.'</i>

0930	<i>Tom sets about doing his police check calls.</i>
0940	James meets Ros for a de-brief and to talk about tomorrow's prospects. Radio Stoke have a good relationship with the University Hospital, not least because the hospital's press officer is the station's former news editor. The trust's new chief executive, Antony Sumara, who's been brought in to sort out the financial mess, will come in to tomorrow's breakfast show live.
0942	<i>Tom starts to re-work his script. The bulletin goes down to two minutes at 10 o'clock.</i>
0950	<p><i>Tom takes a call from the police press office about the possibility of the Defence Minister coming in to Signal. He discusses it with Paul. Paul keeps an executive eye on the day: 'I have to live and die by the decisions I make. You're making hundreds of decisions each day on the hoof – what stories to go with, what stories to ditch. You have to be really careful and sometimes you get it wrong.'</i></p> <p><i>Tom's last read of his shift will be the 12 noon bulletin. Paul is preparing to take over the read at one o'clock, and starts checking stories.</i></p>
0958	<i>Tom goes into the studio for the 10 o'clock bulletin.</i>
1000	<p>Most of the local television team are now on shift. Their working day has different deadlines from the radio stations. Their content can be uploaded onto the broadband site at any time, but in practice most of it has to be ready by the early evening. Bulletins for the whole of the Midlands local TV service are loaded on to the digital satellite stream from the BBC's regional centre at the Mailbox in Birmingham. The video feed to the Mailbox only operates one-way. So, if they want to access library pictures from Birmingham they have to plan ahead and have them sent in the post.</p>
1012	<i>Paul asks Tom to check the voice-banks.</i>

1015



Sue Owen

Sue Owen leads the morning news meeting. James and nine other staff, presenters, producers and reporters contribute. Sue says their audience will want whatever they can get on the health story. Janine, who has just come off air, is worried about holding listeners' attention if there is too much in one chunk. Sue suggests interviewing the chief executive Mr Sumara, then giving him 'a cup of a tea and a croissant' and asking him back into the studio later to deal with the listeners' comments that are bound to follow the interview. Other available contributors include Ian Syme from Healthwatch and Greg Hopkinson, a consultant, who went on the record about the hospital's difficulties in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*.

There's a discussion of the double-fatal accident on the A53. It involved two young drivers. Were they racing each other? Lizzie, the newsreader, says she has been told off the record that they weren't. She's been checking with the police and the names of the victims are about to be released.

Other topics include the large number of dead badgers on local roads. Are they all the victims of road accidents, or are some of them being shot by farmers and dumped on the road? The idea has been mooted by a vet, but he won't go on the record as he relies on farmers for his livelihood.

Everyone in the meeting seems certain that the Stoke City football manager will be 'gone by the end of the week'.

On the Local TV desk at the other side of the office, video journalists are editing packages using Avid Express. Stuart Ratcliffe asks VJ Laura McMullan to check out a story that has appeared on GNS (the BBC's General News Service) about a disabled Tamworth man who has been told by the council he'll be prosecuted unless he puts back brambles and other rubbish that he's cleared from the banks of the River Tame near his home. She's also trying to set up a story about a transport café that's been named in a 'Michelin-style' guide as among the best in Britain. Stuart suggests taking a restaurant critic to the café.



Radio Stoke meeting

1045

Tom asks Paul about the correct way to word his script. He's having trouble with the wording on the Endon crash story and naming the two people who have died. Paul suggests 'believed to be . . . but not formally identified.'

1046

Radio Stoke's morning news meeting has finished. Lizzie has the names of the road accident victims and they'll be in the next bulletin. During the meeting there has been little if any mention of what other local media are reporting. Sue Owen's philosophy is clear: 'If we've got stories that are on the first three or four pages of the *Sentinel* [the local paper], we've failed. What's the point of two local media organisations covering the same stories with the same interviewees. That's not what we do'.

Laura, the VJ, has spoken to the agency News Team International in Birmingham, who supplied the Tamworth brambles story to GNS. They don't have the man's phone number. She knows the road he lives in and is trying to call neighbours, using the computer database of information from the electoral roll and telephone directories.

1055

Tom checks through his script and goes into the studio to read the 11 o'clock bulletin.

1100	<i>Tom reads the 11 o'clock bulletin live.</i>
1102	James, the Radio Stoke news editor, liaises with Stuart from Local TV and tells him the best times to interview the contacts the radio station has lined up for the afternoon's announcement of the plans for the new hospital. Using the radio station's research and contacts, Local TV will be able to put together a package with the chief executive Antony Sumara, the consultant Greg Hopkinson and campaigner Ian Syme.
1103	<i>Tom returns to the newsroom and starts looking for new stories for the 12 noon bulletin.</i>
1115	<i>Tom discovers that a marshal who died at Oulton Park race track has been named. He discusses with Paul how he should write it. Paul says: 'Write it differently from the Endon crash story. Often Cheshire police will only give out the name of someone when the inquest has been opened and then adjourned. Check that, and then that can be your line.'</i>
1125	<p><i>Paul continues writing the one o'clock. He decides to use just the marshal story for this bulletin. He checks through the draft later bulletins Tom has prepared. He checks the writing and discovers some word repetition. One story has the word 'makeover' twice. He changes one of them to 'facelift'. He changes another story to the present tense to make it more immediate, cuts out some unnecessary words and adds some geographical tags. Paul explains: 'All intros have a geographical tag because the patch is so big. We need to signpost for all the stories.'</i></p> <p><i>The lead story is about the local hospital. He tightens and hardens it by changing the tenses ('will pose' becomes 'are to pose') and cuts out some words: 'I rewrite everything from IRN. It is not as short as I would like, so I cut two paragraphs down to one.'</i></p> <p><i>Paul has a skeleton bulletin ready for one o'clock: 'If a big story breaks now, I have a skeleton ready, which allows me to concentrate on the breaking story.'</i></p>
1130	The public spending watchdog the Audit Commission has issued a press release criticising the Stoke hospital management for not balancing the books. James asks Paul Stanworth, a reporter who's acting as producer of the afternoon drive time show, for a voicer for the 1200 bulletin.
1133	<i>Tom checks for new stories to update his script for 12 noon.</i>



<p>1136</p> 	<p>Ian Syme from Healthwatch is in reception. James asks Phil, the morning sports presenter, to go and see him. Phil is keen to gain more news experience. He spends nearly 15 minutes with Mr Syme. The health campaigner asks if the newsroom has seen the Audit Commission report, but that's not the reason for his visit. He provides background information about a forthcoming inquest into the death of a 17-year-old in hospital, apparently from the effects of the MRSA bug. Phil is given the phone number of the victim's mother.</p> <p>Lizzie's seven-hour early newsreading shift is coming to an end. She leaves a handover note for the afternoon newsreader Helen Thomas, explaining which stories have been used and how often.</p>
<p>1145</p>	<p><i>Paul continues adding to his script for one o'clock. He decides to drop the audio on the Unison story and rewrites it as a straight read: 'I've hacked it to pieces and left it as a back anno – because there is little new news. We're tabloid in style, but we don't use the language of tabloids – people who overwrite get a sound slapping! A lot of journalists are guilty of kite-flying. I always say: "If it's a good enough story, it will stand on its own two feet." Please excuse the two metaphors!'</i></p>
<p>1148</p>	<p><i>An e-mail has arrived, timed at 1135. This is the new lead story. The District Auditors have gone public on the hospital story.</i></p>
<p>1155</p>	<p><i>Paul goes through the report from the Audit Commissioners with a highlighter pen.</i></p>
<p>1158</p>	<p><i>Paul considers rushing through the report and breaking the story for the bulletin at 12 but decides against it. He wants to get it right and decides to break the news at 12.30. He wants time to digest and understand the report before he writes it. He then notices an embargo until 3 p.m.</i></p>
<p>1200</p>	<p><i>Tom reads the 12 noon bulletin with no reference to the report from the Audit Commissioners.</i></p> <p>Lizzie reads her last bulletin as Helen arrives. A clip of the nurse Nina Flemming from the breakfast show leads the bulletin, followed by Paul's voicer on the Audit Commission report. James monitors Signal News, notes they have nothing worth following up and begins a ten-minute lunch break.</p>
<p>1205</p> 	<p><i>Paul writes the headlines for 12.30. He studies the report carefully and discovers that the Audit Commissioners' report is not embargoed until 3 p.m. – it is the response that is embargoed.</i></p> <p><i>Simon Humphries is sitting at the desk next to the main newsdesk where Paul is sitting. Simon has been in since 08.30 and has been working on tomorrow's news, writing draft bulletins from press releases and diary stories. He is now working on the financial news and sports bulletin for today. Signal's one o'clock and 5 p.m. bulletins are nearly six minutes long and contain a full sports bulletin.</i></p> <p><i>Simon and Paul discuss whether they can say that Boskamp is going – Sky News have said he is going.</i></p>

1215	<i>Paul has written the headlines for 12.30. He gets the weather off IRN's website and writes it into a script. He takes it to the studio for the presenters.</i>
1220	<i>Paul starts writing the Audit Commissioners' story from the press release. He says it's his job to make the press release understandable, without oversimplifying the story. He wants to get an audio clip from local Labour MP Paul Farrelly. He checks his contacts book and rings the number he has for Farrelly's local assistant. He discovers she changed her job four years ago. He rings the MP's mobile phone direct, but gets no reply.</i>
1224	<i>Paul rings the MP's office at the House of Commons. He explains who he is and how he has already tried his mobile. The MP's assistant in London says she'll try and locate him, and will ring Paul back. He explains he wants him for the one o'clock bulletin. Paul knows the MP well, and expects he will be critical of the hospital management.</i>
1225	<p>Mick has not had any success tracking down relatives of elderly patients at Westcliffe hospital. So, an appeal goes out on air asking anybody with relations in the unit to get in touch with the station.</p> <p>Stuart phones engineers at the Mailbox to send a package from the previous week to BBC South Today. A dog that went missing from Staffordshire four years ago turned up in part of South Today's region. The story emerged when the dog was reunited with its owner in Tamworth, after a vet discovered it had an identification chip. BBC Radio Five Live also want to hear the audio before arranging an interview with the dog's owner.</p> <p>Laura has spoken to a neighbour of the man being accused of unlawfully clearing brambles, but he wasn't too helpful. She suspects it might be same neighbour who complained to the council. She can't find a restaurant critic for the café story either. She decides to drive the 45 miles to Tamworth to find the brambles man. And she'll try a different tack with the café story – she'll ask a friend who's an award-winning restaurant chef to sample the café's menu.</p>
1230	<i>Tom reads the 12.30 headlines.</i>
1236	<i>The Sentinel, the local evening paper, has arrived. Paul checks through it and ticks off the stories they've already covered. He turns to the births, deaths and marriages: 'I always go though the hatched, matched and dispatched – just in case.'</i>
1244	<i>Paul checks the Staffordshire and Cheshire police voice-banks. He then rings Mark in police control for more detail on one of the stories. Somebody has forced their way into a flat in Crewe. Mark says he'll ring back with the answers to Paul's questions.</i>
1245	<i>Tom leaves for the day.</i>

1248	<i>Paul checks through the latest news from IRN and decides to use a story with the Prime Minister Tony Blair commenting on the NHS above the Unison story.</i>
1249	<i>Paul changes his mind and decides to use Blair as a back anno on the hospital story.</i>
1250	<p><i>Local MP Paul Farrelly rings. Paul rings him back immediately and records him directly off the phone on to the computer system on his desk. Paul knows the soundbites he wants from the MP, and poses the question he expects will get the right response. Referring to the Audit Commissioners' report, he says: 'They're having a right good go on the hospital – what's your take on that?'</i></p> <p><i>Paul gives a thumbs-up to Simon.</i></p> <p><i>'What's your position on the managers' response, then? You're saying what, then?'</i></p> <p><i>'Should managers lose their jobs?'</i></p> <p><i>'You're not very impressed then?'</i></p>
1254	<i>Paul continues questioning the MP. He keeps looking at the clock. He has to edit the soundbites ready for the bulletin in six minutes' time.</i>
1255	<i>The call ends. Paul has already chosen the clips he wants to use as he was recording. He edits them, and saves them in the system ready to play in the bulletin.</i>
1257	<p><i>While Paul is editing the soundbites, Mark from Cheshire Police rings back with the answers to Paul's questions. Simon takes the call: 'No to any injuries, and no to anything stolen.'</i></p> <p><i>Simon gives Paul the message.</i></p>
1258	<i>Paul rushes into the studio to read the one o'clock bulletin.</i>
1305	<p><i>Signal's mid-morning presenter rings the newsroom to say he couldn't hear the last audio clip on digital.</i></p> <p><i>Paul returns to the newsroom and changes the script. He has repeated himself and rewrites to avoid the repetition. He has problems making sense of the difficult language in the report.</i></p>
1340	<i>Laura arrives in Tamworth. She finds her way down to the river, but can't get through the brambles and household rubbish. Then she notices a clear area, half of it turfed, further along the riverbank. A man is in the back garden of an adjoining house. She makes her way back to the road and discovers that the man in the garden is the son of the man she's looking for. He's out but will be back soon. She promises to return in just under an hour, and goes off to find some lunch at a local shopping centre.</i>

1345	<i>Paul continues to work on the wording of the report.</i>
1350	<i>Paul checks the voice-banks, and rings round the local emergency services' press officers. Paul has been the news editor at Signal for so long he is on very friendly terms with the press officers.</i>
1358	<i>Paul makes final checks on his script and asks Simon to listen to Radio Stoke's output at two. He is aware that Patricia Hewitt, the Health Secretary, is due to speak at the Unison conference in Gateshead, and so also puts Sky News on in the newsroom. He asks Simon to keep an eye on what happens. Paul goes into the studio for the two o'clock bulletin.</i>
	
1400	<i>Paul reads the two o'clock bulletin.</i>
1403	<i>Paul returns to the newsroom and monitors Sky's output.</i>
1410	<i>Patricia Hewitt starts speaking at the Unison conference and Paul takes notes for the next bulletin.</i>
1415	<i>Paul does his police check calls. He discovers that the Crewe flat break-in story happened a week ago.</i>
1420	<p>James is told by the BBC Parliamentary Unit at Millbank that Patricia Hewitt, the Health Secretary, has been speaking about the Stoke hospital at the annual conference of Unison, where she's been heckled by the union's members. The speech is live on BBC News 24. James can access the audio on the BBC's 'autorot' system. Autorot is short for 'automatic record off transmission'. It means material from the BBC's radio networks and its main TV channels can be accessed by other parts of the organisation. It's stored digitally in half-hour segments. James listens to the Health Secretary saying the hospital's managers should apologise to the thousand workers losing their jobs. This is an unexpected new angle.</p> <p>In Tamworth, Laura returns to the riverside house and meets Garry Cartwright, a 60-year old disabled man, who has spent £1600 improving his access to the river at the foot of his garden. He shows her the letter from the council threatening him with criminal and civil action, unless he reinstates the land to its former condition.</p>
	

1425	<p><i>Paul asks Simon how tomorrow's bulletins are shaping up. Simon replies: 'Pants, mate!'</i></p> <p><i>Paul decides to lend a hand looking for stories for tomorrow. He writes up the Crewe break-in story. Paul says: 'Journalism has got to be a vocational call. When I started it was hot metal and newspaper presses. You've got to be a nose bugger and not give up. Someone who is half hearted just won't make it – a lot of young people just can't be bothered. You have to want to do it. If you think you want to do it, then it is not to be.'</i></p>
1442	<p><i>Paul checks the voice-banks. He then calls Carol Evans, who works in the press office at Staffordshire Police. He knows her well and puts on his 'charm': 'What have you been up to this weekend then?' They chat about decorating and domestic life. Paul then asks: 'Anything happening?'</i></p> <p><i>Paul then rings Mark at the Cheshire Police press office. They laugh and joke, but when Paul asks the same question, the reply is: 'Nothing happening, mate.' Paul's relationship with the police has been built up over his 23 years as the news editor at Signal: 'I know I'm trusted. I have the best job in the country – for my style. Stoke-on-Trent is a great patch and the people are just amazing here – it's just a great city.'</i></p>
1443	<p>Laura is busy filming Garry Cartwright. He's told her he wanted access to the river bank to teach his grandson fishing. It's not the fishing season, so she can't film him with a rod in his hand. Instead she settles for set-up shots of him on the newly-laid turf with his dogs.</p> <div>  </div> <p>Laura filming Garry Cartwright</p>
1445	<p><i>Paul decides that, with nothing happening locally, Patricia Hewitt will have to go into his next bulletin at three o'clock. He takes the IRN audio clip from the Unison conference, and rewrites the IRN copy to make it much shorter.</i></p>
1448	<p><i>Paul checks the latest IRN stories on his computer. The stories appear in red when they are local to Signal's area. He notices one about a teacher's body being found and can't understand why it is red. He reads further and discovers the teacher was from Macclesfield, which means it is a local story. Paul has a new lead story. He rewrites the IRN copy.</i></p>
1450	<p>Stuart, BBC Stoke's health story specialist, arrives at the hospital site in Hartshill to cover the trust meeting.</p>

1458	<i>Paul asks Simon to monitor Radio Stoke's bulletin and goes into the studio and reads Signal's three o'clock bulletin.</i>
1500	A clip of Patricia Hewitt leads the Radio Stoke bulletin, followed by the Flemming audio.
1510	<i>Paul returns to the newsroom. Simon tells him that Radio Stoke had a story about the Ivor Novello songwriting competition with mentions of Coldplay and James Blunt. He starts updating the stories for the four and five o'clock bulletins and writes the Macclesfield teacher's body story for tomorrow morning.</i>
1512	<p>Laura continues her filming in Tamworth.</p> 
1525	<i>Paul answers the phone. Mark from Cheshire Police has information about a court appearance a few weeks previously.</i>
1532	<p><i>Paul continues writing fresh lines on the Macclesfield teacher, and checks how the other police stories start to make sure he's not repeating the same opening words.</i></p> <p><i>'I've heard stations that are still running stories that first went out at ten in the morning, using the same wording and the same audio clip eight hours later at six in the evening. You can run the same stories, but you need to freshen them. People listen traditionally in 20-minute bursts. You can often leave the same bulletins running for two hours. In the mid-morning and mid-afternoon, you can even leave them running for three hours.'</i></p>
1548	<p><i>Paul rings Carol at Staffordshire Police press office for another friendly chat: 'Is it quiet? . . . Good. OK, talk later.'</i></p> <p><i>He rings Diane at Cheshire Police press office, but nothing is happening.</i></p> <p><i>'You have to be everyone's mate as a journalist.'</i></p> <p><i>Paul checks the draft bulletins ready for Tom in the morning. There are already six stories written for him: 'We're 60 per cent done – that'll give him a good head start.'</i></p>

1559	<i>Paul goes into the studio and reads for level.</i>
1600	<p><i>The second hand reaches the top of the hour and Paul starts his bulletin. He finishes two minutes later as the second hand hits two minutes past.</i></p> <p>Two clips of Patricia Hewitt lead the bulletin, both about the University Hospital. She'd spoken about its problems for several minutes, saying the mess the hospital is in is entirely of its own making. Off the back of the second clip, Helen announces: 'The former chair of the hospital Calum Paton will be talking to Tim Wedgwood on BBC Radio Stoke later this evening. He says he's unhappy at being made a scapegoat.'</p>
1602	<i>Paul is back in the newsroom. He starts writing new headlines for five o'clock. He has a dilemma. Does he stick with the Ivor Novello music awards just after the headline about two people dying in a car crash? 'Yes, we do.' He changes his mind: 'No, we don't.' He checks with the police on the condition of the two young men in hospital after the Endon crash. Paul says: 'We don't have enough manpower to be ringing hospitals checking on their condition. Also, should we be bothering hard-working medical staff on patients' conditions?'</i>
1615	<i>Paul checks on the weather update off IRN and takes it round to the presenters on air. He goes into the small news studio and records the headlines and weather for overnight for the various outputs.</i>
1618	Laura has finished filming. She has recorded 22 minutes of video, which she'll edit into a two-minute package. The council have told her they won't offer a spokesman for interview, but they have issued a press statement in an e-mail that's waiting for her when she returns to the office. She pulls in to the roadside to call her friend Simon, the chef, who agrees to meet at the transport café the following morning. She decides to drive back to Stoke via the A515 which will take her past the café, so she'll know how to find it tomorrow.
1624	<i>Paul returns to the newsroom and checks his e-mail for any new press releases.</i>
1643	<i>Paul takes a call from a listener about a stolen item. Paul says he is sorry, but he can't read it out on the news.</i>
1649	<i>Paul rings the voice-banks and makes his regular police check calls. He picks up details of a family's tribute to one of the victims who died in the Endon crash. The drive-time audience is traditionally a much lower audience on Signal than the breakfast audience, and Paul decides not to use it for the five o'clock bulletin. He wants to keep something fresh for the morning: 'I don't want to use all my eggs today. I won't waste a fresh update on a smaller audience this afternoon. I'll save two or three eggs for an egg dip in the morning!'</i>

<div>1650</div> <div> </div> <div>Stuart Fear at the hospital OB</div>	<p>The hospital trust has agreed a revised scaled-down design for the new hospital, with more than a hundred fewer beds than first planned. Stuart is having trouble with interference from a taxi firm on the radio car's link to the studio. He does a 40-second voicer on his mobile phone. It will run in the next two bulletins. A 'phono' voicer can be filed straight onto the station's auto-recorder – a high-quality answerphone. The reporter reads his cue, records his voicer and the report can be top-and-tailed in Radioman, the edit system. If a producer in the newsroom is expecting the reporter to file, there's not even a need to phone in.</p> <div> </div> <div> </div> <div> </div>
<div>1657</div>	<p><i>Paul goes into the studio to read Signal's five o'clock bulletin.</i></p>
<div>1700</div>	<p>The Radio Stoke bulletin includes the two clips of the Health Secretary and Stuart's voicer.</p>
<div>1706</div>	<p><i>Simon leaves the newsroom for the day. Paul returns to the main news desk in the newsroom and starts writing the tribute story for tomorrow morning. He files it on the system under Tuesday 6 a.m. He then writes another version of the story for the 8 a.m. bulletin, saving a line about the 'lessons learned' for the larger audience at eight.</i></p>
<div>1715</div>	<p>Stuart does a live two-way with presenter Tim Wedgwood. He returns to the meeting for the rest of the business and to collect audio for later bulletins.</p>
<div>1756</div>	<p><i>Paul checks the voice-banks. There are no new stories.</i></p>
<div>1800</div>	<p><i>Paul reads the same bulletin as he read at five o'clock.</i></p>

<div>1805</div>	<p><i>Paul leaves the newsroom for the day.</i></p> <p>Immediately after the news, there's an interview with Calum Paton, the former chair of the hospital trust. He's unhappy at being made a scapegoat by the Health Secretary.</p>
<div>1850</div>	<p>Local TV's 10-minute bulletin includes a report from BBC Midlands Today, the regional programme, about villagers in Gnosall who've bought their own speed gun to catch speeding drivers. There's a NIBs (news in brief) bulletin of three items read by Rupinder Bahra, the community content producer; an item presented by Chris Campbell-Brown who does ghost walks in Burton-upon-Trent (complete with 'spooky' camera tricks); and pieces about breakdancing classes and the Paralympic sport of goalball. The NIBs include the names of the A53 car crash victims. Laura's brambles story will run tomorrow. It will also be shown on the regional programme Midlands Today.</p>