



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lord Hall
Director-General
BBC Corporate Affairs
Room 5045, Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London
W1A 1AA

12 February 2019

Dear Lord Hall,

Response to the BBC's public consultation on age-related TV licence policy

I am writing on behalf of my constituents in Warrington South regarding the BBC's public consultation over what action it should take when Government funding of the licence fees for over-75 households comes to an end.

In Warrington South, 6,990 households are currently eligible for an over-75 free TV Licence. I have been contacted by a number of constituents who are affected by this issue and who are concerned that they are at risk of losing this important benefit.

According to a recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, pensioner poverty is on the rise, with one in six pensioners currently living in poverty. Finding the money needed to pay for this additional bill will be impossible for those struggling to make ends meet. Age UK have also found that over two million over-75s would have to go without TV or cut back on essentials such as heating or eating if the concession is scrapped.

Ending the free TV Licence could see approximately 2.4 million pensioners lose their licence and a further 50,000 pushed below the poverty line.

The free TV Licence can also play a crucial role in helping to combat social isolation and loneliness. Four in 10 older people say the television is their main source of company. If the free TV Licences are ended or means-tested, millions of older people will have to pay to keep the little company they do have.

If the free TV licences are means tested and only given to those who receive pension credit, in Warrington South this could mean 5,740 households may cease to qualify for a free TV Licence. If the age of eligibility is raised to 80, 2,910 households in my constituency could cease to qualify.

Member of Parliament for Warrington South

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For your information, I have outlined below a small snapshot of some of the comments I have received on this issue.

- I and many other of my elderly friends depend on TV to access news and entertainment.
- It is often the only company that I have, and I feel as though if it were to be scrapped then it will be penalising those who have already contributed many years towards the country.
- My TV is a lifeline, especially in winter where there are not many things to look forward to.
- The recent extreme cold weather, when some of my activities have been restricted, has brought home to me how much I depend on BBC1 and BBC2.
- There are people out there that rely on the TV as it is the only contact with the outside world that they may get - it might be the only thing that they see in the day and it brings a lot of comfort to them.
- A TV is a companion, especially for those who live alone. Many who cannot get out rely on it for entertainment, as well as being the main source of news, as newspapers are expensive these days.
- I have looked forward to the day when I was not required to pay a fee for the last few years. After removing £50 from my winter heating allowance the extra £12 per month would have been a great help to balance my budget.
- I, like many other people over 75, have worked and paid tax and insurance for approximately 60 years. Many of these people are on small pensions and we have served the country with dignity and honour. The TV may be the only form of entertainment and to scrap the licence is a kick in the teeth and a disgusting move.
- The Government and the BBC must realise the comfort and company that a TV can bring to those who may be alone and/or unable to join in other activities due to the frailty that old age brings or who may even be housebound.

I have received many more comments in response to the consultation – they have also made their views known individually as part of the BBC's consultation process.

The TV licence is an important benefit for pensioners who suffer disproportionately from loneliness and social isolation. If TV licences are ended or means-tested, millions of older people, almost half of whom consider television their main source of company, will have to pay to keep the little company they do have.

The current Government was elected on a manifesto which promised to maintain all pensioner benefits, including TV licences. I believe it must keep this promise by taking back responsibility for the TV licence. With that in mind, alongside my Labour colleagues, I will continue to press the Government to step in and save free TV licences for over-75s.

I would be grateful if you would register the points raised above as part of the consultation process.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Faisal Rashid MP.

Faisal Rashid MP