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HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

07 February 2019

Dear Lord Hall,

I write on behalf of my constituents in Washington and Sunderland West regarding the consultation into what the BBC should do when UK Government funding of licence fees for over-75 households come to an end.

In Washington and Sunderland West, based on 2017/18 figures, there are approximately 5,120 households with someone over the age of 75, and therefore eligible for a free TV license.

That is over 5,000 households who are eligible to benefit, not only from savings associated with the TV license, but also from the feeling of social inclusion. 2.4 million older people living entirely on their own in the UK could be set to lose their free TV license. With four in 10 older people saying that their television is their main source of company, it would therefore be unconscionable to take the free TV license away from them, especially with the Government's commitment to tackling loneliness.

If eligibility for the free TV license is linked to pension credit, 3,150 households in my constituency could cease to qualify. If the age eligibility is raised to 80, 2,160 households in my constituency could cease to qualify. It cannot be right that so many households are at risk because of these changes.

It was a Labour Government that first introduced free TV licences for over 75s in 2000. But in 2015, the Conservative Government outsourced this social policy by shifting the cost of these licences to the BBC in its 2015 Royal Charter, without the funding to sustain the policy. This was something I was opposed to at the time, and I remain committed to that stance.

I understand that the cost of free licenses is expected to reach £745m by 2021/22, and will continue to rise due to age demographics. I believe therefore that the Government should take responsibility for this cost, and tell us urgently what they are going to do to ensure free TV licenses aren't cut. The Conservative Party's 2017 General Election Manifesto committed to "maintain all other pensioner benefits, including free... TV licences, for the duration of this Parliament.", which should be up until 2022. However, the proposal to abolish free TV licenses for over 75s, before 2022, would be a U-turn on that commitment and will be a blow to people over the age of 75.



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I hope that the BBC will be taken out of this appalling situation that the Conservative Government has put them in, this is a social benefit and should be paid for fully by Government, not by the BBC, in order that the free TV license can continue for all over 75s. This is important for people in my constituency, and across the country.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Mrs Sharon Hodgson.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson MP

Member of Parliament for Washington & Sunderland West Constituency
Shadow Minister for Public Health

Cc. The Rt Hon Jeremy Wright MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport