

ANGELA RAYNER MP
Ashton-under-Lyne

All correspondence to:
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HOUSE OF COMMONS
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Our Ref: DM/AR

Dr Carolyn Wilkins OBE
Chief Executive
Oldham MBC
Level 3, Civic Centre
West Street
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22/07/2019

Dear Carolyn,

I share your concern following the BBC's announcement that these TV licences will be means-tested, from June 2020, by linking them to Pension Credit. As a result, up to 3.7 million older people – 1.6 million of whom live completely alone – are set to lose their free TV licences.

Unfortunately, in 2015 – as part of the BBC's Charter renewal – the cost of these licences was shifted to the BBC from 2020, without the funding to sustain the policy. The Government is blaming the BBC, but public broadcasters should never be responsible for social policy. I opposed this outsourcing of social policy from the start.

The free TV licence is an important benefit for pensioners, who suffer disproportionately from loneliness and social isolation. With TV licences set to be 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. I am alarmed by Age UK's analysis which shows that scrapping the free TV licence could push 50,000 pensioners below the poverty line. Taking free TV licences away will also leave many older people feeling isolated and alone.

The Government was elected on a manifesto which promised to maintain free TV licences for the over-75s throughout this Parliament – that is, until 2022. On 8 May, the House of Commons expressed – unopposed – its belief that the Government must stand by its pledge to maintain free TV licences. I was pleased to support this Opposition Day motion.

However, the Government has overseen the scrapping of free TV licences for the over-75s and has delivered yet another welfare cut to some of the most vulnerable in our society. This is a betrayal of older citizens, who deserve dignity in retirement and reward for their hard work.

I fully agree that the Government should take back responsibility for maintaining the free licence. I can therefore assure you I will be pressing the Government to overturn this decision and to honour its commitment to protect free TV licences for the over-75s.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "ARayner".

Angela Rayner MP