

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS****Inquiry into aspects of BBC Charter Renewal: the public purposes of the BBC; and who should set the licence fee.****CALL FOR EVIDENCE**

The House of Lords Select Committee on Communications, under the chairmanship of Lord Best, is to conduct an inquiry into the public purposes of the BBC and the mechanism by which the licence fee is set. The Committee thus invites any interested organisation or individual to submit written evidence to the inquiry. **Written evidence must be submitted by 30 September 2015.**

The Committee expects to hear oral evidence from invited witnesses from July – November 2015. The Committee intends to report in February or March 2016. Reports are made for the information of the House but may also make recommendations. The Government has undertaken to respond in writing to reports from select committees.

The current BBC Royal Charter expires at the end of 2016. While the formal process of Charter Renewal has yet to begin, the report published by the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee entitled *The Future of the BBC* has laid out many of the key issues and conflicting perspectives.<sup>1</sup> The intention of this inquiry is not to cover the same ground as that report but to look in detail at two specific areas of the BBC.

What should be the public purposes of the BBC?

The Committee's inquiry will review the existing public purposes and consider their continued relevance.

*Background*

The principle of the public purposes was first introduced in the early 2000s. They were first articulated in regard to the BBC by a BBC document entitled *Building public value: Renewing the BBC for a digital world*.

The six purposes were incorporated into the current Royal Charter of 2006 and expanded in the subsequent Framework Agreement. The Charter states that “the BBC’s main object is the promotion of its Public Purposes”.<sup>2</sup> These are;

- Sustaining citizenship and civil society
- Promoting education and learning
- Stimulating creativity and cultural excellence
- Representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities
- Bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK

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<sup>1</sup> Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Future of the BBC* (Fourth Report of session 2014-2015)

<sup>2</sup> Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation:  
[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how\\_we\\_govern/charter.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/charter.pdf)

- In promoting its other purposes, helping to deliver to the public the benefit of emerging communications technologies and services and, in addition, taking a leading role in the switchover to digital television.

Under the Framework Agreement, the Trust sets purpose remits for each of the six public purposes which set priorities and specify how the BBC's performance against them will be judged. The Trust must consult publicly in developing purpose remits and keep them under review. In order to make an amendment to them there must be public consultation.

The CMS Committee's recent report recommended "...that the independent panel and formal Charter Review consult on the BBC's current public purposes and purpose remits set out for them, to determine whether and how they might be revised and to examine their effectiveness in measuring the BBC's public value."<sup>3</sup> Rona Fairhead, Chairman of the BBC Trust, stated that part of the Trust's strategy for the next 10 years was to, "refine – or change - the broader public purposes of the BBC as they are set out in the Charter... Our research asked people what they thought the most important objectives are for the BBC in future. We wanted to use that question to test the relative importance that they attach to the current public purposes. For the most part there was positive endorsement of these purposes."<sup>4</sup>

The Committee invites interested people and organisations to respond in writing to the following questions and any other they think important.

*Are public purposes the best way to judge/analyse the BBC's performance?*

*Ten years on from their inception, how relevant are these core purposes to the contemporary debate about the renewal of the Charter? Should they be revised and should a broad process of consultation be used to test the public purposes against licence payers' expectations?*

*What are the pros and cons of the current purposes? How are they measured, how should they be measured? How do the purpose remits contribute to this?*

*If they should be amended, what should they be amended to? What rationale or supporting evidence is there to support this?*

*Who should decide what the public purposes are? What body, combination of bodies and/or individuals? Are there any comparisons with other organisations which would be useful to inform the debate?*

*What is the wider public's and those who work for the BBC's knowledge and understanding of the Public Purposes?*

*Does the process by which the public purposes are set deliver the best outcome for the public? Does this process need to be amended?*

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<sup>3</sup> Culture, Media and Sport Committee, *Future of the BBC* (Fourth Report of session 2014-2015) p 20

<sup>4</sup> Speech by Rona Fairhead, Chairman of the BBC Trust, to the Royal Television Society:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/news/speeches/2015/rts>

*If this needs to be amended what process would be appropriate for setting the public purposes within the current Charter Renewal?*

*Should the BBC do anything beyond its public purposes?*

### Who should set the level of the licence fee?

#### *Background*

The licence fee is currently set by Government following discussions with the BBC Trust. In January 2007 the licence fee was agreed for a six-year period with the amount being approved each year by Parliament. The Government decided to freeze the licence fee at its 2010 level of £145.50 until 31st March 2017.

The Committee's inquiry will consider whether there is a better way to set the level of funding and offer assurances of value for money while protecting the BBC's independence. The Committee invites interested people and organisations to respond in writing to the following questions and any others they think important.

#### *Questions*

*What are the positives and negatives of the way the settlement has been reached in the past? How should the settlement be reached for 2017?*

*What alternative mechanisms exist for setting the fee, and what are their advantages and disadvantages? In each case, how might independence from government be achieved and protected? Are there any useful international comparisons?*

*Could a new independent system also incorporate thinking about collection and charging mechanisms in light of technology changes?*

This document sets out the broad questions on which the committee would be interested to receive written evidence. A person submitting written evidence need not address all of the questions and is also free to raise other issues. Practical instructions about in what form and how to submit written evidence are attached to this document.

## **ANNEX: GUIDANCE FOR SUBMISSIONS**

Written evidence should be submitted online using the written submission form available at <http://www.parliament.uk/hlcomms-charter-renewal-submission-form>. This page also provides guidance on submitting evidence.

Short submissions are preferred. A submission longer than six pages should include a one-page summary.

Paragraphs should be numbered. All submissions made through the written submission form will be acknowledged automatically by email.

Evidence which is accepted by the Committee may be published online at any stage; when it is so published it becomes subject to parliamentary copyright and is protected by parliamentary privilege. Submissions which have been previously published will not be accepted as evidence.

Once you have received acknowledgement that the evidence has been accepted you will receive a further email, and at this point you may publicise or publish your evidence yourself. In doing so you must indicate that it was prepared for the Committee, and you should be aware that your publication or re-publication of your evidence may not be protected by parliamentary privilege.

Personal contact details will be removed from evidence before publication, but will be retained by the Committee Office and used for specific purposes relating to the Committee's work, for instance to seek additional information.

Persons who submit written evidence, and others, may be invited to give oral evidence. Oral evidence is usually given in public at Westminster and broadcast online; transcripts are also taken and published online. Persons invited to give oral evidence will be notified separately of the procedure to be followed and the topics likely to be discussed.

Substantive communications to the Committee about the inquiry should be addressed through the clerk of the Committee, whether or not they are intended to constitute formal evidence to the Committee.

This is a public call for evidence. Please bring it to the attention of other groups and individuals who may not have received a copy direct.

You may follow the progress of the inquiry at <http://www.parliament.uk/hlcomms-charter-renewal>.