



Consultation Response

Age related TV licence policy

BBC

February 2019

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the BBC's consultation on age related TV licence policy.

Age Cymru has contributed to and fully supports the detailed response to this consultation submitted by our sister organization, Age UK.

In addition, we would like to raise several issues relevant to older people in Wales which we think are important to highlight.

First, Wales has the oldest population, and the most rapidly ageing population, of all four nations of the UK. Wales is also the UK region/country with the highest percentage of pensioners on a low income outside of London. Over 100,000 older people in Wales are estimated to be living in poverty. We believe all older people should have an adequate standard of living and a level of income which enables them to live comfortably, and no one should have to endure a calamitous reduction in their standard of living when they retire. Yet, despite progress during the late 1990s and early 2000s when poverty amongst older people fell, levels have been largely static since 2005 and living on a low income remains a serious issue for many older people. Removing the entitlement to a free TV licence for people over 75 would therefore have a disproportionate effect on the population of Wales and only worsen the circumstances of those people who are already lonely, isolated and struggling to achieve some quality of life while living in poverty.

Second, BBC Wales is the primary and often sole source of information for many older people in Wales for news about Welsh politics and public services. Wales does not possess a comprehensive newspaper industry that can scrutinise political decision making processes, and major public and private services, to inform the general public, to the same extent that happens in England.

The National Assembly of Wales and Welsh Government are the primary legislative and policy-making bodies for twenty devolved matters in Wales, namely: agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development; ancient monuments and historic buildings; culture; economic development; education and training; environment; fire and rescue services and promotion of fire safety; food; health and health services; highways and transport; housing; local government; public administration; social welfare; sport and recreation; tourism; town and country planning; water and flood defence, and the Welsh language.

If older people in Wales cannot afford to pay for their TV licence and are unable to access broadcast media reporting on Welsh public affairs, it will be extremely difficult or even impossible for them to inform themselves about major public issues in Wales which have a significant impact on their daily lives, and to engage in democratic process and debate. There is therefore a very real danger that removing free TV licences for people aged over 75 in Wales will lead to a democratic deficit amongst its older population.

Third, BBC Wales is by far the biggest provider of news, current affairs, sport and drama through the medium of the Welsh language. We also know that many older people, particularly those living with dementia, often revert to their mother tongue of Welsh as they grow older. Therefore, if older people in Wales whose first language is Welsh cannot afford a TV licence, they could become cut off from a substantial proportion of their opportunities to be informed and engaged through the medium of their native language.

Finally, as more information and services are made available mainly or exclusively online, there are real risks of increasing exclusion amongst older people. Technology can offer a vital portal to information and advice for older people but access and take-up remains low amongst older age groups. The National Survey for Wales 2014-15 highlights that only 29% of people aged 75 and over used the internet. In addition, large parts of rural Wales cannot access the full range of social media platforms due to the prevalence of so called 'not spots'. For many older people, reductions in the amount of information available in traditional formats has exacerbated difficulties in keeping

informed and being able to access key services. Removing the entitlement to a free TV licence for people over 75 would add substantially to these difficulties.

We hope that these comments are useful and would be happy to provide further information if requested.