

BBC Charter Review Team
Department for Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

Sent by email to: bbccharterreview@dcms.gov.uk

10th March 2026

Age UK response to the BBC Charter Review consultation

Dear Sir or Madam,

The importance of television

For millions of older people across the UK, television (and radio) remain a vital source of companionship, entertainment, and trusted information. For those who experience loneliness, social isolation, or limited mobility, television provides not only entertainment but an essential connection to the wider world. The BBC, in particular, continues to play a central role in many older people's lives as a reliable, accessible and valued public service broadcaster.

Digital exclusion

Despite rapid digital transformation across society, 4.9 million older people in the UK still lack the basic digital skills needed to use the internet confidently. This makes it significantly harder for those who are not digital natives to access services, find information, or carry out everyday online tasks. For the foreseeable future, millions of people, many of them older, will remain offline. Their rights, needs, and interests must therefore be integral to any future Charter plans.

Any measures that involve digital technology for accessing equipment, services, or compliance processes must be designed to be fully accessible and inclusive. Crucially, offline alternatives must remain available for those who struggle with digital systems or who rely on telephone or postal communication.

A managed plan for internet-only TV

A shift to digital-only television without a managed plan would risk excluding a significant number of older people who are currently offline. Age UK is a member of the '2040+ campaign' and as such we would strongly oppose switching off terrestrial television at an early date, or at any time before the necessary conditions for success are firmly in place as part of a carefully planned and well executed transition. Moving prematurely to internet-only services would place an unreasonable financial burden on older people who are not online, requiring them to fund ongoing broadband services and potentially purchase new smart televisions - equipment that millions do not currently own.

Affordability

For an older person living on a low, fixed income with limited savings, the set-up and ongoing costs associated with internet-only television are simply unaffordable. While a fully digital future may one day be feasible, this will only be fair and practical once the significant barriers around affordability, access and skills have been addressed. Moving to internet-only television before these challenges are resolved would be profoundly unfair to digitally excluded older people and is completely unacceptable from Age UK's perspective.

Older people's needs and media use

Ofcom's Media Nations data shows that older people aged 65+ watch more than 300 minutes (five hours) of broadcast television daily. Ninety-five per cent watch broadcast TV, and 94% view television or film content using a television set, including Smart TVs. By contrast, far fewer older people watch on mobile phones (24%), tablets (32%) or desktop/laptop computers (26%). Nearly half (46%) have not used subscription on-demand services in the past year.

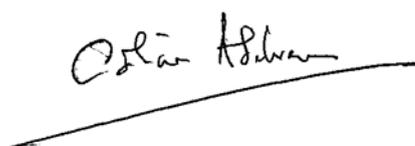
Furthermore, 4.3 million people aged 65+ do not use a smartphone, and 1.6 million do not use any type of mobile phone. As the Government and the BBC explore the future of TV distribution, it is essential that the needs of older people are fully considered. As acknowledged in the Green Paper, any transition to online viewing must ensure that no one is left behind, and digital inclusion must remain central to the BBC's planning.

Future funding

As the BBC reviews future funding models to keep the licence fee affordable and considers whether concessions should be updated, Age UK urges the inclusion of targeted measures to support older people facing financial difficulty. We remain disappointed that previous efforts to secure free TV licences for all over-75s did not result in a sustainable solution.

Although it is reassuring that the Green Paper indicates no further cuts to existing concessions (including those for over-75s in receipt of Pension Credit) much more is needed. Without careful planning and targeted support, the costs associated with digital transition risk falling disproportionately on the most vulnerable older people who rely most on the BBC's services.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Abrahams CBE

Charity Director, Age UK