

The Rt Hon the Baroness Stowell of Beeston MBE
Chair of the Select Committee on Communications and Digital
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW
Tel: 020 7219 2922
Email: holcommunications@parliament.uk

Tim Davie CBE
Director-General
BBC
BBC Broadcasting House
London
W1A 1AA

29 March 2023

Dear Mr Davie,

As you know, the Communications and Digital Committee takes a keen interest in the BBC and its approach to serving all sectors of UK society. In July 2022 we published *Licence to change: BBC future funding*.¹ The report covered a number of issues facing the BBC and made recommendations to help the corporation adapt to an increasingly challenging future landscape.

Your response confirmed that the BBC was undertaking a “detailed strategy review”.² We would welcome an update on this work by June 2023. One of the key recommendations in our report was for the BBC to publish a comprehensive long-term vision that sets out its role, and how it will deliver value and distinctiveness in a rapidly changing world. We called for that vision to be clear about “what the BBC will stop doing, what it needs to do differently and what it will start doing. This would provide clarity to the commercial sector, and greater structure and transparency to help Ofcom, Parliament and the public hold the BBC to account”.³ We were clear that this work was crucial to help the BBC explain to all sectors of society what it is for; how and why decisions around programming and resource prioritisation are being taken; and how this relates to the BBC’s long-term plans to secure a sustainable future.

This clarity of vision and purpose is becoming increasingly important in the face of challenges in multiple areas. Rising costs and changing audience habits are requiring public service broadcasters to take difficult decisions about the allocation of scarce resources.⁴ Recent decisions on the reduction of BBC services in areas such as local radio have prompted concern among some stakeholders about the corporation’s long-term approach to serving

¹ Communications & Digital Committee, [Licence to change: BBC future funding](#) (18 July 2022)

² Correspondence from Tim Davie CBE, [BBC in response to the Committee's report "BBC future funding: Licence to change"](#) (21 October 2022)

³ Communications & Digital Committee, [Licence to change: BBC future funding](#) (18 July 2022) p 31

⁴ Reuters Institute, Journalism, media, and technology trends and predictions 2023 (10 January 2023): <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/journalism-media-and-technology-trends-and-predictions-2023>



HOUSE OF LORDS

citizens across the UK.⁵ Ofcom recently emphasised the importance of the BBC being “clear with audiences and Ofcom about the changes to services it plans to make” and said it was “disappointed by the lack of detail and clarity contained within the BBC’s announcements about the changes to its provision of local content and news.”⁶ There are other reports on the impact of wider resource constraints on the BBC’s work, ranging from the extent of World Service provision,⁷ to the announced cuts (subsequently amended) to BBC Singers,⁸ through to smaller-scale issues such as potential changes to the broadcast coverage of parliamentary select committees.

Our report called for the BBC’s future vision to be clear about priorities and how these will shape future decisions on programming and allocation of resources.⁹ While we do not propose to inquire into the details of the BBC’s internal resourcing decisions, we would like to underscore the value of having a clearer overarching vision that provides the public with transparency and confidence about the basis on which the BBC manages competing priorities. This is particularly relevant to issues around market failure. As we detailed in our report, the BBC plays an important role in providing services that are underserved by the private sector.

We would therefore welcome assurances that the BBC will publish a bold long-term strategic vision in the near future. This must be clear about what the BBC is for; how it will manage its responsibilities to serve all sectors of society (including the provision of services that are likely to be underserved by other providers); its plans to continue adapting to a digital future; and how changes to its funding model would affect its ability to deliver on its mission. Recent discussions about the work of the BBC and challenges it faces underscore the growing importance of the BBC leading the public debate about its own future.

We would be grateful for an opportunity to discuss the progress you have made on the recommendations in our report. We will be in contact with you to arrange this.

Yours sincerely,

BARONESS STOWELL OF BEESTON

⁵ BBC, BBC local services disrupted by 24-hour strike over radio cuts (15 March 2023):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-64964035>

⁶ Ofcom, [Letter from Ofcom to the BBC](#) (24 February 2023)

⁷ BBC, BBC World Service outlines move to digital-first service (29 September 2022):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2022/bbc-world-service-outlines-move-to-digital-first-service>

⁸ BBC, BBC suspends proposed closure of the BBC Singers (24 March 2023):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-65063238>

⁹ Communications & Digital Committee, [Licence to change: BBC future funding](#) (18 July 2022) p 14