

## TV fee campaigners call for tax funding as BBC faces £250m bill

**CAMPAIGNING is continuing to try to ensure as many people over 75 still get free TV licences.**

The spring and summer saw renewed efforts to try to get ministers to agree that licences should be funded from general taxation after the BBC announced that, from next year, only those on pension credit would not have to pay.

Responsibility for the social policy initiative was transferred from taxpayers to licence fee payers by the coalition government under the BBC funding arrangement secretly accepted in 2015.

Former chancellor (and now London *Evening Standard* editor) George Osborne is widely believed to have been behind the move, while pursuing the Conservatives' austerity agenda.

This view was confirmed when former DCMS minister Ed Vaizey told the House of Commons that the decision to transfer the cost to the BBC from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was forced through by the Treasury.

Licences for the over-75s account for nearly £750m a year while a means-tested benefit will cost about £250m.

Even the smaller sum will endanger NUJ members' jobs, as cuts to BBC output will be inevitable as the Corporation struggles to find so much money.



**ROYLE APPROVAL:** Actor Ricky Tomlinson, still associated with *The Royle Family* sitcom, with NUJ 60-Plus Council member Mary Brodbin at the licence fee protest outside the BBC's Media City premises.

Members of Bectu, Unite, Equity, the Musicians' Union and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, as well as the NUJ, will find their livelihoods threatened. A BBC press release said the Corporation would "divert some spending (from) programmes and services", look for more savings and "expand its commercial revenue to cope".

The NUJ believes that free licences are a social policy that should remain a government responsibility, funded by taxpayers – and outside the remit of a broadcasting organisation.

The 60-Plus Council has been backing Age UK and National Pensioners Convention campaigns for ministers to again assume responsibility for the benefit.

BBC executives' timing of the announcement coincided with this year's Pensioners' Parliament in Blackpool, prompting a hurried demonstration outside the BBC at Media City in Salford.

Outside, *Royle Family* star Ricky Tomlinson said: "I don't think the BBC should be funding this at all – the government should be funding it."

Concern over the proposals was so great that the House of Commons culture and media committee considered the proposal as part of its regular review of BBC annual reports in July.

Director general Tony Hall said the BBC had been left with "no option" but to limit free licences, as it was with government who were "withdrawing the concession".

BBC chairman Sir David Clementi told the committee that the issue of pensioner poverty among the over-75s is a "matter for the government and not for us".

## Branch leads march through city to mourn Lyra McKee

**CO-CHAIR of the 60-Plus Council, Jim Symons, was among those who rapidly organised local demonstrations to show solidarity with the importance of journalists' safety and LGBT rights following the killing of NUJ member Lyra McKee in Derry in April.**

Jim, pictured, addressed a vigil by trade union members in Dundee's City Square

that followed a march, accompanied by bagpipers, from the city's Robert Burns statue.

Jim Symons said: "It was an honour to lead the march and see people come out to pay their respects for Lyra. The Dundee branch of the NUJ celebrate her life and mourn her loss."

Picture: Alan Richardson.



## Generational involvement set to influence union's structure review

**THE dilemma over ensuring the NUJ is relevant to young journalists at the same time as being dependent on retired members and freelancers looks set to emerge as a key issue in the current review of the union's structure.**

While nurturing younger activists is accepted as vital to the NUJ's future, the workloads faced by those starting their careers means that undertaking union work takes at least third place as a life priority, behind work and a work-life balance.

Older and freelance members, who have the time to attend meetings and carry

out the administrative tasks essential for any branch to function, are crucial to the union's democracy.

*'Older and freelance members ... are crucial to the union's democracy'*

This year's renaissance of the Brighton branch as well as the survival of the Sunderland, Shields and Hartlepool and Solent branches, for example, is largely due to retired members.

Also, informal evidence from many parts of the UK and Republic of Ireland suggests that without such input, even more of the NUJ's branches would be dormant.

One way to try to address this is to elect younger and older member jobshares for key branch officer positions – so younger members do not feel bad about not delivering if workloads impinge on family and personal life.

This approach also gives them opportunities to learn from more experienced members, who can write minutes, arrange meeting rooms and keep accounts, as they have more time.

A report considering initial submissions is due to go to the NUJ's national executive council in October with motions for next year's delegate meeting being published in December.

## Roy takes the chair

**SIXTY-Plus council member Roy Jones, pictured, has been elected chair of the revived North Wales NUJ branch.**

The branch, which has members living and working along the North Wales coast, held its first new meeting in the spring, followed by a summer social event a few weeks' later.

The revival was supported by the Welsh Executive Council plus NEC members Natasha Hirst and David Nicholson.



## Support vital in battle against digital division

**OLDER people need more support to get online – or the digital divide will get worse.**

That was the call made at this year's Pensioners' Parliament (PP) by Derek Walker, chief executive of the, Wales Co-operative Centre. The centre coordinates and implements projects to strengthen communities and promote inclusion – with particular emphasis on older people.

*'Older people prefer news in print rather than online'*

As well as affecting journalism, as older people prefer news in print rather than online (just as publishers push their "digital first" plans), concerns are growing that more and more people will find themselves in increasing hardship as they cannot get online to apply for benefits.

A show of hands at the PP closely mirrored findings of the UK

Consumer Digital Index 2019, published by Lloyds Bank.

That showed that across the UK 62 per cent are "digital first", using multiple devices, shopping and streaming online, and preferring to manage money digitally, while 25 per cent are "digitally competent", using devices but preferring face-to-face contact. A significant 12 per cent are "digitally disengaged", rarely if ever using computers or phones

Organisations such as the Co-operative Centre must, said Derek Walker, act as "agents of change", training staff in libraries, social care, other public services and the third sector, "so they can support older people."

Taking questions, Derek Walker faced anger and hostility from a minority saying they would never go online because of the fear of scams, the cost and other concerns.

"We've got to support people – or the gap gets wider," he responded.

## Parliament adopts a more conventional approach

**THIS year's Pensioners' Parliament was the last – but the opportunity to discuss concerns facing older people is not being lost.**

Next year, the event becomes the "Pensioners' Convention".

Four NUJ members – Jenny Sims, Jim Symons, Mary Brodwin and Julian Swainson – contributed to this year's debates. These addressed – housing, older people and fuel poverty, tackling intergenerational unfairness, ageing without children; the social care crisis, public transport and tackling digital exclusion.

## Thinking ahead can influence the council

**IF you're an older member of the NUJ and think you can contribute to the work of the 60-Plus Council, now's the time to be thinking about standing for election.**

Most council members are elected at delegate meetings every two years – and the next takes place in Southport in April.

The closing date for nominations is at the end of November, so anyone wanting to stand must get their branch to put their name forward by then.

Members wanting to suggest work for the council can do so in motions that must also be submitted by tabling bodies before the end of November.

### SENIOR REPORTER

© 2019 Copyright in the words and images in *Senior Reporter* remains with the originators. All rights reserved.  
Editors: Jenny Sims and Adam Christie.

*Senior Reporter* is the occasional newsletter of the 60-Plus Council of the National Union of Journalists.

NUJ, Headland House, 72 Acton Street, London WC1X 9NB