

Rt Hon John Whittingdale
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

In 2014 Scotland Welcomes the World



Email: enquiries@culture.gov.uk

08 July 2015

Dear Mr Whittingdale,

AGREEMENT OF THE BBC LICENCE FEE

I welcomed our agreement last month of the Memorandum of Understanding which sets out how Scotland will be consulted through the process of BBC Charter Renewal. I also welcomed the collaboration of officials from our respective Governments, which helped to reach a good outcome.

In this context, I was disappointed to note your statement to the House of Commons on 6 July and the announcement made by Sir Tony Hall that the BBC had agreed, with the UK Government, the terms of the licence fee for the next Charter period, including that it would take on the funding and policy for free licences for the over-75s. I also note from your statement that the UK Government intends to publish a green paper shortly as well as the Terms of Reference for the Charter Renewal process.

I understand that the announcement was made following an urgent parliamentary question, but from subsequent press coverage, it would appear that your department has been in discussion with the BBC for a number of weeks to agree the licence fee. I also note that the BBC Trust have expressed their concerns about the process in a letter to you yesterday. It is my understanding of the terms we had agreed through the MoU, that the Scottish Government *would be consulted in advance of the agreement of matters in relation to the BBC*. This would include the agreement of the licence fee, as the financial settlement is critical in determining the scope of any policy changes which can be delivered through Charter. I understand from officials that there is the potential to re-consider elements of the licence fee settlement announced yesterday during the forthcoming Charter process. However, this is at odds with the position outlined by the BBC on this issue and I would welcome your confirmation that the licence fee will be considered as part of the process of Charter Renewal.

I would welcome your urgent confirmation that the Scottish Government will be consulted in advance of the agreement of the Terms of Reference for the Charter Renewal process and also on the forthcoming Green Paper which you announced yesterday.

I remain committed to delivering the principles laid out by the Smith Commission and in the subsequent MoU and look forward to your assurance that the Scottish Government will be consulted fully on these matters, ensuring that the people of Scotland are fairly represented in decision making which effects them and the quality of services that they can access.

Kind regards

Fiona Hyslop

FIONA HYSLOP