

OUR BBC

A BLUEPRINT FOR A MORE INDEPENDENT & FUTURE-PROOFED BBC

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

FEBRUARY 2026

The BBC is much more than a news or media organisation. It is critical national infrastructure for our epistemic and democratic security. In an era of information warfare and global democratic backsliding, in which just 1 in 6 public media around the world are classified as independent, this Charter Renewal process must fundamentally strengthen the BBC's independence from political interference while deepening its accountability to the public it serves.

OUR PROPOSALS: FOUR INTERCONNECTED REFORMS

Our report proposes four interconnected reforms, each of which is designed to strengthen the overall organisational independence of the BBC, and create further protections for the BBC's editorial and creative independence, which is at the heart of its legitimacy.

1. STRENGTHENING CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS

- **Remove the 10-year Charter expiry date** - a cliff edge that creates political leverage to force the BBC to trade concessions for its continued existence. Instead implement a perpetual Charter (or a generational term of at least 25 years) entrenching the BBC's mission, purposes, independence and universality as foundational provisions beyond periodic renegotiation.
- **Create a new 'public lock'** on proposed fundamental changes to the Charter: any amendment threatening the BBC's future would require supermajorities in all four UK legislatures and deliberation from a Citizens' Assembly.

- Pass a new **BBC Independence Bill** to reinforce the 'public lock' and establish independent commissions for appointments and determining funding, removing ministerial control.
- Establish in the new Perpetual Charter a **guarantee of 'adequate funding'**, which is determined by the Independent Funding Commission, which the government would be responsible for delivering, and restore the BBC's purpose related to **technology in the public interest**.

Crucially, a **perpetual Charter does not give the BBC 'carte blanche'** - it protects only foundational provisions such as the BBC's existence, independence, core purposes and the principle of universality. It is these provisions alone that are also given further protection through the 'public lock'.

Schedules appended to the Charter will be easy to amend, and operational details (such as the detailed Board guidance in the current Charter) would move to a new **Operational Agreement**, subject to a single **Periodic Operational Review** (every 6-8 years). This new, transparent, independently-led process will replace the current tangle of the Framework Agreement, Ofcom Periodic Review, Charter Review, Mid-Term Review and National Audit Office review. These changes provide more accountability by disentangling the BBC from the persistent existential threat under the current system, and reorients the review towards substantive challenges, and how it should evolve to better serve the British people in response to the changing environment.

2. IMPROVING THE INDEPENDENCE OF GOVERNANCE

End political appointments to the BBC Board, and restructure governance to better match the BBC's public service character. In particular,

- An **Independent Appointments Commission**, working with clearer, transparent criteria replaces ministerial selection or discretion for board appointments, including for the Chair (for which government retains a veto on narrow, specified grounds).
- A **Supervisory Board Model**, separating governance oversight from executive management, replaces the 2016 Unitary Board Model - or at minimum revise the Unitary Model to adopt trustee-like responsibilities, and reduce the number of Executive members to just the D-G.
- A **Conduct Panel** to investigate and address complaints about board member behaviour.

3. GUARANTEEING ADEQUATE, INDEPENDENT FUNDING

Funding is how governments have exerted leverage over the BBC, resulting in a 38-40% real-terms budget cut over 15 years. The current system allows governments to extract concessions through "clandestine talks" over the funding settlement, as when George Osborne forced the BBC to absorb the cost of free licences for the over-75s in 2015. Therefore, the Secretary of State can at the moment, with the agreement of the Treasury, unilaterally decide to withhold some or all of the proceeds of the Licence Fee.

The government should remove this leverage entirely by creating:

- **Independent BBC Funding Commission** (modelled on Germany's KEF) whose expert members are appointed through the Independent Appointments Commission.
- The Commission leads a **transparent, evidence-based process** as part of a Periodic Operational Review to assess what funding is 'adequate' to enable the BBC to deliver its mandate and public purposes.

- The Commission's determination is - as in Germany - **binding on government**, with deviation only permitted on strictly-defined fiscal grounds (e.g. household affordability), stated publicly and subject to judicial review.
- The Government retains **responsibility for the funding mechanism** (i.e. license fee, household levy), but not the level the BBC receives, i.e. 'How', not 'How much'.
- The settlement is multi-year, increases in line with inflation, and provides additional funding for additional responsibilities.
- In Germany, the KEF may move from *ex-ante* (reviewing PSM needs in advance) to *ex-post* evaluation (assessing retrospectively how the BBC fulfilled its mandate/purposes).*

The **BBC's public purposes** are: serving all audiences, providing impartial news, supporting learning, reflecting the UK's nations and regions, and representing the UK to the world. These are the BBC's constitutional obligations, written into its Charter, not audience metrics.

* **"Performance-linked" funding is not** political leverage disguised as performance management, or using individual failings or headlines to attack the whole institution, or a proposal to cut funding based on programme ratings or 'flop shows' or to 'cut the Licence Fee'. Rather this is accountability to an independent body assessing public value, The Commission would assess the BBC's systemic delivery against its mandate and public purposes. Any "targeted deductions" would only apply if the evidence *proved* that the BBC had *systematically* failed to meet its public service obligations. The BBC can appeal or challenge adverse rulings.

4. EMBEDDING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE BBC'S GOVERNANCE

Every current formal accountability mechanism for the BBC - or pathway for its reform - ultimately flows back to the government of the day as a proxy for the public. As such, **there is no alternative centre of gravity that can articulate the public interest independent of the government or BBC leadership**. Many voices in the media, civil society and politics have called for some form of citizens' assembly to be formally incorporated into the BBC. We have presented a detailed plan for why and how this can be achieved, and how it improves the BBC's governance and resilience.

Citizen participation and deliberation as part of the BBC's high-level governance serves a distinct purpose from the BBC's existing methods of audience consultation, user research and public opinion polling. It is a **bulwark against political or elite capture** while deepening public legitimacy. It anchors decision-making in public judgement: empowering good-faith boards to navigate political pressure, and holding politicised boards to account. (To read more about what we mean by citizen deliberation, see [this short explainer](#)).

- **Standing Citizens' Panel** of 100–120 people, selected for staggered 2-year terms, through [civic lottery and stratification](#), with defined, bounded powers in ongoing governance - on high-level issues like strategic priorities and financial plans.
- The Board must **publish responses to the Panel's recommendations** and explain publicly where it chooses not to implement them ("comply or explain")
- The Board, Executive, government or Parliament can also **refer ad hoc questions** to the Panel
- **One-off Citizens' Assemblies** form part of the "public lock" on existential threats to the BBC - rarely deployed, but with substantial democratic weight, with its reports tabled to Parliament and the devolved legislatures.

HOW THESE REFORMS WORK TOGETHER

The current system for governing the BBC is vulnerable and based on the ‘good chaps’ theory that people will generally act in the common interest. The threat environment has changed, and the BBC’s existence can no longer be guaranteed by the assumption of goodwill. Any healthy system of governance, and especially for an organisation as pivotal as the BBC, needs diversity and some redundancy to guard against single points of failure. These reforms will ensure that no single actor - not a minister, the BBC Board, or the executive - can unilaterally weaken the BBC’s independence or misuse its accountability mechanisms. As an institution that ultimately belongs to the public, the BBC’s independence requires ‘defence-in-depth’ governance - multi-layered defences where constitutional, institutional, financial and democratic safeguards reinforce one another.

CURRENT VULNERABILITY	PROPOSED REFORM	EFFECT ON INDEPENDENCE
10-year Charter expiry enables political leverage	Perpetual Charter with “public lock”	Removes existential threat as negotiating tool
Framework Agreement, Ofcom Review, Mid-Term Review, Charter Renewal consultations, funding settlement - multiple review methods	New Operational Agreement, and Periodic Operational Review bringing together these processes into one - but not requiring a new Charter	Disentangles the review process from the existential threat to the BBC, less costly, more strategic
Chair and 4 board members are direct political appointments	Independent Appointments Commission creates independent, arm’s-length process to appoint members to new Supervisory Board	Insulates BBC governance and executive from political interference, and editorial pressure
Closed-door funding negotiations with Treasury and Secretary of State	Independent Funding Commission determines level of funding, Government determines how to raise it	Transparent, evidence-based, politically insulated, and predictable funding settlement
Ample audience research and public consultation, but no structural public voice in governance	Standing Citizens’ Panel makes recommendations to Board, to which Board must respond	Counterweight to political pressure, genuine deliberation from body that represents the public, not consumers

Globally, just one in six public media organisations are classified as independent. 512 of 606 public and state media outlets are captured or controlled. In this context, the UK has a generational opportunity: by securing the BBC’s independence and anchoring it in citizen governance - before we reach irreversible tipping points in the degradation of our information ecosystem - we can protect for future generations hard-won information infrastructure that is not state-controlled or surveilled or market-dominated, but genuinely public.

To read these recommendations in full, please turn to the full report: [***OUR BBC: A Blueprint for a More Independent and Future-Proofed BBC.***](#)

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