



HOUSE OF LORDS

Communications
Committee



The House of Lords is an essential part of the UK Parliament. Its committees investigate public policy, proposed laws and government activity. The remit of the Communications Committee is ‘to consider the media and the creative industries.’

Background and role

Why it was set up

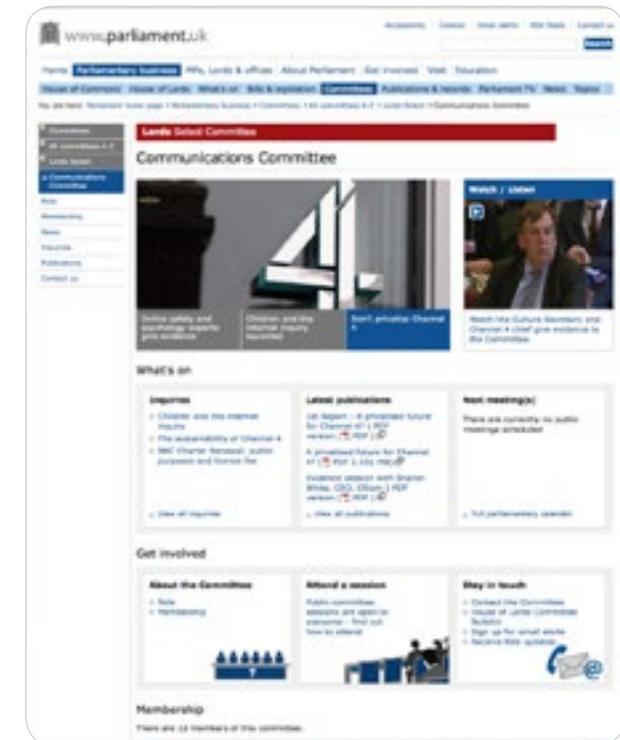
The committee was set up in 2007 to look at a broad range of communications and broadcasting issues and to highlight issues to the House of Lords. Its first chairman and many of its initial members served on a one-off committee set up in 2005 to look at the BBC Charter Review.

What it does

It investigates public policy areas related to the media, communications and creative industries.

How it does its work

The committee decides subjects to investigate and takes evidence from individuals, organisations and government ministers to gather material for its reports. The reports outline suggestions to government and others for change, and how problems could be overcome.



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2007

Communications Committee set up to check on and highlight media and broadcasting issues

See all Communications Committee reports at www.parliament.uk/hlcommittees

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Membership

The committee includes media professionals and people from other backgrounds with relevant experience in industry, politics and communications.



Communications Committee chairman Lord Best questions witnesses

Members

Lord Best (chairman)

Independent crossbench peer

Lord Allen of Kensington

Former chief executive of ITV

Baroness Benjamin

Broadcaster

Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury

Former TV producer

Earl of Caithness

Bishop of Chelmsford

Co-chairman of the BBC standing conference on ethics and beliefs

Lord Gilbert of Panteg

Former deputy chairman of the Conservative Party

Lord Hart of Chilton

Former solicitor and political adviser

Baroness Kidron

Film director

Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall

Executive director of the Royal National Theatre

Baroness Quin

Former MP

Lord Sheikh

Businessman

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury

Public relations specialist

Investigations and reports

Press regulation – where are we now?

The Committee initiated this inquiry to establish exactly where things stand with regard to press regulation in the wake of the Leveson report, the Royal Charter on Self-Regulation of the Press and the closure of the Press Complaints Commission. The committee wanted to set out the current situation clearly and in one place.

Press refusal to sign up

While most national newspapers had signed up to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), a number – including the Guardian, Financial Times and the Independent – had made different arrangements for handling complaints.

Complicated regulation scene

The Press Recognition Panel, which was set up under the Royal Charter to approve and oversee new regulators, had not, at the time of the report's publication, received any applications for recognition. IPSO was not seeking to be officially recognised.

An alternative potential regulator – the Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS) – told the committee that it might seek recognition when it was properly established and had members; however, at the time of the report's publication no publishers were members of IMPRESS.



No clear route for public to make complaints

The committee said that this presented a confusing picture for the public, and in particular for any complainant. The result was a complex process for people to go through to make a complaint against a publication, and no regulator in place that met the criteria set out by Lord Leveson and embodied in the Royal Charter.

Government action

The committee called on the government to evaluate the arrangements that have emerged since the Royal Charter.

BBC charter review

The Communications Committee published its February 2016 report as the government carried out its BBC charter review consultation. It argued that no big changes to the BBC's core mission – to 'inform, educate and entertain' – were needed and made recommendations about the arrangements for the next BBC charter.

Set the licence fee openly

The committee argued that the licence fee agreement should be negotiated openly and the regulator of the BBC should publicly set out the level, with the secretary of state taking a final decision.

Decouple charter review and general election

The report highlighted the coinciding of the charter review and general election cycles, bringing debate on the BBC into the political frame. It proposed that the next charter be set for 11 years (rather than ten) to protect the BBC's impartiality and independence and allow for long-term planning.

BBC's unique position for the nation

The committee underlined the BBC's special position amongst UK public broadcasters in its capacity and duty to reflect diverse communities and bring together the regions and nations of the UK.

Peers said they had heard “no compelling evidence” that it should further restrict its (the BBC's) output – though they backed calls for it to face a tougher regulatory regime. 9

Herald Scotland

Future of Channel 4

The committee's July 2016 report said that Channel 4's output in news, film production and diversity could be damaged by privatisation.

Background

The committee examined the broadcaster's financial sustainability as well as the implications of privatisation, in light of the government's ongoing review of the future of Channel 4 Corporation.

It urged the government not to pursue any plans to sell the channel, saying that the risks of privatisation outweigh the benefits.

Part of the nation's media landscape

The committee said that Channel 4:

- is an important and much valued part of the nation's media landscape
- provides distinctive news and current affairs coverage
- contributes to cinema through Film4
- has a demonstrable commitment to on-screen diversity.



It called on the government not to take forward plans for privatisation arguing that these qualities would be jeopardised and that the risks from selling it off are greater than any benefits that may arise.

Key findings and recommendations

- Channel 4's current business model is sustainable, at least until the end of its current licence period which ends in 2024. The committee heard that 2015 had been a successful year and that any issues of economic sustainability of previous years have now been addressed.
- Channel 4's current programming for older children and young adults is unsatisfactory, and greater commitment to this group should be demonstrated.
- In the event of privatisation, there was a strong likelihood of Channel 4 Corporation being bought by a foreign company.
- Were any form of Channel 4 privatisation to be taken forward, it should be subject to a full public consultation.



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