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Content from Dr Dan Poulter MP

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At the end of January, the Government announced plans to radically reform the BBC and review the TV license fee, so it is appropriate to consider what impact these changes may have upon something that many of us value: our own BBC Radio Suffolk.

Many people would support the Government in freezing the annual licence fee over the next two years. Energy bills are rising, and households face other costs as we experience the ongoing economic fallout of the pandemic in the form of rising inflation. Asking the BBC to do some belt tightening and to look for efficiencies at this time is reasonable and should have little or no impact on the quality of its programming.

I also have little doubt from my own experience that parts of the BBC at a national level are over-staffed and inefficient. Each different national news programme - even when they are on the same television channel or radio station - has a completely different production team. This is both unnecessary and expensive.

At national level, BBC channel bosses would do well to learn lessons from our own BBC Radio Suffolk who run the station just as well but on a lower budget and with much fewer staff.

Whilst it is easy to make the case for the BBC at a national level to be run more efficiently and at lower cost, the argument for reform or even scrapping of the license fee is far more complex. When the license fee was introduced, the BBC had a virtual monopoly in UK broadcasting, but times have changed, and there are now hundreds of different television channels and radio stations.

Many people, particularly young people, no longer watch television and instead receive much of their news from social media and entertainment via streaming services such as Netflix, YouTube, or Amazon Prime. This trend is only set to continue, so, it is understandable that people who do not use the BBC would consider the idea of paying a license fee to be outdated.

The BBC is not perfect. It needs to cut its production costs. It needs reform, and to more accurately represent the interests of those living outside of the metropolitan bubble. But, there does remain an important role for a public service broadcaster in our country to present impartial and balanced news with integrity and accuracy. This is ever more important in this age of social media which can often be filled with inaccuracies and misinformation, with perhaps one of the worst examples being the behaviour of the anti-vaccination movement in spreading lies and pseudo-science online. Surely, if there were a time where impartial and balanced news reporting was needed from a public service broadcaster, this is it.

The best of the BBC can be found in our own BBC Radio Suffolk, which is why I shall continue to support some form of a continuing licence fee, but for the BBC to survive, Broadcasting House needs to learn a lot of lessons from their local stations.