

Spurned Ofcom candidate Gilbert screened to lead BBC funding review

One of the candidates snubbed in the recent race to chair Ofcom, the media regulator, is being considered to oversee a government-commissioned review of the BBC's future funding.

Sky News has learnt that Lord Gilbert of Panteg, the former chair of the House of Lords communications and digital committee, is among a list of names under evaluation by Nadine Dorries, the culture secretary.

Whitehall sources said this weekend that the appointment of an independent figure to lead the review was some weeks away from being concluded, and that other individuals were also being considered.

Lord Gilbert, who was given a peerage by David Cameron in 2015, could not be reached for comment.

One Westminster insider suggested he would be an "uncontroversial" choice to spearhead a review of the BBC's future funding, although the likelihood of a far-reaching overhaul of the licence fee model which has existed for decades mean any recommendations for reform will be hugely contentious.

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Ms Dorries, whose department recently published a broadcasting white paper which included proposals to privatise Channel 4, has said the government is "ready to implement a new way of funding the BBC", and suggested she wants Ofcom to "hold the BBC to account" more robustly.

Few concrete details about ministers' thinking have emerged

other than suggestions of what has been dubbed a Netflix-style subscription model.

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The £159 annual cost of a television licence has been frozen until 2024, rising slightly in each of the following three years.

Last month, the BBC announced a series of cuts aimed at saving £200m, with the most prominent casualties being the BBC4 and CBBC television channels.

About 1,000 jobs will also be cut.

Tim Davie, the BBC director-general, said at the time: "When I took this job I said that we needed to fight for something important: public service content and services, freely available universally, for the good of all.

"This fight is intensifying, the stakes are high."

There have been growing suggestions in recent days that Boris Johnson's narrower-than-expected confidence vote victory this week could derail the Channel 4 sale given the extent of backbench Tory opposition to the policy.

Lord Gilbert was close to being appointed as Ofcom chair earlier this year before ultimately losing out to Lord Grade, the former BBC and ITV chairman.

The BBC funding review is separate to a piece of work commissioned by Ms Dorries last month which will scrutinise the Corporation's record on impartiality and the diversity of its workforce.

The Ofcom search process was labelled a "shambles" that would "put a reality TV series to shame" by Julian Knight, the MP who chairs the Commons culture select committee.

A spokesman for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport declined to comment on the possible appointment of Lord Gilbert to lead the BBC funding review.