

SOCIETY

Pensioner is sent 'threatening' letters over licence fee

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An 89-year-old widower has received 53 "threatening" letters for non-payment of the TV licence despite the BBC operating an unofficial "amnesty" for elderly people it believes are evading the charge.

David (not his real name), who lives in Sheffield, told *The i Paper* he feels "bombarded and harassed" by the mounting letters, which threaten action up to prosecution if he does not pay the £174.50 charge.

Having previously received a free licence until the BBC ended the concession for over-75s in 2020, David said he will not pay and is calling for the benefit to be restored. "I have no intention of giving in," he said.

TV Licensing is continuing to send warning letters to pensioners like David, despite the BBC apparently having no intention on following through on threats to prosecute for non-payment.

Ministry of Justice figures show that the BBC is yet to prosecute anyone over 75 found not to be paying, data obtained by *The i Paper* found.

Dennis Reed, director of Silver Voices, the campaign group for pensioners, said: "No way in a month of Sundays would it ever be in the public interest to prosecute David for non-payment, so why waste licence payers' money in sending him so many letters?"

TV Licensing said it would not stop sending letters to pensioners, despite rising Royal Mail postage fees contributing to a 15 per cent increase in the cost of collecting licence fees in 2023/24, from £145.4m to £165.6m.

Although more than three in five customers now receive their licence by email "there remains an ongoing need for physical mailings", it said. TV Licensing rejects claims it is sending "harassing" letters to the elderly.

"We have a duty to collect the licence fee and enforce the law. As part of this, we send letters to unlicensed addresses to inform the occupants that they may need a TV licence," a spokesperson said.

The BBC has not confirmed an "amnesty" for over-75s who do not pay but sources said it was unofficial policy.

£165.6m

Cost of collecting the TV licence fee in 2023/24, including a 15 per cent increase in postage costs