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From The Secretary of State for Wales

The Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP

24 April 1987

De Willie

NBM

COMMUNITY CHARGE: MARRIED AND UNMARRIED COUPLES

I have seen the latest letters from Nicholas Ridley (11 April) and from Quintin Hailsham (9 April) on this subject.

In view of colleagues' concern I agree with Nicholas that we should drop the idea of liability extending back before marriage or cohabitation. But I think that his suggested alternative would attract considerable criticism because of the assumption we would be seen to be making. In effect, Nicholas resolves the problem by treating all couples as if they were unmarried; and I think that this does not sit well with our more general approach to the family. I have considered as an alternative a rolling joint and several liability which would be restricted to each current and preceding financial year. This would do away with many of the problems associated with establishing when liability should begin, while severely curtailing the degree of retrospection. But if colleagues still find this limited amount of retrospection unacceptable, then I would support Quintin's proposal.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, members of E(LF), the Lord Chancellor and Sir Robert Armstrong.

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Niel

The Rt Honourable Viscount Whitelaw CH MC
Lord President of the Council

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