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Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

The Rt Hon Christopher Patten MP  
Secretary of State for the Environment  
Department of the Environment  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 3EB

30<sup>th</sup> August 1989

*Dear Chris*

**COMMUNITY CHARGE: PUBLICITY**

*at first*

Thank you for your letter of 3 August, asking for my agreement to proposals for further expenditure on community charge publicity, focused on the rebate system.

I have considered this carefully. We are starting from a fairly good base. As the Gallup research shows, awareness of the Community Charge is almost total, and nearly 85 per cent have heard of the rebate system. The DSS and local authorities will automatically transfer existing rate rebate claimants onto Community Charge rebates. And some of the new chargepayers eligible for rebates will be sharing a household with people who already get rate rebates, and will find out about the new system from them. In addition, those receiving income support will also automatically receive a claim for a rebate. So the question is how and when we deploy extra publicity, to get maximum value for money in targeting those who we still need to reach.

With this in mind, I doubt if it is cost-effective to spend as much as £3 million on a television campaign. Nicholas Ridley's 21 July letter says that it is difficult to reach much of the target audience by other means, but he also suggests that key groups can be reached through radio and cinema advertising, at the cost of a further £450,000. Moreover, if newspaper advertising is targetted towards the popular, youth, and ethnic press, I am not sure why it is necessary to propose a further £150,000 worth of advertisements in specialist publications.



It seems to me therefore that there is scope to look again at the approach to this publicity, with a view to improving its cost-effectiveness. Reducing the projected cost of the campaign would, of course, make it easier for you to find the money from within your own programme. I am sure you will agree that the need for such a campaign is neither new or unforeseen, and given the pressures already on the Reserve this year, I am afraid I see no case for providing new money to pay for it.

I think we would also improve cost effectiveness by reconsidering the timing. I appreciate the desirability of getting claimants to apply for rebates in January, so that they can receive the right bills. But it will also be important to keep some of our publicity for the period when people actually receive their charge bills.

Perhaps I could comment more briefly on your other proposals. It is, of course, entirely for you to decide whether to commission research on the case for a departmental telephone hotline. I shall be very happy to consider the results of any such research with you, though I suspect that the vast majority of questions suitable for a telephone answer will in fact be better dealt with by the local authority in question. I doubt whether it can possibly be cost-effective publicity or even practicable to write to every business ratepayer in the country; perhaps you could consider an alternative way of getting our message across to the business community. And on the smaller initiatives mentioned in Nick's letter, I would expect you to fund these from within your own programme. I assume that the new leaflet on rent and rates in particular, relates to the existing system.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, and to Peter Walker, Malcolm Rifkind, Tony Newton, and Sir Robin Butler.

*Yours*  
*Norman*

NORMAN LAMONT

