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The Rt Hon Norman Lamont MP  
Chief Secretary  
HM Treasury  
Parliament Street  
LONDON  
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*NBM*

*Treas*

*report*

*ACG*  
*10/10*

My ref:

Your ref:

20 October 1989

*Dear Chief Secretary*

**COMMUNITY CHARGE: PUBLICITY**

*file with B A14*

Thank you for your letter of 30 August, expressing doubts about the need for, and the cost-effectiveness of, the information campaign outlined in my letter of 3 August and Nicholas Ridley's of 21 July. The proposals had the key aim of increasing awareness and take-up of rebates with the subsidiary aims of ensuring first-time payers are aware that they will have to pay a bill, and of maximising registration.

I have been awaiting decisions on the transitional relief scheme before replying, but I have to say that your scepticism about the need for our proposals and their cost effectiveness somewhat surprises me.

On the question of need, may I make a very basic point first, but one which our familiarity with the community charge may incline us to overlook. Almost every adult in the country will be participating in a radically new system, of which they will have had no experience other than this year's registration process. Furthermore, 18 million of these will be first-time payers with little or no direct participation in the current rating system. And we expect that over 11 million people will be eligible for rebates. I cannot think of a recent reform with such universal and radical application.



recycled paper

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In such a new system it is of course crucial that people are aware of their rights and duties. Of those rights, eligibility for a rebate is undoubtedly the most important. I do not think we should underestimate our responsibility to ensure that accurate information reaches those who need it, or the justifiable criticism that we shall face if we fail to make all reasonable efforts to provide it.

Since you wrote, two developments have taken place. The first is, of course, our announcement of the new transitional relief arrangements. While members of one and two adult households will receive their relief automatically, and we are hoping to proceed in a somewhat similar way in respect of larger households, there will be special arrangements for the disabled and pensioners. The Government has a clear duty to ensure that these people are aware of their important new right and how to obtain it. I would propose to adapt elements of the publicity envisaged in my earlier letter to meet this need and I am not seeking any extra money on top of my earlier request to cover this. Nevertheless, it is clearly essential that I have adequate funds to publicize this important new benefit.

The second development has been further research that we have had carried out into awareness of the community charge and information needs, especially among vulnerable groups. As you say, earlier research by Gallup showed that awareness of the community charge is good among the general population. But Gallup also indicated that key, vulnerable groups, often have lower levels of awareness, especially, for example, council tenants, the unemployed and socio-economic groups D/E. In particular, awareness of rebate entitlement and the rebate system was lower among these groups, yet they are the ones most likely to be entitled to, and to benefit from, rebates. It is vital that people know how the system will work, are encouraged to claim, and know how to make a claim.

Our further research has now confirmed that among classes C2, D and E, knowledge is poor on key details, including rebates, exemptions, and the collective charge. There is also confusion on individual responsibilities for registration and payment. I still await the detailed results, but I have now had the benefit of a presentation from the researchers and enclose a synopsis of their findings.

I have however looked again at our proposals in the light of your views and would be prepared to accept savings of £600k. This leaves the items listed in the attached annex. I would propose to make the savings by removing £100k originally allocated to cinema advertisements, by taking £200k off the contingency reserve for reprints (included in item i of the attached), and by abandoning the possible telephone hotline. As you say, I consider on reflection that this could best be provided by local authorities, as indeed many of them are doing already.



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I am convinced however that I must maintain the other elements in their entirety. I note your reservations about the cost (£3m) of the proposed TV advertising. This is however the most effective way of reaching those we most want to reach. The Scots found it necessary to advertise extensively, including on television, to increase awareness of rebates and Malcolm Rifkind considers the latest results in Scotland justify their efforts. If take-up of rebates is low, we shall be open to quite reasonable criticism if we have not taken the demonstrably most effective route to publicise them. As to the precise cost of this, I consider that £3m is the minimum necessary for the strong and effective campaign over 3-4 weeks that we need, given public attitudes to the community charge. This is broadly comparable with TV advertising on Family Credit which this year alone cost about £2.25m - and that, of course followed an earlier campaign. Anything significantly less than £3m is likely to constitute poor value for money.

Turning to some of your more detailed comments, I am satisfied that the newspaper and magazine advertising would not duplicate TV proposals, as you fear. For one thing, they will not all target the same groups. For another, some overlap between newspaper and TV advertising actually increases the effectiveness of both - the media reinforce one another.

I cannot agree that the cost of £400k for reaching 1.5 million business rate premises is not good value for money at approximately 25 pence per communication. There is still much misunderstanding in the business community of our reforms and this is a discrete group whom we can target precisely. At the end of the year, when I propose to write, we shall be able to inform business people of the publication of the new local rating lists, firm arrangements for the transitional arrangements and new poundage. These are all important facts which business people, many of whom do not have ready access to specialist advice, will need to know if the new rating system is to work effectively. This will be the first time that we shall have targetted business people individually.

As you say, the need for such a campaign is neither new nor unforeseen. When the original provision of £1m for the leaflet drop was agreed between Nicholas Ridley and John Major, it was on the understanding that we should seek further funds for a later campaign if needed. I enclose the note of the meeting concerned. You will also recall the correspondence between the Prime Minister and Nicholas Ridley about community charge publicity last winter.



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I should be most grateful to your early agreement to this. I regret that I see no prospect of being able to meet even this reduced bid from my Department's current budget. Time is now becoming tight if we are to achieve the major campaign which Nicholas Ridley broached nearly three months ago. Indeed, the chance of carrying out some items will be jeopardised if I am not able to start preparations in the very near future.

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

*Yours sincerely,*

*R. Butler*

*cc* CHRIS PATTEN

*(approved by the Secretary of State  
and signed in his absence).*



	£k
(a) newspaper advertisements on rebates	400
(b) TV advertising on rebates	3,000
(c) leaflet backing up (a) and (b) and 'response fulfilment' by a mailing house	100
(d) radio advertisements aimed at key groups	350
(e) specialist advertisements aimed at key groups	150
(f) hire of Post Office display unit and QTV	95
(g) mail drop to all business ratepayers	400
(h) VFM research	70
(i) miscellaneous small items needed now	430
	<hr/>
Total	4.995



Public awareness of community charge

Qualitative study

Copies of charts from a preliminary presentation of findings

Alan Hedges

John Kelly

October 1989

JN 431

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- 1 THE STUDY
- \* Qualitative
  - \* Groups, pairs and individuals
  - \* 125 people  
110 households  
31 sessions
  - \* Sept/Oct 89
  - \* Mainly social class C2DE
  - \* Leeds, Bradford  
Birmingham, Bromsgrove  
North Kensington, Slough
- 

2 Sessions recruited as:

	Individuals	Households
Owner occupiers	8	7
Private renters	10	9
HMO tenants	10	9
HMO landlords	8	8
Afro Carribbeans	8	8
Asians	10	5
Benefit recipients	20	18
Single parents	9	9
18-24s living alone	12	12
18-24s with parents	4	2
Pensioners living alone	10	9
Pensioners living with family	4	2
Sick & Disabled	6	6
Carers	6	6
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>		
Total	125	110

3 PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

- \* What do people know?
  - \* What do they think and feel?
  - \* What do they want to know?
  - \* How can they be reached?
    - existing material
    - future options
  - \* Sub-group differences
- 



4 WHAT PEOPLE KNOW

\* Basic picture (Widely known):-

- 'poll tax' is coming in
  - next year (April?)
  - replaces rates
  - based on individuals
  - over 18 (16?)
  - have to register (penalties)
  - introduced by the government
  - collected by the council
  - (linked to local spending)
  - (happening in Scotland)
  - (paid like rates)
- 

5 WHAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW

Common:

- \* Amount (time they did)
- \* Rebates (often, not always, assumed)
- \* Standard charge, collective charge unknown
- \* Business rates continue
- \* Details of exemptions
- \* Detailed responsibilities (for registering, paying)
- \* Money can be taken from defaulters
- \* Safety net (fragments only)
- \* Registering changes (often assumed)
- \* Appeals (often assumed)

Occasional:

- \* Can pay monthly
- 

6 WHO PAYS?

- \* Everyone/most people
  - \* Most know cut-off at 18 (16?)
  - \* Few exemptions salient (nuns?)
  - \* Some know students reduced
  - \* Not sure about rebates - some assume there will be
  - \* Distinction between rebates/exemptions not clear or helpful
  - \* Some specific queries
- 





7 MISCONCEPTIONS

Common:

- \* Will levy more money
- \* Entirely per capita basis (excludes standard charge)

Occasionally:

- \* Standard amount through country
  - \* No rebates
  - \* Wrong/no age limit
  - \* Register same as electoral register
  - \* Privileged categories (eg MPs)
  - \* Students pay nothing
- 

8 WHAT PEOPLE FEEL

Attitudes to Community Charge:-

- \* Mostly unfavourable (neutral to hostile)
  - \* Hardly anyone positive
  - \* Unfair (but minority have mixed feelings)
    - hits poor (gives to rich)
    - hits big families
    - 'racist' (Afro Carribbeans)
    - but some agree individuals should pay
    - minority think rates unfair
  - \* Why change?
  - \* Complicated
  - \* Hard (impossible?) to collect
  - \* Expensive to collect (wasteful)
  - \* Controversial/'political'
  - \* Conspiracy theory (part of a pattern)
  - \* Moral crusade for some
  - \* Not working in Scotland
  - \* Privacy, 'Police State'?
- 



9 REACTIONS TO ASPECTS OF COMMUNITY CHARGE

- \* Individual responsibility:
    - fairly appealing
    - unfair to large families
    - may break up families
    - complex
  
  - \* Rebates:
    - some relieved to find there will be
    - necessary
    - could still be a lot
    - good to deduct in advance
    - some assume polarised (20% or 100%)
    - will I get one?
  
  - \* Collective charge:
    - surprise
    - shock for landlords
    - unworkable
    - what if can't collect?
    - 'derisory' payment for collecting
  
  - \* Standard charge:
    - surprise
    - misleading name
    - not for the rich
    - some welcome
  
  - \* Registration:
    - simple in principle
    - majority compliance
    - some refusal
    - some not had forms (eg HMOs)
    - some privacy worries:-
      - o police state?
      - o who has access?
      - o junk mail?
  
  - \* Seizing income:
    - surprise
    - often resented
  
  - \* Safety net:
    - not understood
    - some local resentment
    - implications unclear
- 



10 WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW

General:

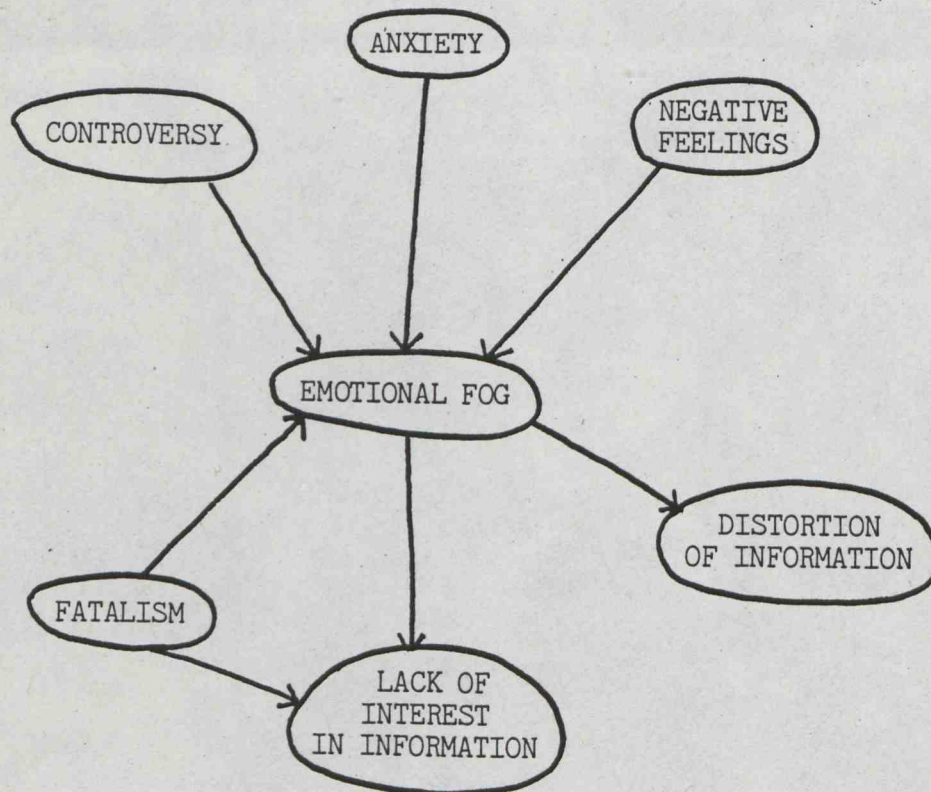
- \* How much will I pay?
- \* Can I get money off?
- \* How/when to pay?
- \* What if I default?
- \* Why change?
- \* What money used for?

Specific: (for example)

- \* Schoolchildren?
- \* Short stays?
- \* How will collective charge work?
- \* Will rented property be commercially rated?
- \* Water rates?

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11 FACTORS AFFECTING INFORMATION TAKE-UP



12 ATTITUDES TO INFORMATION

- \* Not well informed - incompetent authorities?  
- deliberately low profile?
  - \* Hear about politics, not substance
  - \* Worries about bias/propaganda
  - \* Shadow of water privatisation campaign
    - expensive
    - brainwashing
  - \* Low expectations of literature
  - \* Fear of 'officialese'
  - \* Reading difficulties
  - \* Language problem
  - \* Comprehensiveness v manageability
  - \* Case examples could be useful
  - \* Some resent cost of material
- 

13 EXISTING LEAFLET ('How it will work for you')

- \* Fairly poor recall
  - \* Possible 'junk mail' confusion
  - \* May have delivered some information
  - \* A bit short on specifics (eg standard/collective charge)
  - \* 'Better than nothing'
  - \* Not satisfactory as sole source
  - \* Fairly clear
  - \* Like check-list of leaflets
  - \* 'Poll tax' too small
  - \* Some think came too early
- 

14 STEP BY STEP GUIDE

- \* Generally preferred to 'How it will work ...'
  - \* Less like junk mail
  - \* More likely to read/keep
  - \* Bulk occasionally daunts poor readers
  - \* Clear, easy to read
  - \* Well laid out
  - \* Mostly seems factual (not too biased)
  - \* Fairly comprehensive
  - \* Still leaves some questions
  - \* No amounts
  - \* Many would be satisfied with this
  - \* 'Further information' recessive
  - \* A few criticise 'childish' graphics
- 



15 OTHER SOURCES

- \* LA activity fairly invisible
  - \* Media important (but more politics than information)
  - \* Grapevine important
- 

16 WAYS OF REACHING PEOPLE

- \* TV key medium
  - \* Press (national/local) important for some
  - \* Radio patchily useful
  - \* Ads or editorial?
  - \* 'Hotline' welcome for some; but:
    - must be publicised
    - always engaged?
    - useful for query not primary information
    - some dislike phone/lack confidence
    - some have no phone
    - expensive (if not free)
  - \* Literature needed (but not good for all)
  - \* 'Road shows', shopping centre displays etc?
  - \* Help desks?
  - \* Grapevine important
  - \* Case-based examples useful
  - \* Who should inform?
    - government more authoritative?
    - council more approachable?
    - neither trustworthy
    - prefer independent information (eg CAB)
  - \* Needs a big effort
  - \* Needs multi-media approach
- 

17 SOME SUB-GROUP DIFFERENCES

- \* Council tenants:
  - some aware of separate rates element
  - often assumed rates will be knocked off
  - often interested in rebates
- \* HMO tenants:
  - rates rarely separated from rent
  - most assume rates won't be deducted
  - many haven't had form
  - often interested in rebates
  - unaware of collective charge
- \* HMO landlords:
  - unaware of collective charge
  - shocked at idea
  - very hard to collect
  - who responsible for defaulters?
  - 5% payment derisory
  - may affect future plans:
    - o whether to let
    - o who to let to



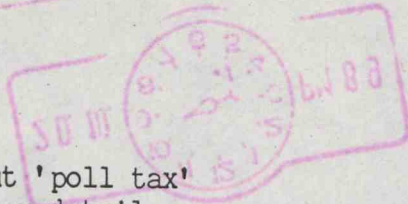
(Sub-group differences contd.)

- \* Private renters:
    - upmarket renters know their rates, assume will be deducted
    - downmarket renters often don't, assume 'poll tax' extra
  - \* Owner-occupiers:
    - usually aware of rates element
  - \* Benefit recipients:
    - interested in rebates
    - some worried
    - part of long-term government squeeze
    - feel they can't take much more
    - some feel victimised, outraged
    - some resigned (they can't take much more away)
  - \* Single parents:
    - often like benefit recipients
    - but small families, may be better off
  - \* Disabled:
    - often anxious
    - benefits hard to get
    - some have poor information networks
  - \* Carers:
    - no better informed than others
    - often bitter about difficulty getting benefits
    - often anxious
  - \* Large families:
    - often fear effects
    - may break up families
  - \* Pensioners:
    - often anxious (dwindling resources)
    - often interested in benefits
    - often limited understanding
  - \* 18-24s:
    - those living with parents seem dependent, uninformed
  - \* Asians:
    - often very worried
    - often large families
    - language problems
  - \* West Indians:
    - often large families
    - some suspect anti-racial motives
- 



18 CONCLUSIONS

1. Most people know about 'poll tax'
2. But are ignorant of key details:
  - rebates/exceptions
  - standard charge
  - collective charge
3. Want specific information (how much?)
4. Unpopular measure (politicised)
  - unfair
  - complex
5. Therefore hard to convey facts
6. Existing literature not had big impact
7. 'Step-by-step' booklet liked
8. Major effort needed to get facts across
9. Multi-media approach needed
10. Help-line useful if well done - but not sufficient



Loran G. ...

Pr 15

