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Nicholas Ridley Esq AMICE MP
Secretary of State for the Environment
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
SW1P 3EB

2 December 1987

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Dear Nicholas,

COMMUNITY CHARGE: WOMEN'S REFUGES

I refer to your letter of 20 November to Peter Walker.

I confirm that I propose to bring forward a similar provision for Scotland in the form of an amendment to the Local Government Finance Bill. My present intention is, however, that this should be presented as a mechanism for dealing with political refugees, rather than primarily in relation to women in refuges. This is because, during the passage of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc (Scotland) Bill last session, we included a rather more indirect provision whereby all women's refuges would be subject to the collective community charge (thus ensuring that the names of individual women resident there do not appear on the public register) and that the collective community charge multiplier in these cases should also be removed from the public register, thus concealing the fact that the premises were subject to the collective community charge and therefore possibly a refuge. Details of this proposal are now being worked up in draft Regulations.

I understand that Michael Howard wishes to announce the proposal for England and Wales before the Local Government Finance Bill is published, in order to ensure that adequate publicity is given to it in advance of publication of the Bill. I have no objection to that. I do not propose to make any separate announcement about my intention to bring forward a similar proposal as an amendment to the Bill. I will deal with any Press inquiries by reiterating the arrangements we have already made for women's refuges and saying that I am considering carefully the question of a general arrangement of the kind you propose for other groups.

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

Yours ever,
Malcolm Rifkind

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