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Prime Minister

THE COMMUNITY CHARGE: PUBLICITY

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Your private secretary wrote to mine on 10 January asking some further questions about my plans for community charge publicity. My private secretary sent an interim reply on 6 February. I have awaited sending a full reply until we had received the results of some social research into the likely effectiveness of further major publicity which I propose for May.

My private secretary had earlier outlined the framework of our strategy in his letter of 30 December. It may be helpful if I supplement that by explaining the rationale behind it, give you further details of both our paid and unpaid publicity programmes, and bring you up to date on developments since then.

I have considered our general strategy with John Gummer at some length. There are two rather separate requirements. First, there is a need for a continuing political campaign to explain the positive benefits of the new system fully and to take every opportunity to rebut the negative rhetoric of our critics. Second, there is the need for the Government to continue providing targetted practical information to the public, at appropriate times and in appropriate media, so that people are clear about their rights and obligations.

I will write to you separately about our activities on the political front.

The Departmental strategy embraces both paid and unpaid publicity. It is intended to ensure understanding of the new charge by carefully targetted paid publicity to raise the profile when this is needed most, supported by a continuous "unpaid" campaign of Ministerial comment and information. In planning our paid publicity, we have been concerned to target initiatives for



the right time, when they will be most effective and can be justified in the context of the Government conventions on paid publicity. We are meeting the current demand for information by the extensive and steady provision of information as outlined in the enclosed note. The community charge is still over a year away. So many bursts of intensive high-profile paid publicity now would be forgotten well before the charge comes into force in April 1990, as well as being difficult to justify in terms both of cost-effectiveness and the conventions which are of course now attracting much more attention than hitherto, in Parliament and outside. However, our proposals for this spring will build up to a major national leaflet drop in May with associated press advertising.

Our plans are well under way and have recently moved up a gear. The enclosed note gives detailed information.

You particularly asked how we are taking on board the Scottish experience. We keep closely in touch with events in Scotland and have learnt from a number of their experiences. John Gummer recently held a most useful meeting with Ian Lang, on a number of topics including publicity. The success of the Scottish household leaflet drop was one of the factors prompting our own. We are also considering what lessons we can draw from the Scottish television campaign advertising the availability of rebates. The experience in Scotland shows that press advertising was sufficient to publicize that leaflet at the time of the registration process, and we shall follow that lead. Both our general booklet and the May leaflet are modelled closely on two Scottish examples, although I feel we have managed to improve both style and design to make ours even more accessible.

The Welsh Office are developing their own publicity. We are keeping in close touch. They will doubtless let you have details of their plans, if you want them.

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I will of course report further as our plans develop. I should mention that so far we have provided £1m for our total publicity effort in this area in 1989/90. It is already clear that we should need rather more than this to do a thorough job - I shall be taking this up separately with John Major.

I am copying this letter to Peter Walker, Malcolm Rifkind, John Major and Sir Robin Butler.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of the letters 'NR' in a stylized, cursive script.

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22 March 1989

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ANNEX

Paid publicity

1. Our programme of paid publicity is increasing in intensity. The general booklet which we launched in December (copy enclosed for ease of reference) is greatly in demand. We have distributed it widely, sending copies to all English MPs, all local authorities, the central organisations of advice and law centres, to Age Concern and other bodies as well as making it generally available. We are using posters in libraries and elsewhere to draw attention to it. Many councils, libraries and other bodies have ordered large stocks. The initial print run of 100,000 copies was exhausted in only 5 weeks, and we have already had another 500,000 reprinted. Furthermore we have now received the preliminary results of research we commissioned late last year into people's awareness of the community charge. This indicates that people are eager for information. I have therefore ordered a further reprint of another 1m copies in anticipation of continuing demand.
2. The booklet will be backed up by detailed supplementary leaflets. The first of these, on exemptions, is now ready to be launched and the others will be ready shortly thereafter. They cover rebates, appeals, second homes, the collective community charge, students and the new business rate. We shall seek extensive distribution of all these, especially to organisations dealing with groups most affected. We plan a particularly extensive distribu-