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The Rt Hon Norman Lamont MP  
Chief Secretary to the Treasury  
Treasury Chambers  
Parliament Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 3AG

*MBR*  
*RAE*  
*11/9*

*11* September 1989

*Dear Norman*

COMMUNITY CHARGE: PUBLICITY

*at red flag*

Thank you for copying to me your letter of 30 August to Chris Patten about his proposals for further publicity for the community charge rebate scheme.

I thought it would be helpful if I passed on our own experience of publicising the rebates scheme. As you may know we spent £308,000 on television advertising and a significant proportion of our press campaign budget of £181,000 was spent on rebates publicity. We are now in a position to say that this was money well spent. While we may have been starting from a lower base of awareness of the scheme than is the case in England and Wales, we regarded the main purpose of our campaign as being less to inform people of the scheme than to encourage people to claim who might otherwise assume that they would not be eligible. Opponents of the community charge, for example, mounted a strong campaign to suggest that rebates would only be available for those on very low incomes. While Tony Newton will have more precise figures, it was clear from the response which local authorities reported to our campaigns that there was a large group of people who responded to the advertisements who would not automatically receive rebates through already being in receipt of relevant benefits, including of course those on the margin for entitlement to rebate. It is this group also who risk failing to obtain the full amount of any rebate entitlement for the year if their claims are not submitted within the time allowed.

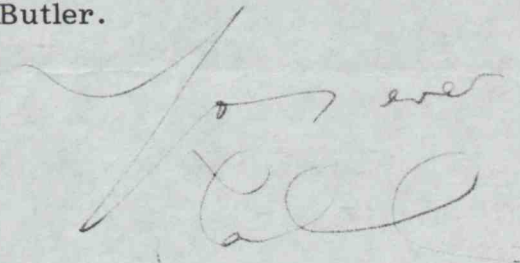
The volume of claims encouraged both by our publicity and that undertaken by local authorities enabled us at all stages in the period up to the introduction of the community charge to dismiss attempts to damage the credibility of the rebate scheme. Had claims fallen significantly short of the levels we had predicted I believe we would have faced considerable difficulty in maintaining that the charge took account of ability to pay. The fact that the scope of the rebate scheme has ceased to be a major issue in Scotland can be attributed entirely to the fact that we have been able to establish that claims were at least at predicted levels. I have no

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doubt that this would not have been possible without the kind of publicity which we undertook. Our experience also showed that the administrative difficulties created by delays in claiming lead inevitably to the issue of unrebated bills where entitlement exists. This became a major problem in Scotland which would have been worse in the absence of national advertising. This tends to confirm that our approach, involving early publicity around November, when details of the scheme are known, followed by a later campaign, around April, to remind late claimants of the need to apply before the time limit for backdating the value of rebates expires, would give the best results.

Without commenting in detail on Chris's proposals therefore, I would urge that considerable publicity is given to the rebates scheme in England and Wales.

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

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Malcolm Rifkind', is written over a faint circular stamp. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

MALCOLM RIFKIND

has for us

Rates by

