

PRIME MINISTER

I attach a letter and enclosures from Iain Mills. He wishes to see you to discuss how the Community Charge affects Solihull. I think it would be helpful if you were to see him for 15 minutes in the House. If you agree, I will, of course alert David Hunt as well.

Happy that I arrange such a meeting?

Yes no

AL

AP MARK LENNOX-BOYD  
2 March 1990

from IAIN MILLS Member of Parliament for MERIDEN



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

19 February 1990

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
No.10 Downing Street

Dear Prime Minister

I enclose copies of letters I have sent to both David Hunt, the Minister for Local Government, and Ken Baker, Chairman of the Party, outlining the extremely strong concern expressed by local Councillors and Conservative Party supporters, on the Community Charge as it affects Solihull.

It is some time since we discussed matters concerning Government policy, and I would appreciate a few minutes of your time to discuss the Community Charge and other matters with you.

Yours sincerely,

*Yours ever*  
*Iain*



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

19 February 1990

Mr David Hunt MBE MP  
Minister for Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
SW1

Dear David

At a meeting on Friday last, together with John Taylor MP, I faced the Conservative group of Solihull Council.

The meeting was most difficult, as they raised with me so many questions about our assessment of Solihull Council's obligations under the Community Charge legislation. I must admit I was slightly overwhelmed.

As you know, I have written to you on many aspects of the Community Charge and, in particular, on my total opposition to the transitional surcharge - the safety net. Despite your letter to me of 11th January, reference P/PSO/41383/89, the matter now seems to be out of control. The problem would appear to be the criteria that has been used to calculate the SSA for Solihull, and you will see that I have tabled a question asking you to show the details of both the criteria and the calculation as it affects my constituents.

The reason I am writing to you is that the Council wish me extremely urgently to meet with you and, as you know, Councillor Bob Meacham wrote to you in the hope that you could meet with us on Friday.

The situation really is quite disastrous, with every Councillor present at the meeting predicting that seats would be lost in the May elections. Each Councillor also voiced - which I found quite extraordinary from true Conservatives - their total disenchantment with the way in which the Community Charge legislation is operating. The situation, quite seriously, is a major problem for us in Solihull, and should the Council lose control, which seems quite likely, with the loss of at least four seats, in the effect on both the Party and my constituents will be considerable.

I do urge you to meet with us as soon as possible - I quote one of the souncillors - At any time and any place.

from IAIN MILLS Member of Parliament for MERIDEN



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

19 February 1990

The Rt Hon Kenneth Baker MP  
Chairman  
The Conservative Party

Dear Ken

I enclose copy of a letter I have sent to David Hunt, which illustrates the extreme difficulty we are experiencing regarding the Community Charge in Solihull.

You will recall when you were Secretary of State for the Environment our pleas on behalf of the Council and the promises that next year would be better.

This year will be a disaster, with the May elections undoubtedly leading to a loss of three or four seats unless we can retrieve the situation.

The Council's view is backed up by my advice bureaux, which have become a nightmare, with person after person bringing their individual problems to me, showing the effect of the Community Charge on their personal finances. In particular, the safety net provisions which will cost each Community Charge payer £52, are quite disastrous, as well as the calculation of the SSAs which leave the Council with inadequate resources.

Can I urge you to speak to your colleagues in the Cabinet to try to ensure that there is a better solution to the introduction of what I think we all agree is a benign and much needed change in local government finance.

Yours sincerely,

from IAIN MILLS Member of Parliament for MERIDEN

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BIF 28 ~~April~~  
March

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

→ Political Office

1 March 1990

B/B

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
The Prime Minister  
No.10 Downing Street

Dear Prime Minister

As you know, I have requested a short time with you to discuss current policies - in particular, the Community Charge. I felt I should relate the letter sent to you by my constituent, Councillor Mrs Miriam Harris of 25 Purnells Way, Knowle, to this discussion.

I enclose a copy of her letter, which outlines the problems we are experiencing in introducing the Community Charge. Since Mrs Harris wrote this letter, the safety net transitional measures have increased from £42 to £52, and I would be grateful for a meeting with you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

*Iain*

Bring back

Copy for Iain Mills M.P.



# Solihull

METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR MRS M.HARRIS

25 Purnells Way Knowle  
Solihull West Midlands B93 9JN

Telephone Knowle (05645) 2459

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The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher,  
Prime Minister,  
10, Downing Street,  
London.

Prime Minister,

REGARDING THE RATE SUPPORT GRANT FOR THE METROPOLITAN BOROUGH  
OF SOLIHULL AND IN RESPONSE TO THE LETTER FROM YOUR OFFICE  
DATED 6th MARCH 1989 ON THIS SUBJECT.

Although your letter to me dated 6th March 1989 states "The introduction of the community charge in 1990 will provide the opportunity for you to show quite clearly the benefits to chargepayers of the prudent approach to budgeting which has been the hall mark of your Council in recent years" it is quite obvious from the paltry inadequate assessment of our level of expenditure for the forthcoming year that you have no intention of allowing us to benefit our ratepayers by the new Community Charge.

Once again you have taken the view that all chargepayers in the Borough can afford to pay, pay and pay again for other areas.

We do have 'inner city' areas within Solihull, great housing problems with some 7,532 council tenants in arrears with their rent. We also have some 25,000 elderly persons within the Borough.

Of the 7,532 tenants in arrears 2,787 of them are receiving Housing Benefit and Income Support and a further 979 receiving Housing Benefit. Thousands of our community are pensioners on the basic pension.

How are any of these people going to be able to pay even 20% of their Community Charge Bill plus the £42 for the safety net to cushion the effects of Community Charge in other areas of the country ???

As you have set this Borough an impossible task to keep the assessment down way below the present inflation rate according to your edict no-one in the Borough will be able to claim relief and your supposition that "no one would have to pay more than £3 per week extra as a result of the changes" is just not true.



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As a founder of Age Concern, Solihull, I know from the numbers of people we have seeking advice on debt problems that these new charges are going to mean the difference between eating, heating rooms or paying bills and will become life threatening. The CAB's have come to the Council pleading for more more money so that they can enlarge their debt counselling service because they have become so overwhelmed with the volume of people requiring their assistance.

Can you imagine how they will react when the bills come through the door for the Community Charge?

Your White Paper on Community Care has been discussed in our Social Services Committee. We applaud the contents and look forward to carrying out the policies outlined. BUT, you have made NO PROVISION in our support grant for this new service. We reckon we will need around £1½ million to start the schemes off.

When the Vice-Chairman of Social Services went to a meeting in London at which your Minister of Health was present early in November on the day the White Paper was released he was told the Government did not have the figures as to the costing of these schemes. Yet, the rate support grant for Solihull had already been set - how could this be?

It is very obvious that mistakes have been made in the past and in the present in the way the Support Grant has been calculated for this Borough, there seems to be someone determined in Whitehall for this Borough to become Labour controlled - we have now come down to a majority of five and as some of the crucial seats are in areas where the new Community Charge is going to negatively affect people most we are very unhappy with this situation.

In The Times today you are quoted as pledging to turn 1990's into a 'caring decade'. I am extremely pleased to read this and I do hope this means you will instruct your Ministers to look once more at this problem.

As a member of the Finance and Executive Committee of Age Concern England I know from the monthly meetings we have in London how frustrated Age



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- 3 -

Concern England are with your Social Services and Health Departments who will not listen to the warnings regarding so many schemes that have been initiated that spell disaster for people once again in 'life threatening' areas.

In your new Community Care programmes you wish the Voluntary Sector - such as Age Concern, England to work closely with Local Authorities on a contract basis. ACE have never shirked any responsibilities towards elderly people and, indeed, after 50 years service they have an every increasing list of developments they wish to provide for such a large proportion of our population.

Would it not be a good idea for the 'caring 1990's' for you to have a frank discussion with them as to future policy?

With my great interest in retired people - I am a Consultant with Bovis Retirement Homes, I try and read as much comment as possible aimed at this group. I note that there is a great groundswell of opinion from people who are beginning to realise their potential voting power against the many policies that your Government are proclaiming which are against the well-being of this section of the Community.

I look forward to hearing how your 'Caring 1990's' are going to be matched with deeds as well as words.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Mrs. Miriam Harris.



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BP MARK LENNOX-BOYD  
2 March 1990

from IAIN MILLS Member of Parliament for MERIDEN



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

24/2  
19 February 1990

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
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No.10 Downing Street

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