



**OFFICE OF THE  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER**

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## **COUNCIL TAX INFORMATION LETTER 1 /2003**

Council Tax Information Letter 6/2002 was the last letter in 2002. This is the first for 2003. The topics covered in this letter are:

- **Local Government Bill: progress**
- **Council tax liability for service personnel serving in the Middle East**
- **Consultation paper issued on uplifting enforcement agents' fees for council tax and non-domestic rate debts**
- **Software suppliers Forum**
- **Council Tax Collection Help Team**

### **Local Government Bill**

The Local Government Bill has now completed its passage through the House of Commons. There were a few minor technical amendments affecting the council tax clauses in the Bill mainly to clause 77 but there was nothing of substance. The Bill was introduced into the House of Lords on 11 March with the council tax clauses now numbered 75 – 87. We expect the Bill to be given its Second Reading in the Lords on Thursday 3 April.

If you have any enquiries about this matter please contact Brian Entwistle on 020 7944 4186 or fax to 020 7944 4179. Email: [council.tax@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

### **Council tax liability for service personnel serving in the Middle East**

We have had a number of queries about whether there is to be any change with regard to council tax liability for service personnel serving in the middle east. The short answer is no. Local authorities should consider whether the dwelling is the “sole or main residence” of the service person in the usual way.

Chris Leslie, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, has just answered a Parliamentary Question from Bob Russell MP for Colchester on this subject. A copy of the question and reply is below.

**Parliamentary Question answered 18 March 2003 (Hansard Col 737W)**

**Bob Russell (Colchester)**

To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, if he will instruct local authorities to exempt members of the Armed Forces from paying council tax while serving in the Gulf.

**Mr Christopher Leslie**

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to change the primary or secondary legislation concerning council tax exemptions, discounts and disregards other than those set out in the Local Government Bill currently before Parliament.

The reference to the Local Government Bill change relates to the proposal to allow billing authorities to introduce their own local discounts.

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**Consultation paper issued on uplifting enforcement agents' fees for council tax and non-domestic rate debts**

On 7 March we issued a consultation paper seeking views on proposals to uplift certain fees that enforcement agents or bailiffs may charge debtors when levying or attempting to levy distress for council tax and non-domestic rate debt.

Copies of the consultation paper can be obtained from 0870 1226 236 or from the Departments website at : <http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk>

The deadline for responses to the consultation paper is 30 May 2003.

If you have any enquiries about this matter please contact Rai Tind on 020 7944 4187 or fax to 020 7944 4179. Email: [council.tax@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:council.tax@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

**Software Suppliers Forum**

In conjunction with the IRRV and the Local Government Association we held a meeting with software suppliers on 10 March to update them on forthcoming changes to council tax legislation. As we were not able to invite all local authorities with in-house software suppliers, we will be letting those authorities have the information which was relayed at the meeting. In view of the feedback we received, the IRRV and ODPM intend to have meetings of this kind from time to time to help software suppliers plan for changes in legislation.

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### **Council Tax Collection Help Team**

The Council Tax Collection Help Team meets to discuss ways of improving the council tax collection rates of the poor performing councils. The Team believes more should be done to share good practice. One of the ways of doing this will be to include a series of articles in the IRRV magazine "Insight". We hope that the first article will appear in May and that this and future articles will be widely circulated within local authorities.

We would like this to be a regular feature. So if you have an example of good practice to share with other authorities and would like to submit an article, please contact Janet Alexander at IRRV, 41 Doughty Street. London WC1N 2LF. Her email address is [janet.alexander@irrv.org.uk](mailto:janet.alexander@irrv.org.uk)

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**STEPHEN BENTON**