

# ENVIRONMENT

## NEWS RELEASE

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### LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE BILL RECEIVES ROYAL ASSENT

The Act which will abolish the community charge became law today.

A council tax, based on the value of properties and on the number of properties, will replace the charge from 1 April next year.

Commenting on Royal Assent for the Local Government Finance Act 1992, Michael Portillo, Local Government Minister, said:

"The community charge is being abolished. It will be replaced with a tax which is straightforward to administer and fair to everyone.

"From 1 April next year households will receive one bill based on the value of their property. The valuation process is well under way with all properties being placed in one of eight valuation bands.

"The Government believes the new tax will be both simple to collect, since it is based on property and fair because it will take account of the number of people who occupy the property. It will provide sole residents with a discount on their local tax bill.

"It will strike the right balance between accountability and ability to pay," said Mr Portillo.

The Minister said the council tax proposals had received a thorough scrutiny during the Act's passage through Parliament.

"The Government's policy has stood up to that scrutiny - no sensible alternative to the council tax has been put forward. We have ensured that councils are well positioned to have the new system in place in good time."

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 also details arrangements for the admissibility of computer evidence in magistrates courts in England and Wales. Regulations laid today will mean that from tomorrow, Saturday 7 March, this evidence will now be admissible in those courts.

The Minister said the regulations will give councils the power to deal effectively with community charge debtors.

"Councils will, from tomorrow, have the necessary measures to deal effectively with all those people who have chosen not to pay the charge, an action which has driven up charges for everyone else.

"It underlines the Government's message to those who don't pay or won't pay - there will be no amnesty and no hiding place," he said.

#### NOTES TO EDITORS

The Local Government Finance Act 1992 abolishes the community charge from 1 April 1993 and replaces it with the council tax. Under the council tax:

- there will be a single bill based on the market value of property.

- single-adult households will qualify for discounts of 25 per cent of the bill.
- students, student nurses, apprentices, YT trainees, people with a severe mental impairment and many carers will also be eligible for discounts.
- there will be a special scheme of relief for disabled people who need extra space in their homes, who might otherwise face higher bills.

The Act also allows for regulations on the admissibility of computer evidence. The Community Charges and Non-Domestic Rating (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1992 provide for the use of computer generated documents in enforcement proceedings for the community charge and non-domestic rates. Any statement generated by a computer will have to be accompanied by a certificate which:

- identifies the computer which generated the document.
- states that the computer was operating properly at all times, or if it was not, that its non-operation did not affect the production of the document or the accuracy of its contents.
- is signed by a person occupying a responsible position in relation to the operation of the computer.

The provisions of the Regulations cover proceedings for the issue of liability orders or warrants of commitment, and of complaints about the levying of distress. Separate regulations applying to council tax proceedings will be made on the same lines.

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