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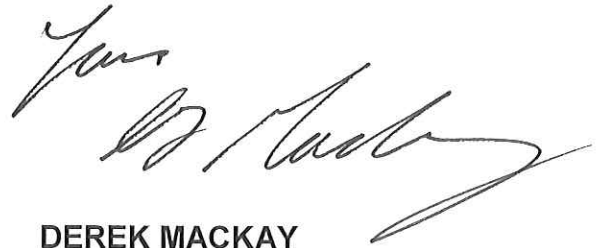
COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME REGULATIONS

Thank you for your letter of January 23rd in which you ask that I consider a more imminent timetable for consolidating the Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme regulations.

In my letter of December 18th, I highlighted that whilst the CTR scheme is not a benefit, it has many linkages to the benefit system which itself is undergoing a number of significant changes. This suggests that if I were to progress a consolidation of the CTR scheme regulations over the coming months, the chances are that would then need significant amendment almost immediately – for example, as new devolved benefits are established in legislation. It therefore does seem that our efforts for the first part of this year would be most appropriately invested in progressing the work I described to consider wider potential changes to the CTR scheme that reflect this changing benefits policy landscape. In coming to this view, my over-riding policy objective is to ensure that vulnerable households will continue to receive the appropriate levels of relief as other policies develop.

Separately, I am afraid that I do not concur with the Committee's view that consolidation of these Regulations is essential. My officials continue to maintain links to welfare rights groups, the practitioner community, the Council Tax Reduction Review Panel and the companies who provide the software to operate the scheme within Local Authorities, whilst I myself maintain frequent contact with COSLA. None of these key stakeholders have raised, in the course of these many exchanges, the need for the Regulations defining the CTR scheme to be consolidated.

For these reasons, I am not able to offer a more immediate timetable for consolidating the CTR scheme regulations. However, I am happy to commit to updating the committee on potential ways forward for the CTR scheme in the light of changes to both the reserved and devolved benefits systems in the late summer of this year.



DEREK MACKAY