



Councillor John Dixon
Executive Member, Health, Social Care and
Wellbeing
County Hall
Cardiff, CF10 4UW

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Councillor John Dixon".

Church of Scientology

25 JAN 2011

Thank you for your 10 November letter to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, about charitable business rate relief for the Church of Scientology. Your letter has been passed to me as this issue falls within my area of Ministerial responsibilities. I agree that this is an important issue.

Legally, a decision to grant or refuse charitable rate relief is one for a local authority to take. In coming to its decision, councils should consider all the relevant facts and correctly apply the law. A local authority should rightly consider any relevant decisions of the Charity Commissioners, as well as a full consideration of statute and case law that might have a bearing on the matter under consideration.

Tolerance and freedom of expression are important British values, but Ministers are of the view that this does not mean that the Church of Scientology deserves favoured tax treatment over and above other ratepayers. The Church of Scientology is not a registered charity, the Charity Commission ruled that it does not provide a public benefit.

Councils should take these issues into consideration when weighing up whether to use their powers to issue charitable rate relief. Ministers do not believe that the majority of the public would want their own council to be giving special tax breaks to such a controversial organisation. The Church of Scientology does not of course receive the exemption for places of worship. Of course, ultimately, any interpretation of the legislation or case law is a matter for the courts.

In relation to the complaint submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman for Wales, you may wish to know that the new Government is abolishing the parallel Standards Board regime in England since we believe it has encouraged malicious and unfounded complaints.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Neill".
BOB NEILL MP

Bob Neill MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

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