

**Non-Household Water charges:
A Consultation on Changes to the Current Charging Arrangements**

Response from the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities welcomed the Minister's statement in August 2004 that the "*Current exemptions for small voluntary organisations and churches have been extended until any new charging arrangements for non-domestic customers come into force in 2010*".

67% of people in Scotland identified themselves in the 2001 census as belonging to a religion, so places of worship clearly play an important part in Scottish society – and often support the most vulnerable in that society. Many congregations already struggle to find enough money for running costs and necessary maintenance – not to mention security, which is increasingly vital, particularly for synagogues and mosques.

In addition, there are many small voluntary sector organisations that work on a shoestring budget to provide important services for their local community thereby reducing the need for statutory service provision.

We therefore regret that there is no reference to the exemption in the current consultation paper and urge that places of worship and small voluntary sector organisations should continue to be treated as a special case. The loss of the exemption may prove the final straw for some of these, forcing them to close their doors with a consequent increase in the demand on other service providers.

Water metering

We note the Executive's intention that metering should, as far as is practicable, be introduced for all non-household premises. However, water meters currently attract high standing charges even where the water usage is minimal, and we believe that this will result in places of worship and small voluntary organisations paying disproportionately high fees for minimal water consumption. Systems that operate a high standing charge tend to penalise low users, so, far from '*those making greater demands on the use of the water services paying more*' (para 16) we suggest that the proposed system will result in those making the lowest demands on the use of the water services subsidising high-volume users. We therefore recommend the introduction of a reduced standing charge for low-volume users.

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.

In preparing this response, the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities has consulted with members of synagogue management committees of all denominations throughout Scotland, as well as with representative communal bodies.