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South Staffordshire Council.
Revenues and benefits Services,
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R W Joyce.
Plot 5. Silver Poplars,
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Kingswood,
South Staffordshire.

WV7 3AP

Date 19th October 2015

Open letter to South Staffordshire District Council.

And other Local Councils using similar tactics.....

Council Tax Department.

To whom it may concern.

Re: OVERDUE COUNCIL TAX reminder letter dated 6th October 2015

Thank you very much for your extremely disturbing letter dated 6th October 2015 claiming that I owe you £100 00 in council Tax for my Mobile/park home Reference Number **0028820** the first four paragraphs of which consist entirely of threats of dire consequences for me, and no doubt others like me, for failing to meet your demands for payment forthwith.

Before your very efficient officers leap into action and embark upon the threatened action against me, as outlined in your letter, may I respectfully draw your attention to the fact that I received your letter three days after the October instalment was paid into your account by online payment, as per usual therefore do not owe you any money whatsoever, as the official receipts issued by your office will confirm. They will also confirm that I am not in arrears with my monthly payments.

Furthermore your records will also confirm that the monthly payments for this address are Band A., therefore amount to £95.00 per month. Certainly not the £100.00 you claim I owe in your letter.

The second paragraph in your letter states that ***“If you (me) don’t pay the overdue amount within the next seven days, we (the council) will remove your right to pay by instalments and the full balance will be need to be paid”***. In response I have to reiterate that I was not aware that I had missed any instalments, as confirmed by the official receipts issued by your office.

I also note that you have kindly given me seven days to pay this claimed £100.00. I can only assume that the seven days commences from the date of your letter 6th October 2015 which I should point out would have been almost impossible as your warning letter was not received by me until Saturday 10th October. I

was under the impression that if seven days was a stated deadline it actually meant seven days, not three with one of these being a Sunday.??

Your letter continues..... ***“If you miss a further instalment your right to pay by instalments will be withdrawn, the full years balance will be immediately due, and a final notice will be issued”.***

This has to be the most brutal and illogically conceived solution to a problem ever devised by the powers that be!! Logic tells me that if I, or any other person in similar circumstances, am unable to find sufficient funds to pay one monthly instalment, how on earth can I be expected to find a full year's worth of payments all in one go on the issue of a final notice. The old saying, “using a Sledgehammer to crack a nut” is very appropriate and describes the current official policy perfectly I feel.

It then gets worse! The letter compounds the above threats by stating ***“If you fail to pay we could start legal proceedings against you. You could end up in Court and could face having to pay our (the Councils) legal costs.”*** Most people, including myself, are terrified of being in debt and issuing threatening letters such as this, can cause great stress especially the elderly vulnerable pensioner.

I can only assume that the reason for your sending such a letter is because I had not paid this month's payment by the date specified. This being the 1st of the month. May I respectfully bring to your attention that I, and no doubt thousands like me, am a pensioner of 76years of age Disabled, with a sole income totalling £150 per month Pension Credit, out of which, £95 per month has to be paid to you in Council Tax with no discounts available.

As this £95 monthly payment is a substantial sum taken from my monthly total income it must be obvious to the powers that be who come up with these rigid payment deadlines, that persons in a similar situations ,may struggle at times, or most of the time, to meet these dates. Like everyone else, other bills also have to be paid, such as water, electricity, gas, heating, food etc etc. Many of these other bills become due at the same time, so become impossible to meet all at the same time.

It is for this reason that it is not possible for me to pay by Direct Debit as obviously I have to pay the Council tax as and when funds allow, and I have no intention of going into debt, by incurring an overdraft for the sake of a few days.

I note from your letter that anyone choosing, or is able to pay by Direct Debit are offered three payment dates. 1st, 15th or 25th of the month. This is obviously to exert pressure on council tax payers to pay by this method. This obviously means that I, and others like me, are being penalised for not doing so. Could you please explain why you send out threatening letters to those who may be, through no fault of their own other than struggling to manage on an extremely limited income, less than seven days late in payment when those paying by Direct Debit are granted three dates?? Easy target perhaps? Or discrimination against those with low and/or fixed incomes.

As you are aware, this home is a Mobile/Park Home and, through absolutely no fault of the occupiers, officially classed as a “Caravan”, stationed on a “Caravan Site” and coming under exactly, again through no fault of the occupiers, the same legislation as Gypsy and Traveller sites, as evidenced by your reference to Plot 5, not home number 5, Silver Poplars, so I would also be very interested to know if you send out such threatening letters to occupiers of the Bricks and mortar in your area, if they are a couple of days late in payment. Or is it that as these are so-called Mobile homes (caravans) we, the occupiers, are perceived as being liable to hitch up our homes behind the car and do a ‘moonlight flit’ to avoid payment???

I would also take the opportunity to point out that we so called park/mobile home occupiers are required to pay a disproportionate sum for Council tax for a reduced service. Also we note that usually should we require assistance from the council officers regarding failure of the site owner to comply with the legal site licence conditions etc., with little or no response. For example, I am still waiting coming up to four years later, despite providing masses of photographic evidence as requested, for action against the site owner for his blatant and deliberate disregard for both mine and my families safety, when he and his sons proceeded to

burn a complete double unit home less than 10 feet away from my home, having previously prepared to destroy my home by deliberately stacking six large LPG propane gas Cylinders against the wall of my home, prior to this fire. (see below) The full story of this incident is comprehensively documented in special editions of PHRAA NEWS and also in newspaper reports (Daily Mirror, Shropshire Star etc.) (*See PHRAA NEWS special editions on www.parkhomesphraanews.co.uk*)Unfortunately it is not possible for us to send out threatening letters to you giving time limits for action? Be a total waste of time anyway!

Finally I must respectfully point out to you, and other councils resorting to issuing similar letters, that you should take the time to consult the MALICIOUS COMMUNICATIONS ACT 1988 “**(1) Offence of sending letters etc., with intent to cause distress or anxiety** “ which expressly forbids the issuing of threatening letters such as this. I will be glad to forward you a copy if requested.

PHRAA reserves the right to publish the contents of this letter in PHRAA NEWS website.

Yours faithfully,

Ron Joyce occupier of Plot 5 Silver poplars.

General Secretary, Park Home Residents action Alliance (PHRAA)

Editor PHRAA NEWS www.parkhomesphraanews.co.uk www.thephraa.website

Copies to..... DCLG. All interested parties

