

Your Moray

REPORT TO: COMMUNITY PLANNING BOARD - 7 MAY 2009

SUBJECT: 0845 TELEPHONE NUMBERS

BY: CORPORATE POLICY UNIT MANGER

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 The Moray Council convenor has a letter he has received which he wishes to be considered by the Community Planning Board with regards the use of 0845 telephone numbers for Customers to access partners services. This report will provide an overview of the operation and options available by using these telephone numbers

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **The Community Planning Board is asked to note this report and the use of 0845 telephone numbers.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 There has been an ongoing debate around the use of non-geographic telephone numbers such as 0845 for contacting the Partners' organisations and the cost incurred by customers in doing so. To enable clarity of this report the following definitions will apply:-

- I) Customer is someone contacting a service by telephone
- II) Service is that being contacted by the Customer
- III) Primary Communications Provider is providing the means to establish the connection between the two.
- IV) Secondary communications provider resells the above service usually with an additional fee and pays a wholesale rate to the Primary provider above.
- V) Caller someone making a call, can also be the Customer

- 3.2 Prior to the availability of 0845 numbers customer calls to services generally took one of two options. They either used 0800 numbers or a standard telephone number. 0800 calls have always been free to the caller from anywhere in the country and are generally paid for by the service being called either by a flat fee

or a per call charge. Obviously calls to standard telephone numbers are charged at variable rates depending on time of day, distance and so on.

- 3.3 In general only large organisations would have deploy 0800 numbers and small groups i.e. Doctors surgery's, Dentists etc would have a standard telephone number as 0800 numbers were expensive. Some large organisations simply publish a list of different contact telephone numbers for different services they provide, much as The Moray Council does.
- 3.4 The development of telecommunications systems that allowed more flexibility of service access & provision caused the advent of 08XX and 09XX numbers. 09XX are premium rate numbers with high charges to callers usually for specific services or gambling and are not of concern in this report. 0845, 0870, 0871 etc offer different but defined rates for caller charges.
- 3.5 Along with the development of the 08XX number came the ability for the service to purchase the 08XX number from secondary telecommunications providers. BT, as the primary communications provider, establishes the call routing and set up and sells this service to a secondary provider of the 08XX number at a wholesale rate. The charge for the call is established by the secondary provider and passed on to the caller by BT, with BT paying the difference between the wholesale rate and the caller charge to the secondary provider.
- 3.6 There are a number of ways a secondary provider establishes the cost of the call. With some the caller pays one part of the charge and the service provider an additional element. With others there is no incoming call fee to the service provider and the caller pays a premium. These additional charges are to provide extra services.
 - i) 0845 numbers charge all callers at the local telephone rate, the same as a local call to a standard telephone number. Additional charges are levied in the form of a call set up charge to pay for the additional features.
 - ii) 0870, 0871 etc nominally have a trunk rate call charge, although this will vary from supplier to supplier who will set their own trunk rates plus call set up fees.
 - iii) Calls from mobiles to 08XX numbers can be considerably more expensive and more and more people are using mobiles as their sole telephone service.
- 3.7 The advantage of a 08XX number to the service being called is that the call can be directed to any telephone number required. This makes it easy to change the termination of a call at different times while customers only have to remember a single number. Some 08XX suppliers offer additional services such as automatic answering systems to again make it easy to place calls to the appropriate telephone so only one number is published but different departments can be accessed from it. These additional facilities are covered by the additional charges.
- 3.8 Currently some of the services using 08XX numbers are:-

- i) The Moray Council uses 0845 for access to some services out of hours,
- ii) Some schools use 0870 telephone numbers as their emergency listings,
- iii) Some doctors surgeries use 0845,
- iv) The NHS uses 0845 for their local services plus NHS Direct,
- v) Grampian Police use 0845 to access non-emergency services.

3.9 There are some things to be aware of when deploying 08XX numbers.

- i) Most telephone service suppliers have products and call packages where a flat fee is paid up front and calls during the charge period are not billed individually. These normally exclude 08XX services.
- ii) Although the 0845 calls are at a local rate the call-set up fee will be an additional cost to the caller. Set-up fees are not regulated and vary between telecommunication providers.
- iii) Some secondary communication providers make a payment to the service provider on a profit sharing arrangement. This is obviously open to abuse by asking customers to call back or making them hold for long periods.
- iv) There is a perception that the customers calling a service provider are in fact paying more so that service can operate more efficiently rather than it be self financing.
- v) There is a high cost of calls to 08XX numbers from mobile phones. Mobile telephone operators all have their own charging structures which are not regulated.

3.10 From January BT has included 0845 and 0870 numbers in its call packages so callers from BT lines with prepayment packages will no longer be charged for calls to them. This does not apply at present for customers who take their telephone service from other telecommunication providers.

3.11 Due to the number of issues that have been raised in regards charging for 08XX numbers and their use in the public sector specifically, a new range of numbers has been developed, 03XX. From this 0300 has been specifically reserved for charities and public sector bodies. This will be available from the end of February 2009. Calls to these numbers are charged at local rate, have no call set up fee and are disallowed from any profit schemes so should represent the ideal solution to this issue going forward. Automatic answering and call diverting are still available with the 0300 service.

4. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Community Plan / Theme Plans / Partner Plans

The use of non-geographic telephone numbers like 0845 has a direct relationship to Outcome 15 of the Single Outcome Agreement.

(b) Policy and Legal

The Moray Council is conducting a project, Designing Better Services – DBS, which will be focussing on improvements in the customer access to council services which may include the use of non-geographic telephone numbers for access to its services.

(c) Resources (Financial, Staffing and Risks)

The use of this sort of call arrangement can have significant potential for improved efficiency of customer service access.

(d) Consultations

All the community planning partners have been circulated with this report for comment and these have been included within the body of the text.


5. CONCLUSION

5.1 08XX telephone numbers offer additional features that allow services to organise their activities more efficiently and effectively but at additional call cost to the customer. It does mean that customers only need to remember a single telephone number to contact a service but whether they see this as good value for the extra cost is open to conjecture, especially if they use mobiles for their telecommunication. The service can be open to abuse and as such should have rigorous controls in place to prevent customers being over charged. The use of 0300 numbers would provide a solution that gives all the benefits, including the potential for possible abuse, but does not increase the cost to customers calling the service.

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Background Papers: Scottish Governments Budget Spending Review 2007

Ref:

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