



Telephone call charges

In 2019 the overwhelming majority of calls to “ordinary numbers” (those beginning 01, 02, 03 and standard 07 mobile numbers) are made without incurring any call charge.

Most of us, on landlines and both contract and PAYG mobiles, purchase these calls in a bundle, limited by time / day or number of minutes. It is highly advisable to choose the bundle carefully, as most do, because significant “penalty charges” are imposed for making non-inclusive calls.

For example, on mobile phones, it is not uncommon to pay more than 50p per minute for “non-inclusive” calls to ordinary numbers. Bundles work out at a rate of no more than 5p per minute (and these bundles include text messages and data also). On landlines those who make anything more than perhaps 1 hour of calls a month save by purchasing an unlimited bundle.

Freephone numbers (beginning 0800 and 0808) are now free to call from all types of phone. The same applies to all numbers beginning 116, e.g. the Samaritans on 116123.

After a tricky history, a decision was made in 2016 to switch all DWP enquiry lines to 0800 numbers. The BBC has recently done the same with its local radio phone-in numbers.

Charging for calls to 101

Whereas calls to 111, the NHS non-emergency number, and 105, to report power cuts, are funded by the respective government department, the Home Office decided not to fund calls to 101, the Police non-emergency number.

A decision was made to make the charge the same for everyone, regardless of their type of telephone contract and the length of the call. The 15p (including VAT) rate was set to ensure that the cost of connecting 101 calls was covered, not to provide any revenue to the Police services or the Home Office.

Given that there was to be a charge, there is a notable equity in this approach. Applying the same rate as a call to an ordinary number would have meant that whilst many people would pay nothing, some would be paying at rates greater than 50p per minute.

The problem with the charge for 101

The **fair telecoms campaign** always argued that whilst there is great merit in having a memorable national number, it is important to maintain a list of alternative “ordinary” numbers for each Police Service. This was done initially, but has now been abandoned.

Those with contract phones receive a 15p charge for the call on their monthly bill, the situation is however markedly different for PAYG users.

Most PAYG users, who make calls, will purchase a bundle to cover the “ordinary” calls that they make. To make non-inclusive calls, e.g. to premium rate numbers, they have to buy a unit of credit, from which the cost of each call is taken. These “top-ups” are typically in units of £5 or £10.

Because 101 is not charged as an “ordinary” call, the 15p cost must be covered by a top-up. This means that, given that no premium rate calls are made that month, **a single 101 call may cost £10.**