



The 118 scam story kicks off

We note recent media coverage of the issue of 118 Directory Enquiry Services. This has included published comments from **Ofcom**, **Which?** and **Citizens Advice**, as well as those from the **fair telecoms campaign** - see <http://fairtelecoms.org.uk/news> and <http://fairtelecoms.org.uk/radio>.

The key issue has been recognition of a market failure, in that people are led to use a far too advanced and expensive service to fulfil a simple requirement.

Please see our (now released) briefing - [Telephone Directory Enquiry Services \(118xxx\) - Comments and Recommendations](#). (N.B. Prices shown were correct on the date of publication.)

On 4 April 2017, this briefing was distributed to the relevant executive and PR officers of the following organisations:

- Ofcom, Phone-paid Services Authority
- Which?, Citizens Advice, Communications Consumer Panel, National Consumer Federation

We have been working directly with a number of media organisations to bring out the detail of the issues covered by the briefing. We have however been keen to allow those who we called to action some time in which to respond.

We are delighted that **Ofcom**, in conjunction with the **Phone-paid Services Authority**, is seriously engaged in reviewing all of the issues covered, and we hope to make a most positive contribution to those efforts.

After the major focus on the most obvious points which was achieved yesterday, we look forward to more detail being revealed as time moves on.

We see an immediate issue as being the need for some serious research to verify the quality of the variety of services in this market – with reference to the price. This is essential so that consumers who need or wish to use these services have the information they require, so as select the appropriate service for their needs. We have identified a number of specific organisations equipped to undertake or commission this research.

Given that a search of the internet is immediately recognised as a far more effective alternative to use of a telephone Directory Enquiry service, one must assume that those who call 118 numbers have some good reason for doing so. Being unable to perform a search on the internet is probably the most likely. We therefore find the following widely-published comment from a representative of **Which?** to be a 'less than helpful' reaction to our suggestion of the action that is necessary – ***“Our advice to consumers looking to avoid being hit with these exorbitant charges is to check online for a cheaper, more direct way to obtain a contact number”.***

This fails to recognise the need for consumer representative groups to offer specific guidance on the offerings in the 118 market. It also fails to acknowledge the traps laid in the online world, to trick consumers into calling premium rate numbers for organisations that do not use them.

We look forward to detailed coverage of the issues identified in our briefing in due course. We also hope to be able to report, and comment on, the necessary action that is taken.

