

**Parliamentary debate opens the door for the Department for Work and Pensions to move from 0845 to 03 numbers**

In an adjournment debate in the House of Commons yesterday, **John Healey MP** [made a strong case](#) for the DWP to switch from 0845 to using 03 numbers. [Responding for the government](#), **DWP Minister of State Mark Hoban MP** was unable to offer any meaningful objection.

Costs and Benefits

The excessive expense incurred by callers to 0845 numbers was well illustrated by examples from Mr Healey's constituency. It was explained that this occurs because of the additional 'termination rate' (or "**Service Charge**" as it will shortly be known) which is applied to the cost of the call and paid to the telecoms company used by the organisation receiving the call.

Mr Hoban confirmed that this money is indeed earned by the company hosting the 0845 numbers. He failed to confirm that, as one must hope, this is taken into account when determining the cost to DWP of the service.

The 03 solution

Mr Hoban offered many reasons why DWP needs the benefit of non-geographic numbers. Mr Healey confirmed this, and cited **Ofcom's** strong commendation of the use of 03 numbers by public bodies ... "*especially when dealing with people on low incomes or other vulnerable groups*". The support of 03 from the **fair telecoms campaign** was also mentioned.

The need to recognise the complexity of current telephone tariffs was rightly referred to by Mr Hoban. He mentioned that the small minority of landline calls to geographic and 03 numbers made outside the terms of Call Plans can, in some cases, incur un-regulated penalty charges that are greater than the regulated charge made by BT for non-inclusive calls to 0845 numbers.

This situation is recognised as perverse; the partial legacy regulations which cause it will shortly be lifted. **This applies to very few callers**, as landline call providers confirm that the overwhelming majority of daytime calls to 01/02/03 numbers are indeed made within the terms of the caller's Call Plan. The unusual cases cannot be ignored, but they must be properly understood as being those where callers are being excessively penalised, probably for selecting the wrong Call Plan.

When compared with the scale of savings made by callers in general on a move from 0845 to 03, these perverse exceptions must be seen as representing only a **modest difficulty**. When **HMRC** switched the Tax Credits helpline from 0845 to 03 around 12 months ago, this was said to result in "*significant cost savings for the majority of callers to the line*".

No meaningful objection

Whilst noting the need for care with the exceptional cases, the Minister offered no meaningful objection to DWP switching to 03. It is unlikely that DWP will wish to comply with **Ofcom's** planned Service Charge declaration requirement for 0845 users, in the following form:

Calls to our 0845 numbers to enquire about your pension or benefits, or for help with your job search, will cost you 2 pence per minute PLUS your phone company's access charge





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Notes and links

- Please see our news release and detailed briefing materials published in advance of the debate - "[Debate briefing pack](#)".
- View the debate on **Parliament TV** - [at this link](#)
- The Ofcom proposals regarding declaration of "Service Charges" are most recently summarised [here](#). The text given there, below the image of a singer, provided the model for the example given overleaf - suggestions for the image that DWP may use should be presented to the Department.
- Our comments on the **BIS** proposals for implementation of the Consumer Rights Directive, referred to in the debate, are found [here](#). Our response to the consultation is found [here](#).