



**Ministers in phone fees blitz**  
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**SUN POLITICS**

# Ministers in phone fees blitz

## Curb on 'wicked' lines



Labour MP Margaret Hodge

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**MINISTERS** yesterday launched a crackdown on "wicked" premium rate government phone lines.

Departments have been told they can only use them in exceptional circumstances — and will need Cabinet Office permission.

The move follows a National Audit Office report earlier this year which revealed that Brits spend a staggering £56million a year on the lines.

It urged Whitehall departments to swap numbers costing up to 45p a minute for cheaper alternatives.

Cabinet Office guidance published yesterday said departments should use 01, 02 or 03 prefixes wherever possible. If not, they should use cheaper 0845 numbers instead of 0345. A spokeswoman said it would help "vulnerable and low income groups".

Fair Telecoms Campaign's David Hickson said: "It was an outrageous situation that the Government was using these premium lines, it was wicked.

"But we've won — everyone understands that it's wrong now and they're doing something to change it."

Labour MP Margaret Hodge — chairwoman of the public accounts committee — said: "This is good news for citizens and it's good that the Government's listened to reason and relented."

