




### Response to statement from NHS (Surrey and) Sussex

The following comments are in response to the statement attributed to **NHS Sussex**, as broadcast by **BBC Sussex and Surrey** and  as published by the **West Sussex County Times**.



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“ **No practice in Sussex uses a premium rate number. However, 084 numbers can cost more to call than other landlines.**

For semanticists - the **rate** for calling any 084 **number** includes a **premium** - this is known as the “Service Charge”, which is passed on to the benefit of the person being called. Number ranges with higher Service Charge rates are classified as being used for “**Premium Rate Services**”.

“ **In the last few years, across the country, many practices bought 084 numbers as they can help with directing callers to the right person.**

The special features referred to are a characteristic of **any** “non-geographic” number - including 080x, 09xx and 03xx, as well as 084x. Each range has different funding arrangements.

“ **Practices are now required to check whether a person calling their practice pays more than the cost of a call to an 01 number - a geographical telephone number.**

This check must be made “**having regard to the arrangement as a whole**”. It cannot consider only the few persons who incur a penalty charge, because they call geographic numbers outside the terms of their call plan, that is greater than the Service Charge for calling 084 and 087 numbers.

“ **If that is the case then the practice must take action.**

The action required is not limited to terminating the arrangement for provision of a complete telephone system, which could incur heavy fees. The practice is required to take any “**reasonable step**” to ensure that callers to the practice pay no more than the cost of an equivalent call to a geographic number. **The obvious step is to migrate to the 034 equivalent of the 084 number**, as this meets the requirement without impacting any aspect of the system provision arrangement.


“ **... some GP practices have taken actions such as offering an 01 number alongside the 084 number or calling patients back. This is in line with national requirements.**

The terms of the contracts with NHS Surrey and Sussex held by the GPs require “**reasonable steps**” to be taken by practices already using 084 numbers on 1 April 2010, to ensure that callers pay no more than the cost of an equivalent call to a geographic number. This requirement applies regardless of any other ways in which contact may be made between practices and their patients.

“ **We take our responsibility on this matter very seriously ...**

To protect the integrity of the fundamental NHS principle, that access to NHS services is free of a charge to the benefit of the provider (even if only to subsidise costs it has chosen to incur in providing the service), **it is vital that this requirement be strictly enforced.**

 [see the relevant NHS GP contract terms](#)

 In preparation for the transfer of relevant responsibilities to the **Surrey and Sussex Local Area Team** of the **NHS Commissioning Board** on 1 April 2013, all PCTs in the area are already under common management, led by accountable officer **Amanda Fadero** (Chief Executive).

**David Hickson**



Monday, 11 March 2013