



Three government departments to be quizzed over the 'Telephone Tax'

Following the recent **National Audit Office** report into "Charges for customer telephone lines" - see [our summary and comments](#), the **Public Accounts Committee** of parliament will be conducting an inquiry and publishing its own report.

No time is being wasted, as representatives of the three key players have been called to give evidence before the Committee at 3:15pm on Monday 2 September, the day that parliament reassembles after the Summer recess.

The witnesses are:

Ruth Owen, Director General Personal Tax, HM Revenue & Customs

Ms Owen will be able to explain how HMRC eventually came to recognise that use of 084 numbers was unacceptable. It is now near the end of a process of switching to use of geographic rate numbers (mostly 03) - withdrawing the Telephone Tax from those enquiring about other taxes. (See [HMRC withdraws the 'Telephone Tax' from its helplines.](#))

Robert Devereux, Permanent Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions

Mr Devereux will be invited to explain why DWP continues to levy the Telephone Tax on pensioners, the sick and disabled, jobseekers and other vulnerable people. (See [Department for Work and Pensions to retain 0845 numbers.](#))

This may be made difficult in the context of the draft regulations which will prohibit use of 084 numbers for customer enquiries by businesses. (See [Rip-off customer support numbers banned.](#))

Richard Heaton, Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office

Mr Heaton will be expected to expand on the assurance that the Cabinet Office will "address the issues raised by the NAO. We hope that action by the Cabinet Office will lead to the total abolition of the Telephone Tax. (See [Cabinet Office commits to end the 'Telephone Tax'.](#))



Margaret Hodge MP, chair of the Committee, has already repeated her strong views on this topic, in response to the NAO report. (See her [Statement on charges for customer telephone lines.](#))

The **fair telecoms campaign** will be presenting a further briefing to the Committee on how one may un-jumble the "confusing charging system" which **Ofcom** seeks to make perfectly clear. We note that some telephone companies remain strongly opposed to the proposed transparency.