

**DWP to be grilled by Public Accounts Committee over expensive "customer service lines" (the 'Telephone Tax')**

On Monday 2 September at 3:15 pm, the **Public Accounts Committee** will be taking evidence as it inquires into the **NAO** report "[Charges for customer telephone lines](#)".

See our news release - [Three government departments to be quizzed over the 'Telephone Tax'](#)

We have provided [a briefing to the Committee](#) to assist its work.

The witnesses

- ◆ The **Department for Work and Pensions** will be seen as sitting firmly "in the dock". Out of the 132 numbers it publishes where the Telephone Tax is imposed, 35 cases are identified by the NAO as being used to serve "vulnerable" groups. Not only are these people most likely to be sensitive to the cost of telephone calls, they are also most likely to incur the highest premium Access Charge added by their telephone company, on top of the Service Charge applied by the DWP.

(The NAO report also identifies 19 other cases where vulnerable groups are subject to the Telephone Tax. Students, whose typical use of mobile phones make them particularly likely to incur high Access Charges, feature on this list - which does not include **UCAS**, as it is a charity funded indirectly from public funds.) The opportunity for these bodies to be able to point to the DWP as an example of where it is acceptable to impose the Telephone Tax on even more vulnerable people must be removed.

- ◆ **HMRC** will be able to provide valuable evidence on what can be done. It announced to the Committee back in January that it would end its imposition of the Telephone Tax - see [the exchange of remarks](#), and [the context](#). This work is now nearly complete.
- ◆ The **Cabinet Office** has accepted responsibility to resolve this issue - see [Cabinet Office commits to end the 'Telephone Tax'](#). We have offered to assist with this work, as we are now working with NHS England as it attempts to persuade GPs to belatedly comply with the terms of their recently (2010) revised contracts, banning use of 084 numbers.

The Committee will no doubt wish to hear from the Cabinet Office about how it proposes to pick up on its abandoned work, that we were involved in, from 2007-2009 (see [Clarification Statement on Telephone Number Ranges](#)) to achieve an effective outcome - **the end of the Telephone Tax**.

This inquiry must be seen in the context of the **BIS** regulations to prohibit businesses from doing what the government and public sector is doing with the Telephone Tax. See [Rip-off customer support numbers banned](#).

We will be attending the session, and will report on the proceedings, before we give evidence to the **Culture, Media and Sport Committee inquiry into Nuisance Calls** on Tuesday morning.

