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ANOTHER BAD CALL FROM IDS

Bedroom Tax bungler's pensions dept uses rip-off phone lines

by Stephen Hayward

IAIN Duncan Smith's department has raked in nearly £120,000 from calls to Government helplines.

Pensioners and redundant workers are among people forced to pay the rip-off phone charges.

Work and Pensions Secretary Mr Smith – already under fire over his discredited Bedroom Tax – may now have to explain why his department still has 0845 numbers for its helplines.

The Government has pledged to stop using the numbers, which cost up to 41p a minute from a mobile phone.

But Labour MP Roger Godsiff has discovered the DWP has made £117,000 during the past five

months from the high-rate numbers. Among the DWP helplines with the 0845 prefix is the Future Pension Centre which gives pension statements and information.

Higher rates are also charged on the Redundancy Payments helpline.

The DWP gets 0.3p per minute from every call to its 0845 numbers, which is then spent on operating other phonelines.

But Mr Godsiff said: "People are being hammered by unnecessary phone call costs."

"This is all part of IDS's relentless pursuit of reducing the benefits bill irrespective of the devastating impact on people's lives."

David Hickson of the Fair Telecoms Campaign said: "The continuing use of expensive num-

bers by Government and businesses is a rip-off." Landline calls to 0845 numbers are no more expensive than normal.

But 15 per cent of the population do not have landlines and use mobiles.

A DWP spokesman said: "We have negotiated a rebate from our phone line providers, generating a better deal for the taxpayer. We make no money from call charges and this rebate does not mean extra charges for claimants."

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LINE OF FIRE: Minister Duncan Smith

People are being hammered by these high-rate call charges

