

**South West Water - "Appalling" Phone Charges**

**FAO: Becky Moran, Communications Officer, South West Water**

Becky

*This open message is published on the **fair telecoms campaign** website and directly copied to **Francesca Taffs** (NDJFran) and your colleagues at **Wessex Water**.*

On reading the article "[Bideford man appalled about South West Water phone charges](#)" in the **North Devon Journal**, I have also reviewed your news item "[Changes to your services](#)". The following comments relate to points made by **South West Water (SWW)** in both.

It seems that **SWW** went ahead with this openly declared plan to charge customers for telephone contact, unaware of the provisions of draft legislation published by BIS on 6 August 2013 - see [The Consumer Contracts \(Information, Cancellation and Additional Payments\) Regulations 2013](#).

If you review section 39 (2) on page 17, you will find that none of its presently listed [customer contact telephone numbers](#) comply with these forthcoming requirements.

We hope that the stated prohibition of the use of existing 0800 numbers will not be enforced whilst awaiting implementation of the present **Ofcom** proposals to make them free of charge. This exemption can however only apply when they are offered as alternatives to permitted numbers. If this hope is fulfilled, you will not have to stop charging all customers so that landline callers may have the assurance of a free call, but you will have to offer 01/02/03 numbers for all.

I note the expressed desire to copy low standards of customer service set elsewhere. There is however a failure to make the important distinction between paying for a one-off service by telephone and engaging with the provider of a service for which one is already paying or has paid.

Referring to charges levied to the benefit of telephone companies is an odd way of justifying those levied to the benefit of **SWW**. In many cases the additional cost incurred due to choice of 0844 numbers is more to the benefit of the caller's telephone company than to **SWW**. When calls to 0800 numbers are chargeable, the telephone company gets paid both by the caller and by **SWW**.

On a simple point of fact, the stated **BT** call cost is incorrect, as it disregards the call set-up fee of 15p and the change of VAT rate to 20%. A five-minute call to 0844 346 1010 from **BT** costs 15p + (5 x 3.062p) = 31p, more than 6p per minute. Mobile callers typically pay 35p - 40p per minute.

You will find that the **Consumer Council for Water** has now ceased using 0845 039 287 and you should be aware that use of 084 numbers in the NHS (with the exception of the moribund **NHS Direct** advice and information service) was prohibited in 2009.

I hope that **South West Water** and the other companies identified will be ready to comply with the new legislation, which is likely to be extended to cover passenger transport, when the final version is announced shortly.

Please pass these comments to those responsible for what genuinely looks like an "appalling" decision, that will shortly need to be reversed, and get in touch if we can help any further.

