



Telephone numbering in the UK is grouped into different types, such that the first digit or two conveys meaning. In this briefing we provide an overview of the design of the numbering scheme, including proper and prohibited uses.

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Introduction

The UK numbering plan¹ gives structure and conveys meaning to the caller. In recent years Ofcom, the telecommunications regulator, has made changes which have brought clarity. There is, however, still work to do, so some prefixes of lesser-used number types do appear out of place.

This briefing offers guidance to organisations in selection of incoming phone number as well as call cost information. Some types of number are not allowed in certain circumstances, and this is covered.

The default choice is a Geographic Rate number, with it being free of any incidental charge for the vast majority of callers. This could be a 03-prefixed non-geographic number or a conventional geographic number starting with 01 or 02. More on this on page 10.

1. Telephone number types

In the UK, the national trunk dialling prefix is 0. The international dialling prefix is 00, which takes the place of the preceding ‘+’ on an international number when calling from a landline.

Local geographic numbers begin with anything from 2 to 9. From landlines geographic numbers with the same code can be called without the code for most geographic codes. In a few areas local dialling has been closed, meaning that the code must be dialled even where the caller’s code is the same as that being called.

1.1 The number types

Geographic

- **01, 02:** Traditionally used for fixed telephone lines.

Mobile

- **071-075, 077-079:** Mobile telephone services.

Non-Geographic

These are generally used by businesses and other corporate organisations, although private individuals are free to use them if they so wish.

- **03:** Geographic Rate Non-Geographic Numbers: Used by businesses, other organisations and private individuals.

1 Ofcom – Stakeholders / Telecoms / Telecoms numbering – hyperlink “the National Telephone Numbering Plan (PDF)”: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/telecoms/numbering/>





- **080:** Free-to-Caller Numbers: Used by businesses and other organisations and mean that *all* calls are free of charge.
- **084, 087, 09:** Service Numbers: Non-geographic numbers where businesses, other organisations and private individuals impose a Service Charge on callers.

Legacy

These are numbers that have still to be reviewed by Ofcom or are to be scrapped.

- **070:** Personal Numbers (to be reviewed by Ofcom in 2016).
- **076²:** Radiopaging Numbers (to be reviewed by Ofcom in 2016).
- **0500:** Legacy Freephone Numbers (to be withdrawn in June 2017).
- **055:** Corporate Numbers: Allocated to organisations (to be reviewed by Ofcom in 2016).
- **056:** VoIP services (to be reviewed by Ofcom in 2016).

Unused

- **04, 05, 06:** Unused prefixes.

1.2 Call charges

For most number types the exact retail price to call is set by the telephone provider and tariff the caller is subscribed to.

Geographic Rate – Numbers prefixed with: 01, 02, 03

This is a generic term for the price of calling Geographic Numbers and 03-prefixed Geographic Rate Non-Geographic Numbers. The rule that 03 numbers are billed at Geographic Rate, including being part of inclusive packages, is one imposed by Ofcom on all landline and mobile operators³.

The incidental cost of Geographic Rate calls is generally zero. This is because telephone services are usually purchased with inclusive calls. High ‘per minute’ charges applying outside of packages, these “penalty” charges being there to incentivise selection of the plan which covers calls one is likely to make.

There is thus no difference in the price of calling ‘local’ geographic destinations as against ‘national’ ones. This has been the case for over 10 years now!

➤ *Calling from landlines*

Landline providers offer packages with inclusive calls during different time periods. There are three types of landline packages which include calls at weekends, evenings and weekends, and any time.

While there are generally no limits on call volumes, providers do start charging for calls which last longer than an hour (some may allow a bit longer). The advice is to redial in order to avoid these charges.

2 With the exception of 07624 which is allocated to radiopaging services and mobile services in Isle of Man.

3 Ofcom – “Ask us – Telephone – What are 03 numbers?”: <http://ask.ofcom.org.uk/help/telephone/03number>





As already explained, penalty charges apply to calls made outside of a subscriber's plan. It is important to emphasise their effect in that normal calls are zero rated. Inclusive packages are no longer a luxury, quite the contrary in fact.

➤ **Calling from mobiles**

Mobile operators offer plans with differing numbers of inclusive minutes that apply at all times. While unlimited plans are available, subject to "fair usage", they apply only to a minority of mobile subscriptions.

Mobile Rate – Numbers prefixed with: 071-075, 077-079

➤ **Calling from mobiles**

Calling Mobile Numbers from a mobile phone costs the same as calling Geographic and 03 numbers. This is usually from bundled minutes, as with geographic numbers. So, Mobile Rate from a mobile phone is the same as Geographic Rate.

Mobile operators often exclude, from their inclusive plans, calls to Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man geographic and mobile numbers.

➤ **Calling from landlines**

The cost of dialling Mobile Numbers from landlines is invariably at a premium to that of Geographic Numbers. This is despite dramatic reductions in the cost of the underlying termination (or wholesale) charges, instigated by Ofcom. Some providers offer finite bundles for ringing Mobile Numbers.

Prior to May 2015, termination rates for some Mobile Number blocks was as high as 15p per minute, this resulting in higher retail charges. Ofcom closed this loophole and termination rates for numbers starting 071 to 075 and 077 to 079 and registered in the UK must thereafter be 0.68p per minute or less. Further reductions are to take effect in April 2016 and April 2017.

Free-to-Caller Numbers – Prefixed with: 080

These are free of charge from landlines and, since 1st July 2015, free from mobile telephones too.

Service Numbers – Prefixed with: 084, 087, 090, 091, 098

These are numbers with an Access Charge paid to the benefit of the caller's telephone provider and a Service Charge paid to the benefit of the called party.

Each telephone service has one Access Charge which applies to all Service Numbers, and each Service Number has a single level of Service Charge which applies irrespective of telephone service used to make the call. The cost of any one call is the sum of the caller's Access Charge and the Service Charge applicable to the number in question.

The level of Access Charge is set by the originating provider and the Service Charge is ultimately set by the organisation being called, by virtue of its selection of number.





Other numbers

Numbers other than those already mentioned have been or are to be subject to review by Ofcom. They are the final pieces in the jigsaw as far as tidying up the numbering plan goes.

Originally allocated to Mercury Communications in the 1980s, the 0500 prefix is to be withdrawn in June 2017. These numbers are free to dial from landlines, but are chargeable from mobiles.

Personal Numbers, which are prefixed with 070, are often mistaken for Mobile Numbers when they are not. Call charges are higher than to mobile phones, with inclusive mobile minutes not covering them. Personal Numbers are to be the subject of review by Ofcom in 2016.

The 055, 056 and 076 prefixes have a myriad of charges and all are to be the subject of review by Ofcom in 2016.

1.3 Routing of calls

- Calls to standard Geographic Numbers (which begin 01 and 02) and Mobile Numbers (which begin 071 through to 075, and 077 through to 079) follow a direct route from the caller's telephone network to the call recipient's telephone network.

The caller's provider has to pay a small termination fee – a wholesale charge, if you like – to the call recipient's telephone provider. In some cases, the call recipient may choose to forward the call to some other destination and this is entirely at their own expense.

- Calls to other non-geographic numbers are initially routed to the telecoms company that controls the number. It then forwards the call on to the destination Geographic Number or Mobile Number, this being known as a number translation service (NTS).

As the call passes through multiple legs there are additional call handling costs on top of the final termination fee. Where the number carries a Service Charge, that charge may cover the cost of onward conveyance, either in full or in part.

1.4 Flow of funds

- Cost-neutral numbers are where the caller pays their own telephone provider to connect and convey the call: **01, 02, 03, 071-075, 077-079**

The 'wholesale' onward termination rate for calls to standard geographic 01 and 02 numbers, non-geographic 03 numbers and standard mobile 07 numbers is less than a penny per minute and is therefore a negligible amount within the call price.

Any additional call handling and forwarding charges, such as those incurred when running an 03 number, or when forwarding a call originally made to a landline or mobile number on to another number, are borne by the called party.

- With Free-to-Caller Numbers the caller's costs are subsidised by the called party, meaning that they pay nothing for the call: **080**





Guide to appropriate uses of telephone numbers [DRAFT]

The called party pays all of the non-geographic call handling and forwarding costs and, as the caller is paying nothing for the call, the called party also compensates the caller's provider by paying them a "call origination fee".

This happens in all cases, meaning that the receiving party incurs charges even where the cost of a geographic rate number would also be free for that particular caller.

- Numbers where the caller pays their own telephone provider an Access Charge to connect and convey the call and where they also pay a Service Charge to the benefit of the called party and their telephone provider, these known as Service Numbers: **084, 087, 090, 091, 098**

Access Charges are set by each landline and mobile provider. It is their charge for connecting and conveying the call.

The Service Charge is the money that is shared between the service provider (the party called) and their telecoms provider. The Service Charge varies depending on the number called. It can be up to 7p per minute or per call on 084 numbers, up to 13p per minute or per call on 087 numbers and up to £6 per call or £3.60 per minute on 090, 091 and 098 numbers.

1.5 Typical uses of non-geographic numbers

Geographic Rate Non-Geographic Numbers

While all numbers prefixed with 03 are charged the same, different sub-prefixes have differing usages:

- **030**: Restricted to not-for-profit organisations, charities, public sector services and some other bodies. More detailed guidance is available from Ofcom⁴.
- **034, 037**: These prefixes serve only as migratory path for any organisation which uses the equivalent 084 or 087 number.
- **033**: These are for all types of organisation to use.

Typical services within the 03 range are customer service lines, government and all other types of public services, healthcare services, financial services, sales and enquiry lines, charity helplines and subscription-free conference calling.

Free-to-Caller Numbers

- **080**: Customer service lines, sales and enquiry lines, charity helplines, and subscription-based conference calling.

Service Numbers

- **084, 087, 0900-0907, 091**: Recorded information lines such as travel information, weather forecasts, horoscopes and sports results, chatlines, voting or competitions by phone, specialist helplines, such as technical support lines, subscription-free conference calling, and charity donations.

⁴ Ofcom – Stakeholders / Telecoms / Telecoms numbering / Guidance on telephone numbering / 030 Number Eligibility Guidance: <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/telecoms/numbering/guidance-tele-no/030-guidance/>





- **0908, 0909, 098:** Adult entertainment services.

1.6 Prohibited usage

Some organisations across various sectors are precluded from using all or some numbers which carry a Service Charge.

Consumer Contracts Regulations

Many customer service telephone lines must charge no more than the basic rate, which means they are not allowed to impose a Service Charge on callers. This is covered by Section 41 of the Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013⁵ and applies to all post-contract purchases with the exception of the following:

- Financial services, including banks and insurance companies, although these are to be covered by a rule to be brought in by the FCA on 26th October 2015.
- Gambling.
- Construction, sale of immovable property and residential letting contracts.
- Package travel and timeshare.
- Roundsmen on a regular route.
- Purchases from vending machines.
- Single telecommunications connections such as public payphones and public Wi-Fi, including that provided in establishments such as cafés.

There are no specific regulations for pre-sales enquiry lines or for sales or booking lines using Service Numbers, other than the requirement to declare the Service Charge. It is for consumers to decide whether they wish to do business with an organisation that charges them extra when they buy something or when they make enquiries before buying something.

Financial services

The FCA (Financial Conduct Authority), which regulates banks, insurance companies and other financial bodies, requires its members to charge no more than the basic rate for existing business enquiries, as from 26th October 2015⁶.

This brings the financial services sector into line with most others, as far as telephone call charges are concerned. As with the Consumer Contracts Regulations, pre-sales enquiries can be to Service Numbers.

5 The Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations 2013, Section 41:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/3134/regulation/41/made>

6 FCA Policy Statement 15/19 Chapter 3, published July 2015:
<https://www.fca.org.uk/static/documents/policy-statements/ps15-19.pdf#page=19>



**Public sector**

The Cabinet Office published guidelines for customer service lines across Government departments, their agencies and other public services⁷. This sets out the position that Geographic Rate should be the default choice, which means use of a 01, 02 or 03 prefixed number unless there is a clear case for otherwise.

Rules governing use of phone numbers for NHS services are contained within different Statutory Instruments or contract amendments. Health services are devolved to the Nations, so it is up to each to do as it sees fit. In some cases, one simply copied the wording of another.

Of course, this is all notwithstanding the first principle of the NHS, which is that its services are “free at the point of need”. Thus, providers should not be using Service Numbers anyway!

- **NHS Bodies**, which includes hospitals: (NHS Directions: in England for 087 and 09 in 2005 and for 084 in 2009; in Wales for 087 and 09 in 2005 and for 084 in 2009; in Scotland for 087 and 09 in 2005).
- **NHS GP practices** (amendments to GP practice contracts: in England for 087 and 09 in 2005 and for 084 in 2010; in Wales for 087 and 09 in 2006 and for 084 in 2010; in Scotland for 087 and 09 in 2005 and for 084 in 2015; in Northern Ireland for 087 and 09 in 2005)
- **NHS dentists** (amendments to dental practice contracts: in England for 087 and 09 in 2005; in Wales for 087 and 09 in 2006; in Northern Ireland for 087 and 09 in 2005)
- **NHS opticians** (amendments to ophthalmist contracts: in England for 087 and 09 in 2005; in Northern Ireland for 087 and 09 in 2005)

2. Access Numbers – These start with a 1

Access Numbers starting with the digits 100 through to 119 have the same function and, with the exception of the Access Charge for calls to 118 numbers, the same call cost on all landline and mobile networks:

- **100**: Operator assistance, free call.
- **101**: Police non-emergency number, 15p per call.
- **105** (from April 2016): Power cut and blackouts emergency helpline, free call.
- **111**: NHS non-emergency number, free call.
- **112**: Emergency Services (also 999), free call.
- **116XXX**: Helplines of Social Importance, free call.
- **118XXX**: Directory Enquiries numbers with an Access Charge paid to the benefit of the caller's telephone provider and a Service Charge paid to the benefit of the directory enquiries service provider.

Where calls are free, the caller's provider is compensated by the organisation being called.

⁷ Cabinet Office: “HMG guidance for customer service lines”, published 26th December 2013, GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmg-guidance-for-customer-service-lines>





Other Access Numbers vary between networks, as do the call costs:

- **123:** Speaking Clock, always chargeable.
- **150 and others:** Some telephone providers offer 150 or another number for calling their own customer services. These can be free to call or chargeable, as set out by the provider.

3. Mobile-only numbers

There are two subsets of numbers that are only applicable to mobile telephony.

3.1 Mobile Network-Specific Numbers – These start with 2, 3, 4 and 9

These are used for the provision of operator-specific functions including customer services, voicemail, top-ups and other automated functions. The number of digits varies.

3.2 Mobile Short Codes – These start with 5, 6, 7 and 8

Mobile Short Codes are a special type of non-geographic number that can be called only from a mobile phone. They generally consist of five to seven digits.

Mobile Short Codes are used by various automated and interactive services, including: voting on a radio or TV show; various competition lines; responding to marketing; charity donations, and; adult entertainment services.

There are a wide variety of charges for these calls and they fall into several different categories, including: a fixed fee per call; a per minute rate, and; calls which are free. Call charges can be up to £5 per minute (or per call), though most are less than £1. These figures are inclusive of VAT at 20%.

The service provider must state the call charge wherever their number is advertised. There are no clues given as to how the money is shared out between the caller's provider and the service provider and their telecoms provider.

Where calls are free, the caller's provider is compensated by the organisation being called.

4. Controlled Premium Rate Services

A service is a Controlled Premium Rate Service (CPRS) if at least one of these criterion apply:

- It is a **chatline** (irrespective of call cost or prefix used).
- It is an **adult entertainment** service (irrespective of call cost or prefix used).
- It is a **dial-up internet service** (irrespective of call cost or prefix used).
- The number starts **087** and has a Service Charge of *more than 7p* per minute or per call.
- The number starts **090, 091** or **098** and has a Service Charge of *more than 7p* per minute or per call.
- The number starts **118** and has a Service Charge of *more than 7p* per minute or per call.





- It has an **enhanced termination fee** that is *more than* 10p per minute, inclusive of VAT (this applies to many Mobile Short Codes as well as some of the numbers starting 055, 070 and 076).

This definition of CPRS is set out by Ofcom in the PRS Condition⁸. Threshold rates quoted above are inclusive of VAT at 20%, although the Condition gives them VAT exclusive. Where a service is deemed a CPRS, it must comply with the PhonepayPlus Code of Practice⁹.

5. Advice on number selection

5.1 The default choice: Geographic Rate – 01, 02 or 03

Organisations should view Geographic Rate numbers as the default choice – it attracting a neutral call charge. For most telephone users these calls are zero-rated as telephone services are usually purchased with inclusive calls. It is good practice to avoid use of the word “free” with respect to Geographic Rate inclusive calls so as to avoid confusion with Free-to-Caller Numbers which begin with 080.

Where a non-geographic number is required then this should be prefixed 03, which is charged as per Geographic Numbers from all landlines and mobiles, and which forms part of inclusive packages.

5.2 Alternative options

There are two principle choices other than the neutral option of a Geographic Rate number. These are to either subsidise the caller’s charge or to receive a subsidy from the caller. Both carry caveats which are explained below.

Free-to-Caller – 080

This is often referred to as “freephone”. As a result of UK Calling in July 2015 all numbers beginning with 0800 and 0808 are free to call from mobiles, as well as from landlines and payphones.

We suggest that Free-to-Caller Numbers should be used only when it is imperative that all calls be free. This is because, as explained above, most people can call Geographic Rate numbers within the allowances of their inclusive call plan on their landline or on their mobile.

An example use for a Free-to-Caller Number is for a socially important service. Callers on low incomes may rely on pay as you go mobiles which, for callers without an inclusive allowance, often charge exorbitant rates for calls to Geographic and 03 Numbers.

The point is that in providing (at extra expense to the call recipient) a number that is free to call for all callers, many of those callers could have called a Geographic Rate number using their inclusive allowance (which would incur no incidental call charge).

8 Ofcom Statement “Simplifying non-geographic numbers – change of implementation date”, published 26th Feb 2015, page 17: http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/consultations/simplifying-non-geographic-numbers/statement/NGCS_revised_date_statement.pdf

9 PhonepayPlus “Code of Practice”: <http://www.phonepayplus.org.uk/for-business/code-of-practice>





Service Charge – 084, 087 or 09

In some cases, organisations might wish to charge callers by way of a 084, 087 or 09 number. There are a number of restrictions on use of Service Numbers, such as that they cannot be used for customer helplines in most instances.

For a full explanation of rules governing non-use, see under the Prohibited usage heading on page 7 and Controlled Premium Rate Services on page 9. All Service Numbers require clear call cost declarations, an example of which is set out below.

6. Call-cost declarations

Where service providers declare their call costs, these often take the following forms:

- **03:** *“Calls cost the same as calling 01 and 02 numbers and count towards inclusive allowances on landlines and on mobiles.”*
- **080:** *“Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.”*
- **084, 087, 09, 118:** *“Calls cost [Xp per call] [plus] [Xp per minute] plus your phone provider’s Access Charge.”¹⁰*
- **Mobile Short Codes:** *“Calls [are free] [cost Xp per minute] [cost Xp per call] on all mobile networks.”*

Note that non-geographic Service Numbers prefixed with 084 and 087 must never be described as, or imply, “local rate”, “lo-call”, “low call rate” or “national rate”. All of these terms are misleading and therefore actionable by the Advertising Standards Authority.

Disclaimer

All information contained herein is provided in good faith in order to help organisations understand the topic. The fair telecoms campaign will not be liable for any losses resulting from errors, omissions or use of the guidance in this paper. Should any changes occur we will seek to amend it if necessary, but we can offer no guarantee.

¹⁰ From 1st July 2015, Ofcom, the Advertising Standards Authority and PhonepayPlus require this declaration to be used for all 084, 087, 09 and 118 numbers wherever they are advertised.

