fair telecoms campaign **briefing**

Ofcom proposals (on hold) to remove 084 and 087 ranges

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Introduction

The following extracts are from Ofcom documents in which its proposals to remove the 084 and 087 ranges from use were advanced.

Strong arguments in favour of the removal were presented and the consultations invited responses, in particular from both users and providers of these numbers, to present arguments for their retention.

No published response to this effect was acknowledged by Ofcom as being significant.

Presentation

In the extracts that follow, links are given to annotated copies of the documents with the quoted sections highlighted and also bookmarked Ref1, Ref2 … as indicated. These may be verified against the original Ofcom publications, to which links are also provided.

For each consultation document, a link is provided to review the published responses

Reason for this publication

The **fair telecoms campaign** is very frustrated that, despite advancing sound reasons for the removal of these ranges, Ofcom has failed to go ahead with this long overdue action.

Whilst these extracts are intended to highlight the case made for the removal of the ranges, readers are encouraged to place these in context, wherever appropriate.

Extracts

1 - Future of telephone numbers - First consultation (11 Apr 2019) Original document

Ref1

1.9 In this document, we discuss and invite stakeholder views on:

- **Non-geographic 084 and 087 numbers:** Our consumer research[5] has found low awareness and poor perceptions of value and trust for 084 and 087 numbers. Concerns about call costs, including uncertainty about those costs, may be a factor in reducing confidence in voice telephony. We look at what the future role should be for 084 and 087 numbers.

Ref 2

2.20 Our review of the future of numbers seeks to promote consumer confidence in voice telephony, and our research suggests that concerns about call costs, including uncertainty about those costs, for calls to the 084 and 087 number ranges may be a factor in reducing confidence. Therefore, we consider it appropriate for us to look at the future role of 084 and 087 numbers. We examine this further in Section 4 of this document.

Ref 3

Summary of key findings in Future of Numbering research

Current use of non-geographic numbers

4.19 Some participants singled out 084, 087 and 09 as 'premium' and tended to assume that these numbers were costlier than the actual maximum rates allowable. Awareness and understanding of Access Charges and Service Charges were particularly poor.

Ref 4

4.21 Sight of 084 and 087 in an advertised context worked much less to engender trust. Once understood (from accompanying tariff information) that these numbers were chargeable, distrust and resentment were widespread. Consumers were concerned that they were unable to determine the costs of such calls. This is based on not understanding their own phone company's Access Charges and an expectation that they could not control the length of the call.

Ref 4a

4.23 A few in the sample expressed stronger views, that companies were seeking to 'make money' from people who either weren't aware of the costs up front or had no choice in having to make the call. Also, some younger participants expressed concerns that older and potentially vulnerable people may be caught out by call costs to 084 and 087 numbers.

Ref 5

4.24 One of the main reasons for mistrust and uncertainty regarding 084 and 087 numbers, particularly amongst older consumers, was low awareness of telecom providers' Access Charges. Many were surprised that the Access Charge applies on a per-minute basis and instead tended to assume that 'access' means a one-off connection fee.

4.25 Micro-businesses generally found the idea of using a 084, 087 or 09 number for their business as less relevant and appealing than geographic numbers. For most micro-business owners and other business users, the drawbacks tended to outweigh the benefits, leading to rejection. Many in the sample relied on local custom and considered a geographic number to be essential. The few who did not, said that they saw non-geographic numbers as 'anonymous' and 'impersonal' (implying lengthy call queuing, scripted responses from call handlers and with a base outside of the UK). The perceived drawbacks of 084, 087 and 09 numbers related mainly to the chargeable element. Micro-business owners considered that the cost would be off-putting to customers.

Ref 6

4.30 Many felt that if they were 'forced' to call a chargeable number in order to purchase a product or service (especially one that needed advice) the charge may act as a barrier to engagement. In any event, many were unhappy with the difficulty in knowing which numbers were chargeable (particularly understanding the difference between 080 free to caller and 084/087 numbers) together with a perceived lack of transparency. Many expressed a fear that people can be easily caught out and forced to pay a charge (which was often assumed to be high, i.e. higher than the maximum call cost allowed).

Ref 7

4.31 Finally, participants were presented with two alternative scenarios for abolition. One was to abolish 084 and 087. The other was to withdraw 09 numbers as well.

a) in the short term, there were high levels of acceptance amongst consumers of the benefits of abolition of 084 and 087 number ranges; and

4.32 Abolition of 084 and 087 was argued for by many participants based on simplification and reducing confusion. As things stood, many claimed to be easily confused by cost differences between 080 (freephone) and 084/087 (chargeable) numbers leading to an increased risk of being charged unknowingly. In all, many felt that simplification would make it more likely that people would make calls based on an informed decision.

Ref 8

4.48 Our Future of Numbering research found a consumer need for more information and greater clarity on non-geographic number services and call costs, plus a degree of simplification. Most participants felt that there was a need to reduce the potential for confusion, particularly given the apparent similarity of 084 and 087 chargeable numbers and 080 free to caller numbers. Some, particularly older participants, suggested the need

to abolish 084 and 087, leaving one freephone number (0800), standard rate number ranges (01, 02 and 03) and premium rate numbers (09).

Ref 9

Our review of the future of non-geographic numbers

4.51 Our review of the future of numbers seeks to promote consumer confidence in voice telephony. Our Future of Numbers research suggests that concerns about call costs, including uncertainty about those costs, for calls to 084 and 087 numbers may be a factor in reducing confidence. Therefore, we consider it appropriate for us to look at the future role of 084 and 087 numbers as a micropayment mechanism in the future.

[Consultation responses]

2 - Future of telephone numbers - Second consultation (23 Apr 2021) Original document

Ref 1

5.5 The results of our Future of Numbering research provided a strong indication that consumers have concerns about 084 and 087 numbers, and that confusion over call costs appeared to persist despite the introduction of the unbundled tariff. Lack of awareness of call costs can lead to consumer harms including bill shock or avoiding making calls due to uncertainty about the cost. There were also concerns expressed about the use of numbers as micropayment mechanisms for contacting certain services.

Ref 2

5.8 Having considered the stakeholder responses,[113] we recognise that, while there remains concern about the potential for consumer harm, there have been significant changes in the use of 084 and 087 numbers since we concluded the non-geographic call services review in 2013. Further evidence is needed to understand how the numbers are being used and their value to consumers.

Ref 3

A1.20 Sky agreed that 084 and 087 numbers should be considered by Ofcom in this review and that 09 numbers should be excluded.[124] Fair Telecoms Campaign felt that some Numbering Plan developments were ill-conceived or were now redundant, with no justification for their continued use in their present form, highlighting 084 and 087 numbers (as well as 070 and 076 numbers).[125] Organisation Withheld 1 agreed that there were better alternatives to using premium rate numbers as a micro-payment mechanism.[126] Magrathea considered that addressing bill shock as a result of extreme access charges for 084/087 numbers was a priority matter (along with mobile call charge differences).[127]

Ref 4

A1.38 We are continuing to review the future role of 084 and 087 numbers as outlined in Section 5.

Consultation responses

3 - Future of telephone numbers - Statement on revenue sharing (11 Oct 2024) Original document

Ref 1

5.8 Name withheld 1 and the Fair Telecoms Campaign said that 084 and 087 numbers should be removed from the Numbering Plan altogether.[76]

Ref 2

5.8 Name withheld 1 and the Fair Telecoms Campaign said that 084 and 087 numbers should be removed from the Numbering Plan altogether.[76]

Ref 3

5.11 The charging structure and the possible withdrawal of 084 and 087 numbers (as suggested by respondents including FCS and Fair Telecoms Campaign) were not matters on which we consulted in the Revenue Sharing Consultation. However, these are issues which we have considered in other documents which we have published as part of our wider Future of Numbering Review.[78]

5.12 Our 2021 Evaluation identified there was a significant decline in the use of unbundled tariff numbers between 2013 and 2020, and in particular of the 084 and 087 numbers.[79] Some respondents to our First Consultation said that, despite the decline in use, there remained some valued uses of these numbers particularly for business-to-business calls and services. Nevertheless, we recognise that consumer awareness of the charges for such numbers is generally low and that this can give rise to some risk of incurring unexpected call charges.

Ref 4

5.13 Significant further work would be needed to determine the most appropriate regulatory approach, if any, to addressing this risk. In light of our broader regulatory priorities, we consider that the current financial year is not the right time to undertake a detailed review of the future use or pricing arrangements for the 084 and 087 numbers. We will, however, continue to monitor the level of complaints we receive from consumers on this issue as part of our wider consumer protection monitoring work, and any decision we make about priorities in future will be informed by the data we collect.

Consultation responses

Other Ofcom publications

Whilst the 3rd item covered above addressed the potential removal of the 084 and 087 ranges, the consultation which preceded it covered only material addressed in earlier publications. For completeness, this is referenced here:

Future of telephone numbers (Further consultation on revenue sharing)

Some of the relevant issues are addressed in other Ofcom publications related to its "Future of Telephone Numbering" project.

These are:

The Future Of Telephone Numbering - A Qualitative Research Study

Evaluation of the 2015 pricing reforms for calls to non-geographic numbers

Conclusions

The **fair telecoms campaign** responded to the latest of these publications quoted above with the following comment and news release - **Response to … | Ofcom allows the 084 / 087 rip-off to continue.**

The final extract quoted above represents the present Ofcom position.

Given that the main issue of consumer detriment is around ignorance and misunderstanding, it is quite absurd to await complaints to Ofcom as the basis for determining whether the detriment continues and needs to be addressed!