

## HELPLINES AND NUMBER RANGES

### *Choosing the right number range for your helpline*

#### Background Information

Helplines provide support to people over the phone, by text, email and web chat. This guide focuses on the different telephone number ranges available to helplines.

Telephone costs can be one of the biggest outgoings that a helpline faces so it's important to choose the right number type. Helplines need to consider whether they are able to offer a number that is free to callers, or whether users will need to pay for the call. Different number types may be appropriate for different types of service. Helplines providing a line which offers crisis support may find that callers have different needs compared to a helpline that provides information.

Helplines Partnership (HLP) considers it to be good practice for helplines to be clear about the cost of the call if they are not able to run on a free to caller number; it is one of the assessment criteria for helplines seeking accreditation to HLP's Helplines Standard.

There are new rules coming into force from July 2015 that will affect helplines which use certain number ranges, particularly those beginning with 080 and 084, such as 0844 or 0845.

The UK telecoms regulator, Ofcom, provides information on the levels of charges that consumers pay for calls on different number ranges. This information can be found on the [UK Calling website](#) and Ofcom's [number crunching guide](#).

#### What does that mean for helplines?

### Caller pays for the call



**01** These are geographic numbers for specific parts of the UK. These telephone numbers relate to a location in the UK and are used for homes and businesses.

**02** These numbers tend to be used by helplines that operate locally or where a charity has started offering a limited helpline service. Most national helplines, and indeed some local helplines prefer to use a national rather than locally based number.

## Caller pays for the call



This is the UK wide number range, and includes 0300 and 0345. Calls are at a similar price level to geographic numbers (01 or 02) and are included in inclusive minutes and discount schemes that a phone provider offers to its callers. These are sometimes referred to as bundled minutes.

This number range has been increasing in popularity with services such as banks, utility companies and government benefits lines using it as a more cost effective option for their callers.

Helplines that can't offer a free to caller number for cost reasons may find that the 03 range is a good alternative. It can be cost effective to the caller particularly if they have inclusive or bundled minutes in their call plan. However some vulnerable callers may not be able to access such plans, perhaps relying on pay as you go or other services. The cost of calls may be a particular barrier for these groups.

## Helpline pays for the call



This is a freephone number where the cost of the call is paid by the helpline. 0500 numbers are being withdrawn however if your organisation is already using a number in this range, you will still be able to receive calls until 3rd June 2017, when the range will be officially retired.

The UK phone regulator, Ofcom has created a new range that will be available for users of 0500 number to migrate to. This range will be 08085 and will allow service providers to migrate their existing 0500 number to 08085 numbers with the same final six digits.

## Caller pays for the call



This is the number range given to mobile numbers. Most helplines don't operate a service on this number range, as there are more suitable options for helplines

## Helpline pays for the call



This number range is free to the caller, so the helpline pays for the cost of the call. Many helplines offer free to caller services to ensure that the cost of the call is not a barrier to someone seeking help. Numbers in this range include 0800 and 0808.

Previously calls to such numbers were only free from landlines and could be very costly from mobiles. From July 2015, all calls to this number range became free from mobile phones, however, with an increase in call costs for many helplines. More information on this can be found on the [UK Calling website](#)

## Helpline pays for the call at an affordable rate



### Special Freephone Tariff

This is a number range that is exclusively available to helplines and offers freephone numbers that are free to call from landlines and mobile phones and do not appear on itemised bills. Helplines Partnership operates the Special Freephone Tariff (SFT) scheme with the agreement of Ofcom. The SFT scheme provides confidentiality to callers who may be at risk and reduces cost barriers which prevent them from accessing helpline services. It is also designed to be affordable to helplines.

## Caller pays for the call and can face high charges



This number range includes 0870, 0871, 0872 and 0873 which are regulated by the premium calls regulator, PhonePay Plus. Calls to this number range can be more expensive, and are not recommended for helplines due to the higher cost of access.

## Caller pays for the call. Helpline provides clear info on cost of call



These number ranges were originally described as business rate numbers, and were popular when they were first introduced. There have been concerns about the costs to consumers of calling these numbers and changes are effective from July 2015 to make it clearer to consumers about how much their call will cost.

This number range can still be used by helplines after July 2015, but clear information about the call cost will need to be provided.

More details about these changes can be found on the [UK Calling website](#)

Ofcom has stated the following about the changes to 084 and 085 numbers (March 2015):

*“The new system will enable organisations to say how much calls to them will cost.*

*In future, the cost to the consumer of calling a service number (starting 084, 087, 09 or 118) will be made up of two clear parts:*

*An access charge. This goes to the caller’s telephone company.*

*A service charge. This is the remainder; it includes any revenue going to the service provider (that is you, the party being called), as well as revenue going to the ‘terminating call provider’ (the company which provides the number to you)*

*Your telecoms provider should be able to tell you about the charges that apply to your number.*

*Organisations that use a number in the affected range will need to provide their caller with information about the cost of the call in adverts and on your website.”*

## Checklist for choosing a number range for your helpline:

- ✓ Think about the needs of your callers and if affordability issues might have an impact on caller's ability to access your services
- ✓ Consider whether your helpline can afford to offer a free to caller number:
  - Think about the volume of calls you receive in a given period to get an idea of the cost
  - Be aware that if you move to a different number, call volumes to your helpline may alter
  - Helplines sometimes need to balance an aspiration to provide a free to caller service with the need to ensure that the service can stay open to the callers who need it
- ✓ If you are using a number where the caller pays for the call, research the costs for the caller
- ✓ Be aware of new rules effective from July 2015 about declaring costs to the caller on the 084 range

## Getting further help and support

Helplines Partnership can provide a range of support on areas to consider when choosing a number range as well as support to set up and run helpline services.



### HELPLINES PARTNERSHIP

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