

Sent: 08 January 2006 12:07 PM
To: Frank Phillips
Subject: Telephone misuse

Dear Frank,

I have tried to use your Word form on your web site but there appears to be no way to send it and no name is on it so I have had to revert to the BBC Working Lunch web site to find out where to send it. You shouldn't be surprised that you get so few complaints from the public about the telephone system because 99.9% of the public have no idea who you are or where you are.

I would support all the proposals you are suggesting but would go much further. I have seen our telephone system degenerate from a very wonderful way to find out information and communicate with people to an almost useless system of delays, menus, diversions and queues. The chance of finding a human being that can help you on the number that you have dialled is increasingly rare.

The telephone system of today is a playground for the dishonest, the swindlers and cheats. The honest users who pay rental for their land based telephones (and other peoples via the 0870 scam) are treated with total disrespect by big business as your investigations show.

The system will not recover until

- (a) the source number of all calls is made known by law
- (b) cold calling by companies selling things is totally banned with a £1,000 fine for each offence
- (c) the price of the calls that you make can be immediately known to you as you dial the number and
- (d) money collection by telephone is completely stopped i.e. no 0870, 0871, 09 type numbers at all.

I had a case yesterday where I was given the number 07004 277482 by the Arriva bus company and was assured it was a free number and not a mobile. Because I thought that even OfTel couldn't have got it that wrong I checked with the Operator. She couldn't tell me how much it cost so she transferred me to Customer Services in Truro. A lady called Amy initially said that it must be a mobile number. Reluctantly she typed in the whole number into her Oracle and she reported that yes, it wasn't a mobile number but she didn't think it was free. She guessed it might be Local rate.

I asked her again to find out how much it cost. "I can't tell you" she said. "How will you bill me if you don't know what the rate is?" I asked. "Oh! Our billing department will know". "Why can't you ask them then?". More music and long absences and when she finally returned she announced that she had tried three methods and all her enquiries had failed to get a price.

I explained to her that if Tesco refused to give a price for a product and stated that you would find out the cost of the product three months later when you were billed you could have involved the Trading Standards Office. "I'm sorry you feel like that" she said.

What a way to run a telephone system. You must try and do something to protect the public. I thought that was supposed to be your primary task.

Please publish all of this on you Consultation Web Site.

Regards

John Middleton.