

Ofcom consultation: Harmonised European numbers for services of social value

A response by Victim Support

Question 1: Do you agree that 116006 'helpline for victims of crime' should be freephone?

Yes.

Victim Support agrees with Ofcom's assessment that the decision as to whether the 116006 number should be freephone or free to caller is a complex one. Ofcom's 116 Statement draws a distinction between services of 'extreme social value' and 'social value' and uses these categories as the criterion against which the decision on charging should be made. However, it is by no means clear which of these categories the helpline for victims of crime falls into. This is because this assessment is based in part on the likely situation of the caller, and we know from our work with victims of crime that the needs of callers to such a helpline will vary considerably.

On balance, we would conclude that as the 116006 number is unlikely to be the first port of call for a victim (that being the police), and the majority of callers will be unlikely to have urgent needs, the freephone designation is the correct one for this service.

Further, as there is no additional money attached to the introduction of the 116006 number, cost is an important consideration. The potential cost of running a free to caller service is likely to be a serious consideration for most potential providers of the service.

Running this service as a free to caller service (or indeed even a freephone service) would also put it at odds with the Victim Supportline, which currently fulfils the role of the UK's primary helpline for victims of crime. Funding is very unlikely to be made available to make the Victim Supportline free to caller. We would add however that callers to the Victim Supportline can request to be called back, and the cost of this subsequent call would be incurred by Victim Support¹.

In conclusion Victim Support endorses the approach set out by Ofcom for the allocation and charging of the helpline for victims of crime. We would also wish to correct a small inaccuracy in the consultation document. Paragraph 3.22 states that around 350,000 crimes per year go unreported to the police. The actual number is far higher. The British

¹ The Victim Supportline would not necessarily be able to call the victim back straight away, so would arrange a mutually convenient time to call back.

Crime Survey² estimates that there were 10.7 million crimes in England and Wales in 2008/9, and that only 41% of these crimes were reported to the police. The figure of 350,000 is the number of victims of crime who do not report their cases to the police but told British Crime Survey researchers that they would like emotional support.

Question 2: Do you agree that 116117 'non-emergency medical on-call service' should be free to caller?

Victim Support does not take a view on this.

Question 3: Do you have any specific comments on the proposed modifications to the Numbering Plan set out in Annex 6?

No.

² British Crime Survey <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/hosb1109vol1.pdf>