

Safeguarding the Future of Numbers – COI Consultation Response to Ofcom

For publication:

Question 4 – 0300 numbers

Overall COI are very supportive of the 0300 tariff as long as it is very clear to the citizen what it actually means and Ofcom are able to help COI and its clients present this as an appropriate tariff for public sector usage. It would give us a fair rate, non-controversial paid for alternative that could complement the free 0800/0808.

However there are some particular issues that do need to be addressed:

1. Exactly how will the charging mechanism work. If people are on a tariff where their geographical calls are 'free' will 03 calls be included, as we understand. What happens with mobiles and calls from phone boxes? Are the providers going to charge an unfair rate from these? This is the key as this is one of the things that can make calls to Government expensive as more people now call from Mobiles.
2. How exactly will the tariff need to be described in publicity? And what publicity will be put behind the new tariff to explain to citizens and to gain the trust that the proposal speaks for?
3. Is it possible that we can avoid a 'free for all' on allocation to providers and number choice i.e. if someone has a particular 0845/0870 number can they migrate to the equivalent 03 number – i.e. have first choice. Also, to ensure that more memorable numbers are used for the key high profile/large volume Govt services can we ensure that there is some more sensible allocation methodology than 'first come first served'. The Transformational Govt team in Cabinet Office would be particularly supportive of this stance.
4. The proposal notes that Ofcom might mandate a change for Govt to 0300. Why would Ofcom mandate such a change? What would make this occur?
5. We are largely happy with the definition of public sector that Ofcom has chosen to use and indeed were part of this process. However there are anomalies with some publicly funded activity not having the .gov suffix for various reasons (branding, arm's length bodies etc) and therefore we would suggest that COI should be more prominent within the lists of eligible bodies who qualify for 0300 status because COI with its aggregated tariff can act as a handling agency for others whose status against some of the other lists may be doubtful. COI can only work with and on behalf of public funded bodies and therefore by our very status, anybody whose number is part of the COI aggregated Government Telephony contract should automatically be an eligible body. COI as part of the criteria would also therefore be able to police this aspect on your behalf.
6. Of particular importance are the charges that would be applicable to clients for the use of 0300 numbers. This has been highlighted by most of the people we have so far spoken with as a major barrier to transition, which we wish to address as quickly as possible. As a supplementary, what assistance (financial and otherwise) could be provided for government departments and agencies in phasing out their old numbers in favour of 03? Over what timescale? Again, aggregation through COI's existing arrangements might be of global benefit to Government as a whole here.

COI are happy to discuss any element of our response further with Ofcom.

Yours sincerely,

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cc: Robert Irons