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**Secretariat memorandum**

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CAC016  
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Ofcom review of non-geographic telephone numbers

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1. To update members on the current position in respect of Ofcom's consultation on the future of non-geographic telephone numbers.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1. To note this report and return to this issue when the next Ofcom consultation document is published in late 2011/early 2012.

**3 Background**

- 3.1. Members have previously expressed concern about Transport for London's decision to move its telephone information services from geographic (020) to non-geographic (0843 and 0845) numbers.
- 3.2. The impact of this change was that callers have to pay more to these numbers than to the previous 020 numbers, in particular when calling from mobile phones. The cost per minute of calling an 0845 number can vary from 12p (Orange monthly contract), 20p, 25p, 35p or 41p (Virgin), depending on network and whether the caller is on a contract or uses pay-as-you-go. 0843 number attract similar charges. The cost of calling an 0845 number from a BT landline is no more than 3p per minute.
- 3.3. Members took the view that while it was acceptable for callers to pay more for transport information, it was not acceptable that they should face additional costs when making complaints about a service or seeking a refund. This was particularly the case when the value of the refund was small and may, in fact, be less than the cost of the call.
- 3.4. Members noted TfL's comments that moving to non-geographic numbers enabled more efficient call handling that benefitted all passengers.

**4 Ofcom consultations**

- 4.1. As part of their work on the cost of calling non-geographic numbers, members noted that Ofcom was carrying out a consultation in this area. It published a call for inputs on the Review of Non-Geographic Numbers <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/ngn-services/> on 30 April 2010 and

on 16 December 2010 it published its follow-up consultation document Simplifying Non-Geographic Numbers [<http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/simplifying-non-geo-numbers/>]. This consultation made two proposals: to simplify number ranges so that they become more intuitive for consumers; and to split the charges made by the phone company from those paid to the service provider so that callers would be able to see how much they are paying and to whom. The consultation period for this document ended in March but findings have not yet been published.

- 4.2. Officers have spoken to the manager for this project, Markham Sivak, who explained that these proposals can only take effect if there are changes to the Communications Act. As a result, the first consultations spoke only in general principles rather than putting forward specific proposals that would require legislative changes. It is expected that the Government will make an announcement about proposed changes to the Communications Act before the end of the year.
- 4.3. Mr Sivak advised officers that a third consultation document would be published no later than January 2012 that would include detailed implementation proposals in light of the legislative proposals.
- 4.4. It is recommended that members note this report and return to the issue when the next consultation document is published.

## **5 Equalities and inclusion implications**

- 5.1. London TravelWatch has noted that the changes to Transport for London's telephone services has resulted in transport users facing higher costs to make complaints about services or seek refunds and that this has transport inclusion implications.

## **6 Legal powers**

- 6.1. Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider – and where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

## **7 Financial implications**

- 7.1. There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.