



Date: 16 March 2005

Dear

I am writing to confirm that the Agency has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 13 January 2005.

You stated that you *“do not require copies of all papers, emails, reports etc but require:*

**1) The call cost per minute that people pay to ring your 0870 numbers**

The Agency is aware that tariffs can vary depending on the customers' service provider. For example, BT charge 6.73ppm + VAT in the day, 3.36p per minute in the evening and 1.27p per minute at weekends + VAT (current rates). However, BT's customers can be on various tariffs (e.g. BT Together, Customer Commitment, etc) that may have a discounted rate for calling standard national numbers. These tariffs would also offer a slightly reduced rate for calling 0870 numbers. Other service providers may charge different rates for calling 0870.

**2) What percentage of the call cost is given back to you?**

The department has decided not to disclose the information you requested in respect of the percentage of the call cost received by DVLA.

This information is being withheld as it falls under the exemption in section s43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, in that disclosure would prejudice the commercial interest of the service providers of the DVLA. In applying this exemption we have had to balance the public interest in withholding the information against the public interest in disclosing the information. The attached annex to this letter sets out the exemption in full, as well as the factors the Agency considered when deciding where the public interest lay. It also includes a schedule of the types of documents analysed by Agency when considering your request.

**3) The essential report/paper which was considered as to why you changed to the 0870 system?**

You have requested the essential report/paper which was considered as to why DVLA changed from using traditional STD telephone numbers to 0870 numbers for its Customer Enquiries Service. I regret that this is no longer held by the Agency and appears to have been



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weeded some years ago. However, it may help if I explain why this was the case. As a national organisation, it was considered iniquitous that some of our customers should benefit from their geographic location to Swansea, whilst other callers paid more for making the same telephone enquiry simply because of their remoteness from Swansea. By using a non-geographic number, this ensures that the arrangements are fair and equitable to all.

We are considering the use of alternative numbers such as the use of Local Rate (0845) and Freephone (0800) telephone numbers. However, DVLA would have to bear the full cost of Freephone numbers and the difference in costs that customers using Local Rate pay. We are mindful of our duty to ensure that we provide all our services as cost-effectively as possible. It may help put matters into perspective if I explain that DVLA expects to handle up to 17 million calls this year, or up to 68,000 calls a day. The majority of calls received are to seek general information or advice that is already provided in documents and forms published by the Agency. It would not be reasonable for the general public to be expected to cover the costs of those who choose to telephone DVLA to seek advice that is already in the public domain.

An average call to the Agency lasts under four minutes. This generally equates to the cost of a first class stamp and is met by the person using the service rather than the public as a whole.

DVLA also derives a number of technical advantages that are not available when using geographic numbers. Non geographic numbers offer a flexible, cost effective method of routing these calls. The use of these numbers also allows us to move, increase or decrease the lines available at short notice. It is one of a range of facilities that enable us to provide improved customer service.

The Central Office of Information have published guidance on the use of non-geographic numbers. Although DVLA's decision to use 0870 numbers pre-dates this guidance, I can confirm that we have taken into consideration this advice. The COI guidance recommends that, when using 0870 numbers, an alternative method of contact should run in parallel. DVLA offers its customers a number of non-telephone options to access its services, e.g. web, e-mail and letter. DVLA considers that it operates its telephone customer interface in accordance with current COI guidance. Confirmation of this has been received from COI.

#### **4) *Your fax number which is not prefixed 0870?***

The only fax numbers for Customer Enquiries for which the DVLA discloses an alternative geographic number is for Drivers enquiries: 01792 783071. This is on our website, under the heading "Contact Us", and is intended for use by drivers telephoning from abroad.

If you are unhappy with the decisions made in relation to your request from DVLA, you may ask for an internal review. You should contact me if you wish to complain.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House

Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire  
SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me, quoting the above reference number in any future communications.

Yours sincerely

Annex A

***Exemptions in full:***

**S43(2):**

Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it).

<i>Factors for disclosure</i>	<i>Factors for withholding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By revealing the amount of money earned by DVLA per minute, per call, if competitors were to come up with better rates, DVLA could use the competition to its own benefit.</li> <li>• Revealing DVLA's share of the call price per minute would not prevent the DVLA from continuing to receive money from phone calls to its public enquiry service or from receiving other benefits from its use of 0870 numbers.</li> <li>• There is general public interest in knowing how public funds are managed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DVLA has a commercial contract with British Telecom (BT) with special rates that have been negotiated. If we were to divulge these rates, commercial rivals could gain an advantage over BT in future negotiations with DVLA and other organisations. This disclosure of information, considered as commercial in confidence by BT could affect the good working relationship DVLA have established with this company.</li> <li>• Information on the amount of money earned by DVLA from the use of 0870 numbers is available from the House of Commons library (Hansard). This indicates that DVLA earned a rebate of £1.1 million for the period 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2004. The availability of this general information mitigates the fact that the amount of money received per minute per call is withheld.</li> </ul>

**Reasons why public interest favours withholding information**

- DVLA would not wish to divulge the revenue earned from their use of 0870 numbers. We would consider this information as Commercial in confidence.
- Companies providing services to DVLA must not be deterred from doing so by the fear that information about their revenue and bargaining position could be revealed.

<i>Type of Document</i>	<i>Applicable Exemption</i>
COI Guidelines	Section 43(2) – Commercial Interests