



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 5 January 2005.

I have answered your questions in order of your e-mail.

Have you considered the Central Office of Information guidance of the use of non-geographic numbers?

Although our 0870 services pre date the Central Office of Information's guidance on the use of non-geographic numbers, I can confirm that we have taken into consideration this advice.

What did you conclude?

The advice offered by COI is not prescriptive and does not take into account that DVLA is offering an advice service. DVLA is mindful of its 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.

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.



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

An executive agency of the
Department for
Transport

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.

DVLA derives a number of benefits in using non-geographic numbers. Lines with different delivery numbers can be added or removed to a non-geographic number within hours, helping us deliver a better and more proactive service to our customers at minimal cost. To change geographic delivery numbers has a standard lead-time of thirty working days and incurs costs from line suppliers.

Real time statistics are available which allow us to monitor the network, alerting us to pressure points and faults immediately. This service is not available on non-geographic numbers.

Historical data on non-geographic numbers is presented to us electronically and goes into much greater detail than geographic numbers. This helps us plan future strategies with confidence.

Are you aware of the cost burden on your members and other people who call you?

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.

Are you aware of the amount of money your telecom providers and or agents make per minute from a call?

DVLA are aware of the amount of money its service providers make per minute from a call.

What do you make per minute from a call?

The department has decided not to disclose the information you requested in respect of the amount of money DVLA makes per call minute.

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.

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

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).

Factors for disclosure	Factors for withholding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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. • There is general public interest in knowing how public funds are managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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.</p>

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>
1.a.i.1. COI Guidelines	<i>Section 43(2) – Commercial Interests</i>