

REPORT TO: Cabinet Member – Corporate Services

DATE: 14 October 2009

SUBJECT: Corporate Customer Contact – Use of 0845 pre-fix to Contact Centre telephone number

WARDS AFFECTED: All Wards

REPORT OF: Paul Edwards
Finance & Information Services Director
0151 934 4082

CONTACT OFFICERS: John Farrell
Assistant Finance & Information Services Director
0151 934 4339

Janet Barry
Customer Services Client Manager
0151 934 4337

EXEMPT/ CONFIDENTIAL: No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

To seek the views of the Cabinet Member in relation to the use of the current “0845” pre-fix to the Contact Centre telephone number.

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

The Citizen’s Advice Bureaux (CAB) have approached Members requesting that consideration be given to replacing numbers with a 0845 pre-fix with numbers that are less costly for people to contact by mobile phone.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services:

- (a) Notes the contents of this report.
- (b) Considers whether there should be a change to the Council’s current Sefton Plus Contact Centre number.

KEY DECISION: No

Not Appropriate

FORWARD PLAN:

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: Following the Expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes for this meeting.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: N/A

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework:

Financial:

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2009/ 2010 £	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

Legal: None

Risk Assessment: Risk Assessment will be undertaken as part of the management of the projects.

Asset Management: Not applicable as this will be managed under the existing contractual obligations.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		✓	
2	Creating Safe Communities	✓		
3	Jobs and Prosperity	✓		
4	Improving Health and Well-Being	✓		
5	Environmental Sustainability	✓		
6	Creating Inclusive Communities	✓		
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy	✓		
8	Children and Young People		✓	

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Customer Contract Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. In August 2009, Alan Toms of the Sefton Citizens Advice Bureau contacted a number of Members, requesting support for a national CAB campaign to reduce the cost of contacting Government (national and local) on a mobile phone.
- 1.2. In this communication the CAB referred to the Council's use of an 0845 number for the Sefton Plus Contact Centre (0845 140 0845), and the cost to residents of calling that number from a mobile phone. In particular, the communication advised / suggested that:
 - Sixty-five CAB from across the north of England have been collecting evidence of problems this causes clients.
 - Many CAB clients have a mobile phone but no land line.
 - The cost of calling an 0845 number from a mobile phone "can cost up to 40 pence per minute".
 - The cost of using a number with an "03" pre-fix is less costly.
- 1.3. CAB urged Sefton to make a policy to adopt 03 numbers in place of the current range.
- 1.4. Following an investigation of the issues raised, an update letter has been sent to all Members, and a copy of the letter is included in **Annex A** to this report.
- 1.5. The purpose of this report is to seek the Cabinet members views on the issues raised.

2. BACKGROUND TO USE OF 0845 NUMBER

- 2.1. The Council's Contact Centre went live on 5 April 2004, and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources meeting on 20 October 2004 considered a Customer Contact Progress Report. This report proposed that the "brand" for Customer Services in Sefton should be "Sefton Plus", and that proposal was agreed by the Cabinet Member.
- 2.2. In conjunction with the launch of the new brand for customer services in Sefton it was proposed that the Council simultaneously launched the new contact centre telephone number. The proposed number, **0845 140 0845**, was chosen because it is easy to remember and can be can be dialled from anywhere in the borough at local rate and without the need for an added prefix. This was considered particularly important given that Sefton (for telephony purposes) is split into two STD areas (01704 for Southport and 0151 for the south of the borough). The intention was that this number be introduced as part of a Council-wide re-numbering strategy, eventually becoming our principal published number. Existing published numbers could be diverted at no cost to the new number and, if appropriate, phased out over time.
- 2.3. This Cabinet Member meeting resolved (minute 38) that the Brand "Sefton Plus" be adopted and that the Contact Centre number **0845 140 0845** be used.

2.4. Since this decision the number 0845 140 0845 has been the single Sefton Plus Contact Centre number and had been widely advertised.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE TO THE USE OF THE 0845 CONTACT CENTRE NUMBER

3.1. Sefton MBC is charged £50.00 per month to use the 0845 number and the supplier agreement includes a standard revenue share clause providing Sefton MBC some modest income based on its use. Currently this income averages £3000 per annum and is used to offset the cost of the 0845 number with any (small) balance being re-invested in developing better services for Sefton residents.

3.2. Contact has been made with BT, who have provided the following information in relation to calls to an 0845 number:

- From BT public telephone - charged at 4.6p per minute.
- From other network provider public telephone - up to 6.0p per minute.
- From private BT landline - generally free in BT packages.
- From mobile phones - 0845 numbers are charge at rates varying from 11.0p to 22.5p per minute depending upon tariffs.

3.3. Contact has been made with Telewest (the Council's telephony supplier) and they were less able to give specific costs due to the different service providers that can provide network services. They did say that public phone call charges varied between 5p and 7p per minute.

3.4. Numbers with an 03 pre-fix were introduced by OfCom to provide a set of numbers that had a consistent charge, and which could not exceed the national standard rate. They are not free, and the cost of calling from a mobile phone can be higher than calling from a land line, but calls may be included in call plan inclusive minutes (dependant upon the mobile phone company). Calls to an 03 number attract the national rate charge of 6.7 pence per minute from a landline, however these calls attract any discounts that a BT customer may be entitled to within their call package. The following information has been obtained from BT and Telewest on the cost of 03 numbers:

(a) **BT** - There is an initial install cost, which will depend on how memorable the number is that is chosen. A random number would be free to install. A memorable number incurs a charge depending on how memorable it is. There are 3 bands £500, £1500 or £3000 for a number from the most memorable group. There is also an ongoing rental of £10 per quarter, and a charge for incoming calls of 0.5 pence per minute. Based upon current usage the annual cost to the Council would be around £8500.

(b) **Telewest** - There is an initial install cost, which will depend on how memorable the number is that we choose. A random number would be free to install. A memorable number incurs a charge of £200. There is an ongoing rental of £2 per month for a number that was free to install, and a rental of £10 for a memorable number. The charge to Sefton for receiving incoming calls will depend on the number of calls received. The band selected is based on the

assumption that calls volumes will increase through the rest of the year as further services are taken on and delivered through Sefton Plus. Based on the incoming calls to Sefton Plus for the first 6 months of 2009, the call cost would be £28,000.

- 3.5. If a decision were made to change from the current 0845 number, there would be additional costs, which the Council would incur in relation to publicity of the new number. Because the current **0845 140 0845** number has been widely publicised, there would need to be a new publicity campaign to publicise the new number. Currently the Contact Centre number is included in outgoing letters, publicity leaflets and on the side of most Council vehicles including buses, bin lorries and vans. The cost of changes to this publicity has not been estimated to date but would be significant.
- 3.6. Any increase in costs referred to above is not provided for in the Council's budgets.

4. OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGE TO USE OF CURRENT CONTACT CENTRE NUMBER

- 4.1. In view of the fact that the current number has been used since 2005, it is well known to the Council's customers and any change may cause a level of confusion, dependant upon the degree and success of publicity.
- 4.2. There will be implications in relation to technical reconfiguration required to change any current linkages from other Council numbers to the 0845 140 0845 number, although the extent of this work has not yet been quantified.

5. OTHER MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 5.1. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services Meeting on 16 September 2009 considered a report entitled "Corporate Customer Contact – Improving Access For Our Customers" and an extract of that report (below) refers to a planned development which will assist customers in contacting the Council:

"Providing greater choice through innovation - implementing hotlines as a contact channel to the Council."

The Service Provider will extend the hotline facility that currently exists at the two One Stop Shops to other locations to be agreed with the Council. This will allow a direct call to be made to Sefton Plus from other locations that may include leisure facilities, partner organisations or from PCT locations.

The aim of this is to:

- Extend range of access channels.
- Provide free of charge calls.

The Service Provider's overall aim is to extend the facility currently available in One Stop Shops across a range of Council facilities. It should be noted that telephony technology must be in place to support this project.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.1. It is recommended that the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services:

(a) Notes the contents of this report.

(b) Considers whether there should be a change to the Council's current Sefton Plus Contact Centre number.



**Finance & Information Services
Department**

4th Floor Magdalen House
30 Trinity Road
Bootle
Merseyside, L20 3NJ

To: All Councillors

Date: 10th September 2009

Our Ref: F&ISD/kjs/cllrs-1009

Your Ref:

Please contact: Paul Edwards
Contact Number: 0151 934 4082
Fax No: 0151 934 4560
e-mail:

Dear Councillor,

Re: Cost of Calling Sefton's Contact Centre

Many of you will have received a communication from the Sefton Citizens Advice Bureau asking you to support the Citizens Advice National Campaign to reduce the cost in contacting government on a mobile phone.

In that communication it was suggested that it can cost up to 40p per minute to call an 0845 number from a mobile phone, and many CAB clients have no landline and rely on mobile phones to contact the Council. You will be aware that the Council's Sefton Plus contact centre number is 0845 140 0845.

I have provided some initial information to the Leaders, both in relation to costs associated with contacting the Council on an 0845 number, and comparing with that the costs that would apply if the Council's Contact Centre contained an 03 pre-fix. A summary of the key points is shown below:

2. BT have provided the following information:

- BT public telephone - 0845 numbers are charged at 4.6p per minute
- Other network provider public telephone - Up to 6.0p per minute
- Private BT landline - 0845 numbers are generally free in BT packages
- Mobile phones - 0845 numbers are charge at rates varying from 11.0p to 22.5p per minute

3. The following information has been obtained in relation to "03" numbers:
- Calls to an 03 number from a mobile phone are not free, however they are included in the callers price plan, and incur the charge appropriate to that plan for a geographic number.
 - There is a cost for a memorable 03 number which would be in the range £200 - £3000 depending upon the number and the provided.
 - There is a cost to the council for incoming "03" prefix calls, which based on current call volumes would be up to £27,000 depending upon the provider (compared with a small income for the current "0845" number).

The Leaders have asked me to produce a detailed report to be considered by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services Meeting on 14th October, 2009, and that report will contain more detailed information as a result of further investigation that is currently being undertaken.

The Leaders have also asked me to ensure that all Members are made aware of the intention to bring this report, which will then be considered as part of the Council's decision making process.

If you have any queries in advance of the report being considered, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



PAUL EDWARDS
FINANCE & INFORMATION SERVICES DIRECTOR