

Reference: 01771985

Information Requests
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27 February 2024

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about Bournemouth's subscriber trunk dialling code.

We received this request on 30 January 2024 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

Your request

"Apparently BOURNEMOUTH (area code 01202) has been struggling for numbers for some time and have even had to resort to using 01202-1xx xxx & 01202-0xx xxx numbers, so I've read, being allocated as all free number blocks are now completely depleted along with the act of rapidly re-issuing retuned numbers which have become free (for example, when someone dies).

My question is this: We were told back on phONE day in 1995 that introducing codes 020, 023, 024, 0113, 0114, 0115, 0116, etc, etc, was to allow for "e x p a n s i o n" and to deal with "future numbering needs"- so with Portsmouth changing from 01705 & Southampton changing from 01703 to become 023-92 xx xxxx & 023 80xx xxxx respectively, considering they themselves are neighbours and that Bournemouth is itself next door to Southampton, WHY hasn't Bournemouth just been added into the 023-xxxx xxxx exchange too?!?!? Isn't that what PHone-day was for?

I have pondered that some people don't or won't want to lose their "01202" identity but when it really, really, really is "there are no more available numbers", WHY, WHY, WHY hasn't this been done just for the overspill?!?!?!?

And if it's "never going to happen" - then with the greatest of respects why did you change all the 01705 numbers to 023-92 numbers and all the 01703 numbers into 023-80 numbers back in the 1990's???"

"Once again, today, while talking to a random business contact from that part of the south coast "struggling to get a Bournemouth number" - why has this gone on and why is it still going on? What on earth was the point or purpose of all these available possible number combinations if - judging by your actions - they are never, ever going to be used?"

Please explain this for me. This just doesn't make any sense at all that the -92 & 80 portions of the new STD code which has a theoretical 100 million combinations are just not being used and the place next door is choking to death for the lack of any free numbering whatsoever."

Our response

It is Ofcom's duty, as administrators of the UK's telephone numbers, that we ensure the ongoing supply of appropriate numbers to meet the needs of consumers and businesses. Geographic numbers continue to be in high demand from phone companies in order to offer a range of services to their customers and to compete for new business. It should be noted that there is no risk of there being insufficient numbers to meet customers' needs, as the quantity of geographic numbers that phone companies already hold in total exceeds likely demand in each area. However, individual phone companies need new allocations of geographic numbers from Ofcom from time to time, and therefore numbers need to be available to ensure choice and to promote competition and innovation, otherwise consumers could be constrained in their choice of supplier and denied the benefits of competition and new services. It is therefore our duty to ensure that we hold a sufficient stock of numbers to meet that demand.

Over the years, Ofcom has consulted on the most appropriate means of ensuring the ongoing supply of geographic numbers. In [2006](#) we concluded our strategic review of telephone numbers and adopted the following policy principles to guide our strategic decisions on how numbers are managed:

- the numbers consumers want are available when they are needed;
- the numbers consumers currently use are not changed if this is avoidable;
- the meaning which numbers provide to consumers is protected;
- number allocation processes support competition and innovation; and
- consumers are not avoidably exposed to abuse.

We then developed these principles specifically to reflect the requirements of geographic numbers:

- we will take steps now to ensure the availability of geographic numbers for consumers in a manner that maintains their continuity and meaning, and causes consumers the least disruption and cost;
- we will ensure that sufficient numbers are available so that scarcity of numbering resource does not create barriers to entry or service provision;
- our management of numbers will be neutral in the treatment of telecoms providers; it will take account of the link between numbering and routing and the consequential impact that numbering policy has on the markets for routing and number portability;
- tariff transparency should be retained, so that a caller pays what he/she expects to pay for a call to a geographic number; and
- our policy approach will not hasten the erosion of location significance but will recognise (and not stifle) the effect of network and service evolution on that significance.

With these guiding principles in mind, we work closely with phone companies to increase their efficient use of existing numbers, using measures such as charging for numbers in the areas with the highest scarcity (such as Bournemouth), auditing allocations and increasing the scrutiny of applications. These measures are designed to maintain the stock of current numbers in ways that do not affect customers. Indeed, such action has vastly reduced the number of areas where Ofcom has had to take action to ensure an ongoing supply of numbers compared to earlier forecasts. However, where this proves insufficient Ofcom must take action to make new numbers available.

In deciding how to increase the supply of numbers, we are mindful that any option for creating new geographic numbers involves some disruption to citizens and consumers. Based on our duty to further the interests of consumers, we seek to minimise such disruption, and this consideration has shaped our approach.

In 2006, we decided to move away from number changes and the continuation of the 'Wide Area Code' scheme of 02X area codes, such as 020 for London and 023 80 for Southampton and 023 92 for Portsmouth. These were introduced as part of the Big Number Change in 2000, when our predecessor Oftel (the former telecommunications regulator) implemented changes to the UK's numbering plan to make the type of service clearer from the number (e.g. 07 for mobile and 09 for premium rate services). PhONEday in 1995 was a step in making this possible, by adding the digit '1' to the start of all area codes and freeing up codes beginning 02 to 09 for other types of services, including 02X for more geographic numbers.

A code change requires customers to change their telephone number according to a set migration plan. Further implementing the Wide Area Code scheme would have entailed a substantial change to the structure of the UK's geographic numbers and customers would have needed to become accustomed to the new number structure, the location significance that it offered and implications for local dialling (the ability to dial a local number without the area code). Wherever a Wide Area Code was rolled out, consumers in that area, and those making calls to that area, would experience a significant impact. Due to the substantial disruption and cost of number change, we considered that retaining the Wide Area Code scheme to increase number supply was only a valid option if there was a sustained need to increase the supply of numbers in a significantly widespread manner across the UK. Only then would a comprehensive plan of number change be worth the cost and inconvenience to so many consumers. However, our forecasts for number availability showed this not to be the case.

Instead, a localised solution to localised instances of number shortage was preferred, and Ofcom looked for the most effective means of providing additional capacity in a targeted manner. We concluded that closing local dialling was the best solution. Requiring the dialling of the area code when calling from one landline to another in the same area, means that otherwise unusable subscriber numbers beginning with '0' and '1' can be used. This solution causes the least cost and disruption to consumers. Whereas Wide Area Codes would entail a major change to the structure of UK geographic numbers, closing local dialling requires no change to numbers. There would be some changes to dialling behaviour, as local dialling would no longer be possible. However, our [research](#) shows that local dialling is viewed increasingly as a 'nice to have' facility rather than an essential feature of landline telephone services, its value generally has declined and its loss unlikely to inconvenience callers.

Therefore in 2012, when our forecasts predicted a shortage of numbers for Ofcom to allocate in the [01202 area code for Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch](#), we closed local dialling in that area. This measure continues to ensure the supply of numbers in Bournemouth with minimal disruption. In 2014, we [closed local dialling in five other area codes](#). To date, we have not needed to introduce any measures to increase the supply of geographic numbers in any other area codes.

The overriding message behind Ofcom's approach to managing geographic number scarcity, therefore, is that no one needs to change their telephone number – which is an objective strongly supported by consumers.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress.

Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).