

Dear Sir/Madam,

Age UK is the country's largest charity dedicated to helping everyone make the most of later life.

We welcome Ofcom's review into the cost of calling Directory Enquiries (118). This issue is particularly relevant to older people; 4 per cent of people aged 65+ use these services, compared to 2 per cent of all consumers.

The examples of high prices highlighted in the review – such as £8.98pm – are shocking. Under this tariff, a single person living on Pension Credit (£163pw) would spend 8.3% of their weekly income on a call lasting 90 seconds (roughly the average length of such calls). Bill shock – which the review shows to be common – can cause anxiety, stress and intense pressure on people's limited budgets.

Such prices are not acceptable, especially given that one of the main purposes of these services is to find contact details for health and government/public services, i.e. services essential for people's wellbeing. We agree that 'despite the small number of users, directory enquiries provides an important service for consumers'.

As the review notes, consumers tend not to shop around and so are unlikely to find cheaper services. We know that older people are particularly unlikely to shop around and switch, especially those who do not use the internet; half (47%) of people aged 75+ and a third (35%) of those aged 65-74 are not online.^[i]

Given this, we strongly welcome the proposal to impose a cap on the price that DQ providers can charge for their services.

We have no strong view on the proposed level of the cap (£3.10 per 90 seconds), although we note that this will still be a high price for people on low incomes. We therefore ask Ofcom to consider further measures to monitor prices in the market, and consider ways to keep downward pressure on prices, as well as ways to make prices more transparent to consumers so they can easily compare and use cheaper services. Such measures must work for consumers who are not online.

^[i] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/113222/Adults-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Report-2018.pdf