

NPIA Missing Person Bureau Response to Ofcom Consultation Paper:

Harmonised European Numbers for Services of Social Value – proposed allocation and charging arrangements for 116 numbers in the UK

Question 1

No, the communications provider and service provider (whether single or multiple) should not be linked as appropriate parties to apply for allocation of 116 numbers.

If the service provider is a non-governmental organization there are likely to be sponsorship issues to resolve. With the current financial climate these types of proposed partnerships may run into difficulties with many charities finding donations dwindling.

If the service provider is a governmental body, say for example, NPIA's Bureau applied to offer services, there would be procurement and contractual issues to overcome.

Our preference is for the allocation to be split so that a communications provider is sought separately. We can see though that new partnership issues would need to be resolved through this process as the new communications provider and service provider may not be able to form a partnership for legal or other contractual reasons.

We have no views on which organization should be the preferred communications provider.

With our knowledge of the NGO/voluntary sector in the UK, it is thought likely that only one or two NGOs may bid to become the service provider. The charity, Missing People is one such organization. The Bureau has an existing partnership with this charity.

It is possible that the Bureau may wish to bid to become the service provider either on its own or in partnership with Missing People or in conjunction with the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). No discussions with possible partners have taken place.

Question 2

Yes, comparative selection process is preferred.

Question 3

Yes, a six week period is thought sufficient for submissions of interest.

Question 4

We agree with the principle of Government co-ordinated advisory committees. NPIA wishes to be represented on such committees, particularly the 116000 number committee. NPIA's Bureau has strong views on the allocation of 116 numbers to suitable organizations. Members, either singly or as a quorum, of such advisory committees should have the power to veto applications from organizations that are considered as unsuitable for running services in connection with the 116 series of numbers.

NPIA's Bureau is aware of progress in the EU on the allocation of 116 numbers and service provision by Smile of the Child (Greece); Kek Vonal (Hungary) and Child Focus (Belgium) and has associations with these and a number of other organizations offering services as they are all necessarily connected with missing children.

NPIA's Bureau is a partner of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in the USA and manages part of a network of websites (across 18 countries) all connected with the search for missing children and linked support services.

Question 5

No comment

Question 6

Yes, agree with charging option 3.

Question 7

Suggested factors sufficient for deciding whether a service should be 'free-phone' or 'free to caller'.

Question 8

Yes, all three 116 initial services should be 'free to caller'.

Question 9

No additional comments, in agreement with Ofcom's conclusions.

Question 10

No comment.

General Comments

In figure 3.1 (page 10), service descriptions are set out. Currently, it is difficult to see an organization that is capable of offering all the services for the 116000 number: the Bureau could do (a) and (c) but not (b); the charity Missing People could do (a) and (b) only but if it did (a), the Association of Chief Police Officers and NPIA may have a view on the efficacy of such third party involvement.

Missing People could offer services for the 116111 number and perhaps the Samaritans or NSPCC could offer services for the 116123 number. Obviously, new organizations could be formed to offer services.

In table 6.1 (page 37), service specific conditions state a 'nationwide' service. What does this mean? England and Wales only; England, Wales and Scotland only or E, W, S and Northern Ireland? The Bureau provides a service for the UK, including Scotland and Northern Ireland.