

**REPORT TO:** Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 6<sup>th</sup> January 2009

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy

**SUBJECT:** The 0303 Telephone Number

**WARDS:** Borough-Wide

## **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise members of the rationale behind the introduction of the new public telephone number (0303 333 4300) for contacting the council.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION ; That the report be noted.**

## **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Driven by the Cabinet Office there has been a campaign to reduce the number of telephone numbers that the public have to ring in order to get a service from an organisation.
- 3.2 Introducing the new 0303 number enables the council to promote a single number for customers to call for all services.
- 3.3 With this in mind and like many other Public service providers it was decided to implement a 03 number for Halton in order to minimise confusion for our customers whilst provide customers with a 'single' contact number which they can use from any phone whether that be a land line or a mobile and be charged the same rate nation wide.
- 3.4 Members will have seen in the press the controversy recently over the use of 084 numbers in the NHS this in the main is because currently some numbers do not form part of customers telephone contract packages with their supplier and they can be charged significantly more for ringing them. There is also evidence that the public are generally sceptical about 08 numbers because of the view that their charges are high and therefore people are reluctant to use them. To alleviate this problem OFCOM introduced the 03 numbering series.
- 3.5 A recent OFCOM publication on this subject said "...allocating a new type of number – starting with '03' - for those businesses, public services and voluntary services who want a common national number, but who do not wish to charge consumers a premium for contacting them. Consumers will pay the same amount for these calls as they would for calling a geographic number:"

- 3.6 The new 0303 333 4300 number does not replace the original 0151 907 8300 number but is masked over it. Therefore, customers who call 0151 907 8300 will continue to be answered and dealt with by the Contact Centre advisors as at present. We are however trying to steer customers away from using the 0151 424 2061 number which is a BT analogue number and does present issues to inbound coming calls through the Contact Centre.
- 3.7 In order to promote a 'One number for your Council' officers have been asked to start using the 0303 number on all new stationery but only when they require to reorder/amend existing stationary. Other publicity material will be produced using existing budgets allowing the new number to be introduced at minimal cost.
- 3.8 Alongside this initiative officers are being encouraged to use their Direct Dial numbers to help reduce the large amount of 'switchboard' calls that are currently handled. Fully utilising this facility could save significant sums of money.

#### **4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no policy implications associated with this report.

#### **5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

- 5.1 Ensuring that the cost of contacting the Council is kept to a minimum for the public helps ensure that people access the services they are entitled to.

#### **6 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 6.1 There are no specific risks associated with this report.

#### **7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 7.1 By ensuring the cost of calls to the Council is kept to a minimum it will hopefully prevent the cost of a call being a barrier for people on low income contacting the Council.

#### **8 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

- 8.1 None