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**Confidential discussion paper**

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Agenda item 15

CA047

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**Transport for London Complaints Line**

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To look at the options open to London TravelWatch to pursue as alternatives to Transport for London's (TfL) 0845 numbers for complainants.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That members discuss the alternative strategies that follow. It is recommended that there is a clear distinction between information giving services and complaint/monetary transaction services. In this case it would be acceptable for the TfL passenger information line to charge on the basis for cost recovery, but for complaints and Oyster helpline they should be free to the user.

**3 Information**

- 3.1 London TravelWatch drew TfL's attention to two recent initiatives at the meeting with TfL personnel on 17 March 2010 :

- The DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) have recently negotiated an agreement with the main mobile companies for calls to the 0800 Benefit Claim lines to be free (see <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/press-releases/2010/january-2010/dwp007-150110.shtml>). It was not clear how this had been achieved. It was possible that DWP had agreed to compensate the Mobile companies for lost revenue. This would probably not, in the current climate, be an option for TfL. It was possible that DWP had been able to get a concession from the mobile companies on this matter in view of the sensitivity of a particular section of the community being both dependent on Pay As You Go (PAYG) mobiles and needing to use DWP help lines. If the latter were the case, TfL would find it difficult to achieve this, although we did suggest that they might be able to join forces with other groups like London TravelWatch, for example, Passenger Focus, Consumer Focus, etc in any negotiations with the mobile companies.

- The Helplines Association has negotiated a “mobile-friendly” (but not free) rate for their members with an 0808 80 number (see <http://helplines.community.officelive.com/mobilefriendlyfreephones.aspx>) capped at 2.1p per incoming minute. There might be an argument for TfL joining this organisation. London TravelWatch should certainly investigate whether membership would bring advantages to our clients.

### 3.2 Wider initiatives with Ofcom

- 3.2.1 It might also be worth talking to Ofcom about some more far reaching possibilities. For instance, one of the main problems with queuing systems is that the caller has to pay for the time that they are waiting in the queue, which can be many minutes. There could be some technical fix whereby some lower rates could be payable during queuing times, or calls not answered until people are at the head of the queue.
- 3.2.2 Annabelle Goymer (Contact Centre Transformation Programme Manager, TfL) mentioned that it is possible for organisations to apply to Ofcom to enable them to charge a flat fee for calls, for example, 10 pence a call irrespective of duration, and irrespective of where the call originated. However, this can take two years to progress and the costs to TfL are unknown. This is an issue that affected consumers in many areas and therefore the best way to resolve this situation it to form a joint approach with TfL, Passenger Focus and Consumer Focus. TfL have indicated that they would like to see a uniform charging system.

## 4 Equalities implications

- 4.1 The issue of premium telephone numbers presents serious equalities and inclusion implications for access to information on the grounds of ability to pay. This is particularly important to low income groups who many no longer use or never had access to telephone landlines, and who rely on mobile telephony.

## 5 Legal implications

- 5.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider – and where it appears to the Committee to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to - any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

## 6 Financial implications

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.