



# Parentline Plus

Annual Review 2007-2008

**Free\* Parentline**  
0808 800 2222

**Free Textphone**  
0800 783 6783

**Website**  
[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

**Email**  
[parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk)

 **Parentlineplus**  
because instructions aren't included  
**0808 800 2222**  
[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

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## Letter from the Chair

Each year of our lives reveals expected and surprising, joy, frustrations, disappointments and achievements. This year for Parentline Plus has been no exception:

- The retirement of our quite exceptional Chief Executive Dorit Braun.
- The winning of a significant three year grant for our Parentline and a contract for innovative web and mobile services from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).
- Significant staff changes at senior level.
- Review of our work in the light of national and local commissioning developments.
- Renewed focus on hard to reach families.

The current economic climate combined with the predictions of higher food, fuel and general living expenses will present significant and probably profound challenges for the families and children to whom we offer support. Parentline Plus is equipped to meet this challenge, but it will not be easy as the spectre of increasing poverty raises its head.

We were relieved and delighted to have won a significant three year grant for our phone line, Parentline, a three year grant to expand our Extended Telephone Support service and a large 15 month contract for further innovative web and mobile services, from the DCSF, after a five year period of year on year funding. This has given us the confidence to prioritise work to ensure that we can become a household name, and to make sure that every parent and carer has heard of us.

At local level, we reviewed our work in the light of the national developments and guidance from the DCSF to local authorities. Very sadly, we decided to withdraw from our hugely successful 'Parents Together' programme of courses, because we simply could not compete with overseas programmes which had Randomised Control Trials. Believing that if delivered by skilled practitioners these programmes are valuable to parents, but cognisant of the fact that such programmes are least likely to be accessed by 'hard to reach' parents, including fathers, black and minority ethnic parents and those living with high levels of social and economic disadvantage, we decided to focus our local work on reaching out to such parents, building their trust and enabling them to find and use the services that they need.



## Review of the year

This change has not been easy for our staff, and I would like to acknowledge the huge efforts that they have made not only to adjust to this tightening of our local offer, but also to embrace it with energy and enthusiasm.

In January 2008 our Chief Executive, Dorit Braun, announced her intention to take early retirement in order to pursue other interests. We were very sad to agree to this, but appreciated her reasons. Dorit's contribution to the organisation and to the parents and families it is set up to serve has been outstanding. She will be much missed as a charismatic personality and dynamic CE, and more importantly for her leadership and her undying commitment to the ethos and objects of the charity. However, the trustees have confidence and believe that the organisation is strong enough to move forward under the guidance of a new Chief Executive.

On a personal note, ill health has prevented my taking as active a role as I would have liked for a few months. I would like to thank Jabeer Butt, Vice Chair, for stepping in, and to thank all my fellow trustees for their support.

**Michael Leadbetter**  
Chair

**“Had reason, once again to use the helpline on the weekend and once again the lady I spoke to was very helpful, sympathetic, understanding and non judgemental and that really makes a difference when you are already beating yourself up about your parenting skills so could you pass on my gratitude to the service!”**

### Overview

During the year we have focused on continuing to offer and expand our national services and positioning our local services. We understand that parents' needs are varied and difficult to categorise. We also understand that many parents feel a sense of shame and stigma about seeking help, so have continued to make huge efforts to reach parents in their own communities to build their trust and confidence in the services we offer. We continue to offer free, confidential parent-to-parent services, to offer volunteering opportunities and to use a model of helping that puts the parent and their expertise as the key resource for themselves and their family.<sup>1</sup> Parentline Plus services are offered primarily at levels 1-3 of need, offering support for universal, targeted and specialist needs.<sup>2</sup>

All our services are underpinned by the availability of Parentline every day of the year, 24 hours a day. And as parents become accustomed to using different channels of communication, we have also been extending the ways that they can access support from us via the internet and email. We will be looking at how to make best use of mobile technology to reach parents without access to the internet in the coming year.

At local level, the commissioning environment has been extremely challenging and difficult. The emphasis by government on the delivery of evidence-based programmes has not always been understood or interpreted in ways that can fund grass roots, community-based work. The processes have often been delayed, very complex and time consuming. At the same time, government policy and funding have resulted in more statutory agencies providing their own parenting programmes, although sometimes with very low take-up by parents. We therefore decided to position ourselves at the community level, which we believe is our unique offer to parents. We focused our efforts on social marketing, outreach and engagement activities, so that we could build parents' trust and enable them to reach the services they most need.

### Monitoring systems

During the year as part of the implementation of our ICT strategy, we introduced improved monitoring systems. This means that we can monitor the take-up of all our services and their impact. For local services, we use a questionnaire that asks parents to assess the impact of our service on their children and on themselves and this feedback is then used to further refine our services, as well as to demonstrate the links between our work and the Every Child Matters framework.

### Quality assurance

Parentline Plus is committed to providing the best possible quality services and we understand that quality is intimately connected to the training and support that we provide to volunteers and staff. In January we were proud to achieve re-recognition of the Investors in People standard for the third time. We also gained accreditation of the Telephone Helplines Association Quality Mark for parenting helplines in March 2008. We reviewed all our training, policies and procedures against the National Occupational Standards for working with parents, and we are fully compliant with these standards.

We also monitor compliments and complaints on a regular basis. We are proud to have received 324 unsolicited compliments during the year and these are shared with all volunteers and staff. We received a total of 26 complaints during the year. All complaints are investigated and an annual report presented to trustees that gives details of learning from the complaint and actions we took to remedy any weakness.



<sup>1</sup> See How helping works for details of our model - [www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk/cmsFiles/policy\\_briefings/How-helping-works021106.pdf](http://www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk/cmsFiles/policy_briefings/How-helping-works021106.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Definitions of level of parent needs vary but Parentline Plus defines them as: Level 1: universal services for all parents ; Level 2: targeted and preventive support for parents who find it difficult to access services ; Level 3: intensive support and interventions for parents with multiple needs; Level 4: specialist interventions for parents with severe and immediate needs, where there are child protection issues or where mandatory measures are enforced e.g. an Antisocial Behaviour Order. It is important to recognise that parents at all levels of need access services at levels 1 - 3 so sensitive signposting and referral are key skills for our practitioners.

# Parentline Plus national universal services

Parentline  
0808 800 2222

**“Thank you. The lovely lady I spoke to helped me see what was going on. It was like she had turned a light on and suddenly it was all clear and I knew what I had to do.”**

**“Until now I have felt like running away, I feel better for talking to Parentline Plus.”**

We answered 112,970 calls on Parentline; answering 85% of callers who rang us and 68% of them were answered on their first attempt. Our pioneering case-management system, to handle very frequent and prolific callers, continues to work well and to free up capacity on the main lines.

We were delighted to be awarded grant funding for three years for the continued expansion of Parentline and other national services from the DCSF.

We were also awarded funding to develop further innovative work using web and mobile technology, so that we can develop new responses to parents' needs using a variety of communications' channels.

In October, we introduced an improved data collection system. The system enables us to protect caller confidentiality while collecting and analysing the reasons that parents call us. We trained all call takers to use this system. The anonymous data collected gives considerable insight into the demographic

profile of our service users and their key concerns. We will be producing regular reports on this data for policy makers. The main issue parents called Parentline about between October 2007 and March 2008 was their children's behaviour; the main adult issue for our callers was their mental health. Full Parentline data reports can be obtained from [www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk)

## Email support

[parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk)

**“After your email I put your suggestions into practice. It worked. I feel like I have got my daughter back and I know how much we love each other.”**

We responded to 4,526 emails, Q&A's from the website and web stories, with each parent receiving an individual response. This service mirrors that offered by Parentline, and offers a route for parents who prefer to write about their difficulties.

## Website

[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

**“This teenage parenting thing can be a nightmare, but rest assured that you are far from alone it has helped me enormously just to know that other people on this forum despair as much as I do from time to time and probably also think they are the worst ever parent which none of us are, I'm sure.”**

The number of parents using our website continues to expand. This was aided by funding to pay for sponsored links, making it easier for parents to find

the site. We had 421,000 visitors to our website with nearly 3 million pages viewed. Parents downloaded nearly 80,000 leaflets. The website has interactive features, and very popular community pages. It provides a mix of information, signposting and parent-to-parent support for very high volumes of parents, and we will be extending our website offers during the coming year.

## Print information

**“Thank you for the great advice booklets on teenagers. I have a very rebellious boy of 14, who tries to smoke, drink and argue you into submission as much as he can get away with. It is exhausting and I feel so defeated sometimes. Your teens series is a huge guideline to help me communicate with him, thank you so much!”**

Our print information materials offer parents tips and strategies on a range of issues that parents have themselves identified when ringing Parentline or searching for information on our website. All the materials are tested with parents before publication. They are used extensively as part of our local outreach work, can be downloaded from our website, provided to parents by a wide range of professionals and agencies working with families, and can be sent to parents following a call to Parentline. We distributed 271,000 leaflets during the year.

# Parentline Plus national targeted services

As a first port of call to parents, we offer generalist support, information, signposting and referral. Parents contacting us have a very wide range of difficulties, some of which need more specialist support.

During the year we funded direct referrals to Children's Legal Centre because of the acute shortage of free, family legal advice that our callers so desperately needed. Other referrals were funded via grant funding received directly by the other organisations. We referred<sup>3</sup> 6% of calls to our own Extended Telephone Support service, 2% of calls to Children's Legal Centre, 1% to YoungMinds specialist call-back service and just under 1% to One Parent Families/Gingerbread for specialist advice. We signposted 3% of calls to the dedicated line for our callers run by the Advisory Centre for Education.

## Extended Telephone Support

**“Everything has changed in our house. I feel as if I am in control now and not that the children are controlling me. Things are nice and calm. I also now enjoy hearing ..... say that 'It's no fun arguing with you anymore, 'cos you don't shout back'. These calls have really helped me!”**

<sup>3</sup> A referral means that we pass on caller details to the partner organisation who then contacts them. We have confidential systems to pass on these details. A signpost means that we give the organisation's information to parents who choose whether or not to contact them.

We offer Extended Telephone Support to provide a coaching-based model of support to parents individually or via telephone-based groups. This service reaches parents with severe and entrenched difficulties, who are isolated and find it difficult to access other services.

During the year 1,235 parents received individual telephone support and 335 parents attended telephone groups. An independent evaluation of this service was completed by the Thomas Coram Research Unit which showed that this service is extremely effective in supporting parents with complex and entrenched difficulties, and through them, their children.<sup>4</sup>

We will be expanding this service and offering other agencies the ability to refer parents to this service with funding received from the DCSF.



## Parentline Plus network of area offices

**“It was great to meet other parents. And because of that group, there is much less shouting in my home. I act and don't react now.”**

Parentline Plus has a network of area offices that support, enhance and deliver our parent-to-parent services. Five of our area offices operate as call centres for Parentline, and all offer a mix of local face-to-face services. The very difficult commissioning and funding environment led to careful reviews of all the offices and their work. Following these reviews, trustees made the strategic decision, with regret, to close three offices by the end of June 2008. Trustees fully acknowledge the valuable work the staff and volunteers achieved at these offices in supporting parents and families over the years.

The focus of area offices is to increase the availability of local parenting support at levels 1,2 and 3 of the continuum of need; add to local social capital amongst excluded parents and communities and ensure that parents participate in the development and delivery of family and parenting support services. Our area offices do not seek to compete with other local providers (statutory or voluntary) but to add value to their work and to ensure that the local area has a mix of provision across the different levels of parents' needs.

## Parentline Plus local face-to-face services:

### Outreach

**“Last month Parentline Plus came to our High School to introduce themselves. As we all know being a parent isn't always an easy job. At times it can be very challenging. The evening was a really enjoyable social evening. It enabled parents to talk to each other about their own experiences of bringing up their own children and some of the challenges they have experienced. Sometimes it can be good to talk and sometimes just as good to listen and learn that we are not the only parents trying to do the best for our children.”**

Evidence continues to grow that parents are reluctant to attend longer parenting programmes without any prior work to engage with them and build their trust and confidence. Parentline Plus has focused on building on our successful outreach work. We target this work to reach the most excluded parents with a variety of approaches, including stands and stalls at shopping centres, schools and other community venues and events, local poster displays at pharmacies, surgeries, and similar community venues, mail shots and fun events.

We gave information to almost 30,000 parents via local events and outreach work and we engaged with 13,467 parents at such events, talking with them about their needs and the different

ways that they might wish to seek support from us and from others.

Networking with professionals is another facet of our outreach service and we attend a variety of conferences and events as well as liaising with a wide range of local service providers. We had over 20,000 contacts with professionals over the year enabling other agencies and professionals to signpost parents to our national and local services.

### Individual Support

**“My kids say welcome to the new mum.”**

This service mirrors the Extended Telephone Support service but on a face-to-face basis. Following a careful research and development process, this service has now been rolled out to all our area offices. The service is tailored to meet the needs of each parent, offering between one to six sessions of support at a local community venue, including schools and children's centres. As with the telephone version of the service, it is targeted to meet the needs of parents who are isolated and with entrenched difficulties. During the year 756 parents received this service from our area offices.

### Groups and workshops

**“In the past as a parent I thought love is the most important need for children but now I recognise having a good guidance is as important as love is.”**

<sup>4</sup> Please see our website for the summary evaluation [www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk/index.php?id=140](http://www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk/index.php?id=140)

## Research and Development

Parents who attend our group and workshop sessions benefit from Parentline Plus' decades of experience of delivering high quality evidence-based parenting support.<sup>5</sup> We focus on helping parents to develop their understanding of themselves and their children and to learn core communication skills for family life from babyhood to teenage years. The key objective of our groups and workshops is to enable parents to bring up children who grow into emotionally healthy and resilient adults, able to take responsibility for themselves, their behaviour and their choices.

During the year 338 parents attended multi-session facilitated support groups; 204 parents attended single session support groups, 2,302 parents attended Parents Together courses and 2,509 parents attended workshops.



We continue to develop new ways of reaching and working with parents. Many of the exciting developments have been using internet-based technology including our online communities' section on our website. New funding from the DCSF has enabled us to start work on an exciting web-based project to support parents of teenagers which will launch in September 2008.

Our partnership with Barclaycard as part of Horizons was successfully completed this year giving support to over 9,300 lone parents. In the words of our funder:

**“The report shows clearly that not only have you achieved the targets we agreed but based on the detailed analysis of feedback and case studies, provided life changing support for thousands of lone parents”.**

The DCSF-funded Time to Talk project was a challenge. Its aim was to reduce the inter-generational cycle of teenage pregnancy through a mixture of face-to-face work with parents in targeted hot-spot areas and social marketing and information. While reaching fewer parents than originally hoped, it has produced valuable learning, particularly regarding the criteria for success in sensitive community development projects.

This year has also seen the completion of the first phase of the Be Someone to Tell government-funded anti-bullying project. We will be developing this work and building on the successful community pilots.

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation-funded Training the Trainers project was also completed. This project tested out new ways of extending our services to vulnerable and socially excluded parents and allowed us to develop partnerships with Deaf Parenting UK and the Refugee Council. The project illustrated considerable learning as well as excellent outcomes for parents and other partner voluntary organisations.

## Diversity and Equality

This year our equalities' specialist developed training for all staff and volunteers which was delivered to each team and area office. She also undertook a review of all policies, procedures and services to 'equality check' these and a few updates were then implemented.

We are clear that our commitment to equality and diversity demands that we make special and targeted efforts to reach those parents who might not otherwise access our services. Next year we will make sure that higher numbers of parents on low incomes and from black and minority ethnic communities than are in the local population will access our services. We have made huge efforts to reach fathers as all too often fathers assume parenting services are aimed at mothers only. Male callers represented 25% of short calls to Parentline and 16% of long calls. We continue to reach many more lone parents than in the population as a whole. Lone parents represented 49.6% of callers to Parentline during October 2007 - March 2008, and are 23% of families with dependent children.

Stepfamilies are another group who find it very difficult to access services, and represented 10.5% of callers to Parentline.

## Working with professionals

Our external training menu continues to be popular and we have extended our client-base. We deliver training for frontline workers offering a number of courses, including one-day, topic-specific workshops, such as 'Supporting Parents Dealing with Bullying', enabling practitioners to work more confidently in supporting parents worried about their children being bullied. And five-day accredited courses, designed to develop practitioners' knowledge, skills and understanding to support family-group work and facilitate parenting courses. In addition we have developed a Resource Pack for practitioners to promote and enhance good practice in the delivery of parenting support.

In the last year we have delivered external training to over 157 individuals, across England and Wales who have come from a range of voluntary and statutory services, including Social and Health Care, Education, Children's Information Services, Drugs and Alcohol Abuse services and the DCSF.



<sup>5</sup> Please see our website for evaluation evidence - [www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk/index.php?id=92](http://www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk/index.php?id=92)

## Lobbying

We know that we will never be able to provide services to meet the needs of the estimated 24 million people in a parenting role in the UK. We therefore continue to work with commissioners and policy makers campaigning for more high quality provision which meet the needs of parents and carers. We undertook consultations with parents who use our services, via focus groups, mailings, surveys and discussion groups. These findings, together with the rich and unique data on why parents are calling Parentline, enable us to campaign and lobby with confidence and to act as a voice for parents.

During the year the Chief Executive and senior Parentline Plus staff have undertaken regular liaison with ministers and senior policy officials. We were delighted to play host to the Rt Hon Kevin Brennan MP the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children, Young People and Families, who visited central office and our Kentish Town-based call centre.

We have been involved in the development of a wide range of policy initiatives, including:

Department for Work and Pensions on the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission; Department for Children, Schools and Families on Information, Support, Advice and Guidance; Social Exclusion Task Force on Think Family and the Department of Health, Health Visitor Review.

We have continued to add to our list of influential briefing papers, analysing information on service user concerns:

- 'Eat your greens: what parents say about improving their family's diet' July 2007
- 'She simply snapped, she'd had enough: what parents say about bullying' January 2008
- 'Will they ever fly the nest: what parents say about living with young adults' February 2008

The Family Policy Alliance (our alliance with Family Action and Family Rights Group) has been active in lobbying on issues that are shared by the three member organisations.

## Press and public relations and marketing

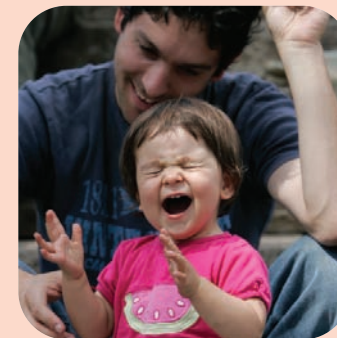
The team has continued to achieve qualitative and positive coverage for Parentline Plus in an array of national and regional media ensuring parents are given a voice. We succeeded in securing 1,354 pieces of coverage in the media for the year April 2007 - March 2008, averaging 112 hits a month. The press office has been monitoring the equivalent advertising cost for the print editorial secured each month. Between April 2007 and March 2008 it is estimated that the equivalent advertising costs for the print editorial secured during that time totalled nearly £6 million.

## Outlook

In October 2007 the trustees agreed our strategic priorities for the coming year:

- To develop and market our brand and national services so that we become a household name.
- To extend and develop our national services, seeking opportunities to use technology to meet the needs of all parents now and in the future.
- To focus our local services to provide outreach, engagement, information, signposting, enabling volunteering and influencing local services and strategies.
- To raise funds; to develop and implement plans to improve the long term financial stability of the charity, including rebuilding reserves; to work to a breakeven budget.

A detailed Business Plan is available to show how we will meet these priorities during 2008/09.



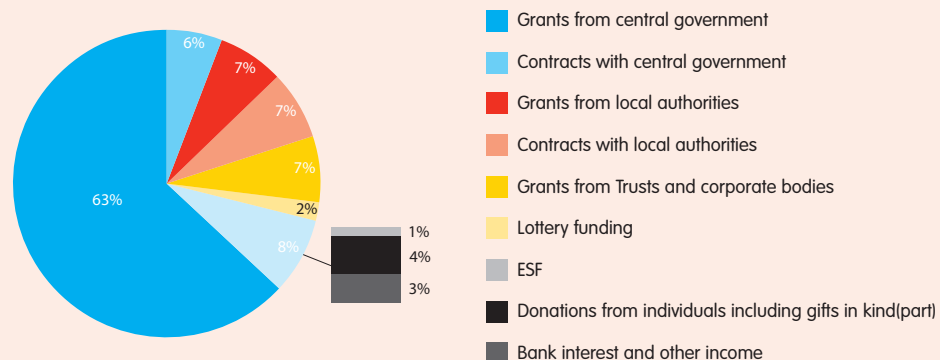
# Financial results

## Financial review for 2007-2008

During the year the charity raised £6.04m and spent £6.26m, which resulted in us using up £0.07m of our free unrestricted reserves, £0.05m of our designated reserves and £0.1m of our restricted funds balances. Our free reserves (which are stated taking account of investment in fixed assets) now stand at £0.80m.

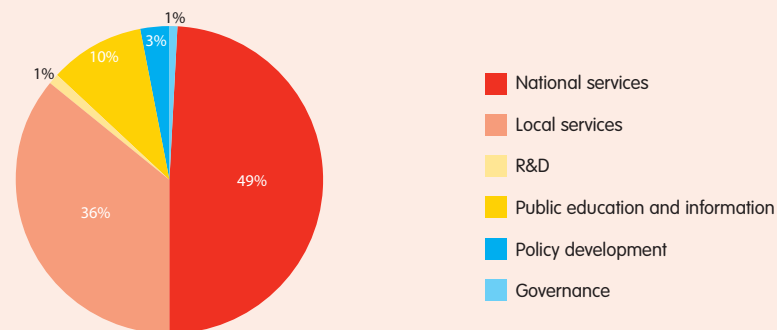
Our income comes mainly from central government £4.24m (69%) and we receive funds from local authorities (14%) and from corporate bodies and trusts (10%) and individuals (4% including gifts in kind). The remainder of our income comes from bank interest and sale of publications (3%).

### Income 2007-2008



84% of our income is restricted. i.e. can only be spent on specified work.

### Expenditure 2007-2008



As the chart shows, the bulk of our expenditure is on our national services, mainly on our telephone helpline, costs for which remained static at £3.11m. Policy work expenditure reduced very slightly to £0.16m (p/y £0.18m). Governance costs remained at 1.3%.

During the year the charity used the designated funds as agreed by the board.

Trustees would like to thank all those who funded our work during 2007-2008. Trustees would also like to thank the charity's volunteers who generously provided 17,502 hours of their time to support parents. This equates to £0.23m gifts in kind.



We have a London-based central office  
and 10 area offices operating across:

- The North West **0151 201 7876**
- The North East **0191 281 4881**
- The Midlands **0115 993 9812**
- The East **01707 270 696**
- London **020 7284 5536 (North) and 020 8689 2252 (South)**
- The South East **01702 554 782 (Essex) and 0238 0645 900 (Hampshire)**
- The South West **0117 953 5525**

#### Our services include

- A free\* confidential, 24-hour Parentline **0808 800 2222**
- A free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment **0800 783 6783**
- Email support [parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk](mailto:parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk)
- Individual support
- Parenting groups and workshops
- Information materials
- A helpful, interactive website for parents [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)
- An online community for parents [www.parentlineplus.org.uk/community](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk/community)
- An online one-stop shop for professionals [www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplusforprofessionals.org.uk)
- A new website for parents concerned about bullying [www.besomeonetotell.org.uk](http://www.besomeonetotell.org.uk)
- A social networking site for parents of teenagers [www.gotateenager.org.uk](http://www.gotateenager.org.uk)
- Training for professionals
- Volunteer opportunities



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Central office telephone number: 020 7284 5500  
\*Free from landlines and most mobile networks.