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## Nationwide building society announces it is to axe EIGHT free helplines by the end of the year

- Nationwide customers with queries may soon have to pay to speak to an adviser
- Baroness Ros Altmann says Nationwide trying to push all of its customers online

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Britain's biggest building society will axe eight free helplines by the end of the year.

It means Nationwide customers with mortgage, loan, online and mobile banking queries may soon have to pay to speak to an adviser.

Phoning its general enquiries line will also incur a local rate charge — usually 16p per minute from landlines and up to 65p a minute from mobiles.



**Cut off: Nationwide customers with mortgage, loan online and mobile banking queries may soon have to pay to speak to an adviser**

The building society has typically offered two numbers since 2019 — a free 0800 line and a local rate 0345 alternative.

But it intends to scrap the 0800 option by 2023. It is understood helplines for bereavement services and fraud will continue to be free.

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Consumer campaigner Baroness Ros Altmann says: 'Nationwide is trying to push all of its customers online. However, many elderly and vulnerable customers do not feel comfortable with this.'

Lloyds, NatWest and HSBC have fee-charging 0345 numbers for general queries. However, Santander and Barclays have free 0800 lines.

It is the latest in a line of cost-cutting measures by Nationwide. The building society scrapped annual paper statements in 2018 for seven million savings account holders, so customers have to go online or in-store to check their balances.

On top of that, all banks and building societies have drastically scaled back on customer service as they axe branches and replace staff with self-service machines.

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Banks have closed more than 1,259 branches nationwide since 2020, according to the consumer group Which?

The result is customers find it difficult to speak to a member of staff in person.

A Nationwide spokesman says: 'We have started to transfer some of our telephone numbers from freephone to local rate numbers, bringing us in line with many competitors.'

'Most of our members will not be impacted as they have inclusive packages with their mobile phone or landline.'

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