

Communication network offences (Revised 2017)

Communications Act 2003, ss. 127(1) and 127(2)

Effective from: 24 April 2017

Triable only summarily:

Maximum: Unlimited fine and/or 6 months

Offence range: Band A fine – 15 weeks' custody

Step 1 – Determining the offence category

The Court should determine the offence category using the table below.

Category 1 Higher culpability **and** greater harm

Category 2 Higher culpability **and** lesser harm **or** lower culpability **and** greater harm

Category 3 Lower culpability **and** lesser harm

The court should determine the offender's culpability and the harm caused with reference **only** to the factors below. Where an offence does not fall squarely into a category, individual factors may require a degree of weighting before making an overall assessment and determining the appropriate offence category.

CULPABILITY demonstrated by one or more of the following:

Factors indicating higher culpability

- Targeting of a vulnerable victim
- Targeting offending (in terms of timing or location) to maximise effect
- Use of threats (including blackmail)
- Threat to disclose intimate material or sexually explicit images
- Campaign demonstrated by multiple calls and/or wide distribution
- False calls to emergency services
- Offence motivated by, or demonstrating, hostility based on any of the following characteristics or presumed characteristics of the victim(s): religion, race, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity

Factors indicating lower culpability

- All other cases

HARM demonstrated by one or more of the following:

Factors indicating greater harm

- Substantial distress or fear to victim(s) **or** moderate impact on several victims
- Major disruption

Factors indicating lesser harm

- All other cases

Step 2 – Starting point and category range

Having determined the category at step one, the court should use the corresponding starting point to reach a sentence within the category range in the table below. The starting point applies to all offenders irrespective of plea or previous convictions.

Offence Category	Starting Point	Range
Category 1	9 weeks' custody	High level community order – 15 weeks' custody
Category 2	Medium level community order	Low level community order – High level community order
Category 3	Band B fine	Band A fine – Band C fine

The court should then consider adjustment for any aggravating or mitigating factors. The following is a **non-exhaustive** list of additional factual elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender. Identify whether any combination of these, or other relevant factors, should result in an upward or downward adjustment from the sentence arrived at so far.

Factors increasing seriousness

Statutory aggravating factors:

- Previous convictions, having regard to a) the **nature** of the offence to which the conviction relates and its **relevance** to the current offence; and b) the **time** that has elapsed since the conviction
- Offence committed whilst on bail

Other aggravating factors:

- Failure to comply with current court orders including restraining order
- Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision
- Offence committed whilst subject to sex offender notification requirements
- Offence linked to domestic abuse
- Abuse of trust
- Targeting emergency services (where not taken into account at step one)

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

- No previous convictions **or** no relevant/recent convictions
- Remorse
- Good character and/or exemplary conduct
- Isolated incident
- Age and/or lack of maturity where it affects the responsibility of the offender
- Mental disorder or learning disability
- Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives
- Limited awareness or understanding of the offence

Step 3 – Consider any factors which indicate a reduction, such as assistance to the prosecution

The court should take into account sections 73 and 74 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (assistance by defendants: reduction or review of sentence) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

Step 4 – Reduction for guilty pleas

The court should take account of any potential reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with section 144 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the *Guilty Plea* guideline.

Step 5 – Totality principle

If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the *Offences Taken into Consideration and Totality* guideline.

Step 6 – Compensation and ancillary orders

In all cases, the court should consider whether to make compensation and/or other ancillary orders including restraining orders.

Step 7 – Reasons

Section 174 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

Step 8 – Consideration for time spent on bail

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003.