

**TO: ADULT SOCIAL CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL
17 JANUARY 2012**

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE BLUE BADGE REFORM STRATEGY
Director of Adult Social Care and Health**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Overview and Scrutiny of the changes to the Blue Badge Scheme and the transfer of responsibility to the Council which were implemented from 1st January 2012.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 **That the changes and additional responsibilities placed upon Adult Social Care and Health in administering the Reformed Blue Badge Scheme are noted.**
- 2.2 **That subject to the outcome of budget consultation, the cost of a fulltime Blue Badge Assessor/Co-ordinator was agreed by the Executive.**
- 2.3 **Note that the Executive have agreed to raise the charge of a Blue Badge from £2.00 for three years to £10.00 from 1st January 2012.**
- 2.4 **Note the progress made in readiness for go live 1st January 2012.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 The government has announced a significant reform of the Blue Badge Scheme aimed at ensuring a fair allocation of badges against a backdrop of rising demand so that the scheme remains sustainable in the long term.
- 3.2 The new reforms were implemented on the 1st January 2012 include extra responsibilities allocated to the Council as follows:-
- Transfer of current NHS spend on badge eligibility assessments to local authorities.
 - Delivering efficiency savings and improving customer services by establishing a common improvement project (Blue Badge Improvement Service) that will deliver operational efficiency savings. This project is expected to be self-funding and should deliver efficiency savings nationally of between £6.5 and £20 million per year.
 - Enforcement procedures which are in accordance with governing legislation.
 - In improving customer services, an online application facility will be developed in partnership with Customer Services during 2012. It should result in faster, more automatic renewals for people whose circumstances do not change between renewal periods.
 - Improved and effective prevention of abuse by introducing a new badge design that is harder to copy, forge or alter. Implement (via the common service improvement project) new arrangements for printing and distribution to prevent fraud and effectively monitor cancelled, lost and stolen badges.

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- 3.3 To help local authorities better cover costs and to enable the delivery of the new badge design and the common improvement project, the maximum fee for a badge that the local authorities can charge will rise from £2 to £10.
- 3.4 In June 2011, funding for GP assessment was transferred from Health to the Local Authority, therefore, the cost of individuals needing further assessment to determine eligibility falls to the Local Authority.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no alternative options. The Local Authority must adhere to legislation relating to administering the Blue Badge Scheme.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Blue Badge (Disabled Persons' Parking) Scheme was introduced in 1971 under Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for the legislation that sets out the framework for the Scheme.
- 5.2 Local Authorities are responsible for the day-to-day administration and enforcement of the Blue Badge Scheme. They are also now responsible for determining and implementing administrative, assessment and enforcement procedures which are in accordance with governing legislation.
- 5.3 On 14th February 2011, the Transport Minister, Norman Baker announced a programme of reforms to modernise the Blue Badge Scheme. The measures taken forward are designed to tackle fraud and misuse and to make the scheme fairer and more sustainable for those disabled people who most rely on it.

Changes to eligibility

- 5.4 Eligibility is extended to include disabled children between the ages of 2 and 3 with specific medical conditions. It also provides continuous automatic entitlement to a badge for severely disabled service personnel and veterans who have a permanent and substantial disability which causes inability or considerable difficulty walking.
- 5.5 Under the new scheme, assessment will be required for individuals who are not automatically eligible and under the discretionary criteria may require, from the information on the self assessment form, an assessment as to eligibility which would previously have had further medical information requested from the GP. This assessment would then be considered by a panel.

Work Undertaken by Bracknell Forest Council

- 5.6 As a trial and from April 2011, Bracknell Forest Council has been allocating these assessments to a part time member of staff as additional work. The assessment involves travel, a home visit and completion of paperwork. These assessments are used by panel to make an informed decision on eligibility.
- 5.7 It has been recognised by panel that this information has been invaluable in the decision making process. It also supports the DfT's good practice for the LA "to provide scope for an applicant to be referred for an independent mobility assessment

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if they are unable to make a clear and robust decision on eligibility using cross checking or desk assessment”.

- 5.8 Since the removal of the additional medical information from GPs, it has been noticeable that there has been an increase in assessments. At present, individuals can wait up to 4 weeks for a visit. If an assessment clinic was available and delivered by a fully qualified healthcare professional, such as a physiotherapist or occupational therapist with an understanding of the blue badge eligibility, more assessments could be completed on a weekly basis.
- 5.9 With the pressure across Government and the public sector to deliver more effective services to customers, whilst cutting budgets and identifying efficiencies, local authorities are under even more pressure to do more with less.
- 5.10 The Blue Badge Improvement Service will provide:-
- Secure printing
 - Central database for statistical information
 - On-line eligibility checker
 - A secure, web-based service available over Government Connect (GCSx)
- 5.11 Customer Service is intended to be improved by making it quicker and easier renewals for people whose circumstances have not changed. Additionally, reminders can be sent centrally, via letter, email or text message (currently no reminders are sent).
- 5.12 The design of the new Blue Badge is intended to:-
- Help prevent fraud, making the badge harder to copy, forge and alter
 - Enable more effective enforcement
 - Enable effective control of badges reported as lost or stolen
 - Improve the quality and durability of the badge

Cost of Blue Badge

- 5.13 The administration of the Blue Badge Scheme has been a set fee of £2.00 since 1971 which was set by the Department for Transport. Due to the new requirements of the reform of Blue Badges, the Department for Transport has now stated that Local Authorities can raise the charge of the Blue Badge to a maximum of £10.00 per badge. This cost is for 3 years and will still not cover the total cost of the Blue Badge administration and assessment.

Progress to Date

- 5.14 Blue Badge Co-ordinator has been trained in ordering a blue badge from BBIS, the training was carried out via BBIS demonstrations. A new scanner has been ordered so that picture images are uploaded direct.
- 5.15 The Co-ordinator will now order the badges on-line from a company called Payne who will then issue the blue badge direct to the person, therefore, making this a more streamlined service which will speed up the service for people who meet the automatic criteria. This will be 1-2 weeks from when they first submit their application.
- 5.16 A new application form has been produced which enables more information to be gathered, this is essential for people who do not meet the automatic criteria. The

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person applying for a badge has to provide proof of identity and that they are a resident of Bracknell Forest.

- 5.17 If the badge is deemed discretionary then there is either a desk-top assessment or an assessment which is currently carried out in the person's home. Going forward there are plans to assess the viability of a clinic which may enable more assessments to be carried out.
- 5.18 The new administration of the blue badge has more rigorous checks that when ordering a new/renewal badge that it is cross checked against the national system for Dept of Works & Pensions which helps to prevent fraud/misuse/duplications of blue badges.
- 5.19 People who are not successful in their application will receive a full refund.

Moving Forward

- 5.20 A business case is currently being written to assist with understanding the benefits and cost of an Assessment clinic.
- 5.21 Under the new legislation people who are refused a badge can appeal to an appeals panel which must be heard by another person independent to those who made the initial decision. We are currently developing an appeals process to be agreed by the Blue Badge Project Board.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The Public Sector disability duties under the Equality Act will need to consider as part of the process of setting the fee level for issuing and renewing blue badges.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The change in responsibility for assessing eligibility of claimants to Local Authorities from the PCT was reflected by a funding transfer covered by the Health Reform Grant element of the non ring fenced Learning Disability and Health Reform Grant. The funding for a Co-ordinator/Assessor is £35,000 and is included in the departmental pressures for 2012/13. The cost of implementation from January to March 2012 will be met from existing budgets. Additionally, the department has submitted the additional income (£5,000) from increasing the charges as savings.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Completed and attached to the report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Funding for a full time Blue Badge Co-ordinator is critical to the efficient running of the Blue Badge Scheme.
- 6.5 Enforcement of the Scheme is reliant on partnership working with Highways and Parking Enforcement Officers.

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- 6.6 Raising the cost of a blue badge from £2.00 for three years to £10.00 will be required to administer the new Blue Badge Scheme.

Other Officers

- 6.7 Cross Council Project Group is in operation to deliver the expectations of the Blue Badge Reforms.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 People with a disability
Access Advisory Group

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Meetings
National Consultation by DfT

Representations Received

- 7.3 Included in final document issued by DfT.
Chief Officer presented details of new scheme to the Access Advisory Panel, who were content with the proposals.

Background Papers

The Blue Badge Scheme Local Authority Guidance June 2011

More information is available at www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk (search for Blue Badge) or at www.direct.gov.uk

Contact for further information

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