

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET **10th November, 2011**

TITLE **National Government Changes to the Disabled Blue Badge Scheme**

REPORT OF **Head of Leisure, Libraries & Customer Services**

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

1.1 Background to the Scheme:

The Blue Badge Scheme is a Central Government controlled scheme overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT). They control the relevant legislation, issue operational guidance, produce and provide leaflets and information to the general public and oversee the enforcement of misuse. Telford & Wrekin Council administers the scheme on their behalf for Telford & Wrekin.

1.2 Changes to the Scheme:

After a recent review of the scheme by the DfT, a number of changes have/are being made to the way the scheme is administered. Including:-

- A new eligibility criteria which came into effect on 17 June 2011,
- A new administration process for the authorisation and assessment for the issuing of Blue Badges starting on 1st January 2012
- A new charging scheme which includes an opportunity for Local Authorities to charge a fee to cover administration costs for successful applications only and which must not exceed £10 and covers the full 3 years of issue.

1.3 This new approach will standardise the process by bringing all issuing authorities into line by having:

- a centralised on-line application form through the DirectGov website. There will still be the option of applying by post, or in person at First Point at the main council offices.
- the creation of a public National Helpline for general enquires.
- a centralised data base of all Blue Badges issued, with secure connections to aid parking enforcement agencies to access information to aid the enforcement of fraudulent misuse of Blue Badges.
- the centralisation of the printing and construction of the Blue Badge.
- Improve security embedded in a new design of the Badge similar in construction to that of a driving licence, but remain the same size as the current badge.

1.4 The current Blue Badge scheme operates at a budgeted net cost of £58,470 to the Council. The introduction of the new format of Blue Badge will result in the Council having to pay £4.60 plus VAT for each badge issued, to the Government appointed contractor, for its production. As this scheme is a national one and governed by legislation there is no other option available to the Council to issue Blue Badges. As a result it is proposed to introduce a charge of £10 for each successful blue badge application, an equivalent of £3.33 for each of the 3 years that the badge is issued

for, over half of which will be forwarded to the Government appointed contractor. The payment would only be taken after the issue of a Blue Badge has been approved.

- 1.5 Given that the new award criteria and the introduction of a small fee for the badge may lead to a small reduction in successful blue badge applications, we are forecasting a contribution of £11k per annum towards the net operating costs of £58K.
- 1.6 As part of these changes Central Government have promised relevant press releases will be made available and information will be supplied to relevant organisations. As part of the DfT consultations that have taken place over the last 2 to 3 years into reforming the Blue Badge Scheme, all national bodies have apparently been consulted.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **To note the changes in the Scheme that are being made by national government via the Department for Transport and approve the introduction of a £10 application fee for all successful applications from January 2012, at least half of which will be forwarded to the Government appointed contractor for the issue of the new badge.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In general, the principles of the Blue Badge scheme are not being changed. Telford & Wrekin will still retain all the current functionality of the assessment process and retain full ownership of the data.
- 3.2 Currently the cost of administering and providing the badges is funded from within Revenues & Benefits, using desktop assessments and where necessary assessments provided by the Physiotherapy Service at the Primary Care Trust (PCT). There is no charge to the customer for the issue of a blue badge under the current scheme.

4.0 SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

4.1 Financial implications

The current Blue Badge scheme operates at a budgeted net cost to the council of £58,470. The additional income generated from introducing a £10 charge would be £26k based on the current level of applications. Of this £11.9k will be paid across to the government leaving £14k additional income with the Council. The changes in the scheme will require the Council to cover a number of additional costs to meet its statutory obligations of administering the Blue Badge Scheme and the £10 application fee, which covers the full 3 years of issue, will assist in meeting those costs. It has been estimated that these costs together with a loss of income through a small reduction in number of claims will be approximately £3k. This leaves additional net income of £11k for the blue badge service. The additional income of £11k has already been included within the Council's savings proposals for 2012/13.

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4.2 Legal

Administering the Blue Badge Scheme is a statutory function and as such is covered by Central Government legislation. In order to issue Blue Badges after 1st January 2012 the Council has to adopt the production process as laid down by Central Government and pay the required fee.

4.3 Equalities

4.3.1 A separate Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) for Telford & Wrekin's implementation of the Blue Badge Scheme has not been completed as this scheme is controlled by central Government and overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT).

4.3.2 As EIA's, other supporting programme documents and consultation information are available to support the reform process it is recommended that Telford & Wrekin Council should adopt the existing documents as this is a national scheme governed by national legislation, which as a local authority we have to implement.

4.3.3 Although this scheme is controlled by Government legislation the implementation will be the responsibility of the Council so measures need to be in place to address any potential issues in the main areas of change outlined in this reform, with reference to the application fee. Due to the nature of the service there could be a disproportionate negative impact on disabled people if the relevant information is not made available so it is essential that notification of these changes are made available to current and potential service users as soon as is practically possible.

4.3.4 When looking at the implementation of this service we need to be mindful of how individuals will apply for a Blue Badge and so application forms will need to be available as hard copies for service users and not just through web based measures, payment of the application fee will need to include methods appropriate to our customer base, reassurance with reference to data, collection, security and clearer guidance in the form of bullet points attached to the issuing letter with regard to enforcement / misuse.