

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board Sub Committee  
**DATE:** 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Communities  
**SUBJECT:** Blue Badges  
**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To present to the Board a recommendation to increase the charge for Blue Badges based on new legislation.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- 1. the Board is requested to approve the increase in charge for Blue Badges from £2 to £10 effective from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012; and**
- 2. the Board is requested to approve a charge of £10 for any lost or stolen badges.**

**3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

3.1 The Blue Badge Scheme provides a national arrangement of parking concessions for some people with disabilities who travel either as drivers or passengers. The scheme allows badge holders to park close to their destination. Department for Transport (DfT) Regulations govern the Scheme but Local Authorities are responsible for ensuring that the regulations are met and processing applications and arranging any assessments for those who do not automatically qualify for a Blue Badge.

3.2 Since the scheme began in 1971 a £2 charge has been levied for a Blue Badge valid for three years. This amount is insufficient to cover the cost of the purchase of the badge, its administration and associated assessment costs.

**3.3 Reform Strategy**

3.3.1 On 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011 the Government announced wide ranging reforms to improve the Blue Badge scheme. One of the most significant changes DfT are making is to the design of the Blue Badge itself so that it is harder to copy, forge and alter.

3.3.2 Following a competitive procurement process, the Department of

Transport's evaluation panel has selected Northgate Information Solutions (Northgate) to develop and introduce the new badge design.

3.3.3 Northgate will print and supply the new PVC badge. They will also provide a central database, an on-line applications system and a single secure print service for the Blue Badge.

3.3.4 The benefits of this system will be:

- fraud prevention: automated checks can be made at application stage to prevent multiple and fraudulent applications;
- automated checks can reduce the need for time-consuming, paper-based checks on applicants by Local Authorities (LAs);
- improved customer services: BBIS should mean quicker, easier renewals for people whose circumstances have not changed;
- reminders can be sent centrally; records can move to different LAs with the badge holder if they move house;
- use of sophisticated anti-fraud technologies on the new badge at the lowest cost; and more security in the supply, storage and distribution;
- quick and easy enforcement checks by officers from anywhere in the country on badges issued by any LA, either using a desktop PC or SMARTphone;
- Significant operational and other efficiencies for LAs.

3.3.5 Halton Council has already signed a returned and Access Agreement committing to the Department of Transport's Blue Badge Improvement Service (BBIS).

3.3.6 A summary of all the Governments reforms to the Blue Badge Scheme can be found in the letter to Local Authority Chief Executive dated 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011 (see Appendix A)

3.3.6 Local Authorities will be charged £4.60 plus VAT for each badge with an option to provide a fast track return by recorded delivery for £ 2.45. It is intended that we shall use this fast track postal option for people with a terminal condition for who we have a fast track application process.

#### 3.4 Current Scheme

3.4.1 The charge for the Blue Badge has been held at £2 per badge since

the 1970's. This is the only charge made to receive a badge with three years validity.

3.4.2 The DfT is amending legislation to enable LAs to charge badge holders a maximum of £10 to cover the cost of BBIS, plus an amount towards the other admin costs incurred by LAs. It is intended that this increased charge will be used to pay for the new badge design and enable the improvements to the Blue Badge scheme. There are currently 8,129 badge holders in Halton Borough.

3.4.3 Within the unit price of £4.60, badge holders will also be sent the new design of the parking clock and the 'Your Rights and Responsibilities' leaflet. These two items are Crown Copyright and the DfT is responsible for agreeing the design and content of them. The leaflet tends to be updated at least once a year. For those LAs that sign up to BBIS, updates will automatically be updated via BBIS at no extra cost.

3.4.4 Badge holders in return should benefit from improved accessibility and fraud prevention benefits as abuse is reduced.

### 3.5 Options for charging for the Blue Badge Scheme

3.5.1 The legislation will commit the £10 (inc. VAT) fee to be charged for badges issued with start date on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 and beyond. However, the final decision on charging is down to the Local Authority. Halton Council therefore need to agree the charge – up to a maximum of £10 – for Blue Badges issued for a three year period.

3.5.2 As a minimum Halton Council would need to charge £4.60 + VAT which equals £5.52 so Halton should charge £6 per Blue Badge to cover the cost of the badge only. However this would only cover the basic costs. Any income over and above the cost of the Blue Badge could be used to cover administration and some of the costs of Occupational Therapy or GP assessments currently required and also cover the costs of people with a terminal illness to fast track their renewal or application by recorded delivery that would add £2.45. The proposal is to continue to charge these applicants the full cost of the Blue Badge. They are advised to apply for a Blue Badge to exempt them from hospital car park charges.

3.5.3 It is recommended that Halton Council charge the maximum of £10. The table below shows the annual income that would be achieved based on the current numbers of badges issued, taking out the cost of the Blue Badge +VAT. A survey of other local authorities shows that the majority are also considering a £10 charge (see Appendix B)

## 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Approval of revised charges will ensure that Halton Borough Council complies with the legislation due to come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 and it will enable the authority to notify people who will apply for renewals from January 2012.
- 4.2 The DfT is amending legislation to enable LAs to charge badge holders a maximum of £10 to cover the cost of BBIS, plus other admin costs incurred by LAs.
- 4.3 The legislation will commit the £10 (inc. VAT) fee to be charged for badges issued with start date on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2012 and beyond.
- 4.4 As a decision is reached on the amount to charge for the new Blue Badge, the policy will be updated to reflect this decision.
- 4.5 A copy of the proposals contained within this report has been publicised on the councils website for some weeks and at the time of writing this report no comments have been received.

## 5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Approval of revised charges will ensure that Halton Borough Council recovers sufficient income to cover the cost of the new Blue Badge plus some additional costs to cover any fast track registered post charges and cost of some OT or GP assessments.
- 5.2 The charge of £10 for a Blue Badge issued for a three year period still represents good value for money as badge holders are exempt from parking charges in many areas plus they can qualify for other benefits such as support with travel costs.

## 6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The scheme covers the needs of children with a disability.

### 6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None identified.

### 6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

An objective of the Blue Badge scheme is to enable disabled people to enjoy maximum mobility, access local facilities and play a full and active role in their communities. The Reform strategy aims to tackle fraud and abuse of the system and benefit those who need this service.

#### 6.4 **A Safer Halton**

A robust approach to tackling fraud and abuse of the Blue Badge System will contribute to crime and disorder objectives.

#### 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

#### 7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The approval of the increased cost of Blue Badges presents an opportunity to significantly improve the administration and assessments for the Blue Badge Scheme in Halton.

7.2 The risks of not implementing the Reform Strategy are that Halton will not comply with DfT regulations and the latest good practice guidance, leading to inconsistent assessments and difficulties in tackling fraud and abuse.

#### 8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 A key objective of the Blue Badge Scheme is that it promotes equal opportunities by enabling disabled people to enjoy maximum mobility, access local facilities and play a full and active role in their communities.

8.2 The measures outlined in this report should also promote fairness and equal opportunities.

8.3 A Community Impact Risk Assessment (CIRA) has been completed and is available upon request.

#### 9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.