

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 5 March 2013
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities
PORTFOLIO: Health & Adults
SUBJECT: Blue Badge Policy - Review
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To present the Board with the revised Blue Badge Scheme Policy, Procedure and Practice document in line with the changes set out in the National Reform Strategy from the Department for Transport (DfT).

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board:

i) Note the contents of the report and associated Blue Badge Policy (Appendix 1)

3.0 SUPPORTING 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. Department for Transport (DfT) Regulations govern the Scheme.

3.2 The Scheme allows badge holders to park close to their destination without charge or time limit in the on street parking environment, and for up to three hours on yellow lines, unless a loading ban is in place.

3.3 A national review of the Scheme in 2007 highlighted several areas where improvements needed to take place to the administration of the Scheme, to the eligibility criteria and to prevent abuse.

3.4 After further consultation, a five year Reform Strategy for the Blue Badge Scheme was published in October 2008. Planned changes to the Scheme include extending Blue Badges to people with mobility disabilities and introducing independent medical assessments to improve fairness and consistency and introducing data sharing systems to reduce fraud and abuse.

3.5 As a result of the National Strategy the local Blue Badge Policy has been reviewed and updated. The main changes are outlined below:-

- **Process**

Although Halton Direct Links are responsible for administering the Blue Badge Scheme on behalf of the Council, the Initial Assessment Team are the point of contact for any application needing medical assessments and will provide professional advice and support where required, particularly in relation to more complex cases.

The Adult Complex Care teams will provide Independent Mobility Assessments where needed.

- **Increase in charges**

Halton Borough Council now levies a charge of £10 per badge application. This increase was approved at Executive Board Sub Committee in December 2011. This covers the cost of the badge (£4.60 + VAT = £5.52) plus other admin costs incurred by the local authority. Fast Tracked applications for individuals with a terminal condition currently cost the Council a further £2.45. This additional cost must be taken from the £10 charge and not passed onto the applicant.

- **Assessment for Eligibility**

The funding provided for applicants who may be eligible for a badge subject to a medical assessment, previously undertaken by GP's, has been transferred from Halton & St Helens Primary Care Trust to Halton Borough Council, as of April 2011. Consequently Halton Borough Council is now responsible for paying for assessments, including those carried out by GP's.

As of 1 April 2012 eligibility under the 'permanent and substantial disability' walking criterion has to be confirmed by an independent mobility assessor, unless eligibility is self-evident. Changes to the medical assessment have now been fully implemented, as outlined below.

- **New Process for Medical Assessments**

For applications requiring further assessments Halton Direct Link Staff will check for correct completion, then forward through to the Initial Assessment Team for a Desk Based Assessment. If an Independent Mobility Assessment is required the application will be forwarded to the Occupational Therapists in the relevant Complex Care Teams.

- **Pre-assessment application**

Whilst undertaking an assessment in an individual's home the Occupational Therapist or Community Care Worker may feel that the individual would meet the criteria for a Blue Badge without further assessment. In these cases they can fill out the pre-assessment form.

- **Welfare Reform**

In January 2013 the Department of Transport and Blue Badge Improvement Service published guidance regarding reforms to the welfare system.

Personal Independence Payments (PIP) will begin to be introduced for people who are aged 16 to 64 from 8 April 2013. From October 2013 onwards PIP will begin to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from existing DLA recipients aged between 16 and 64.

This will affect those people who are applying for a Blue Badge without further assessment as those individuals who are currently in receipt of DLA Higher Mobility Component have been automatically eligible for a Blue Badge.

It has been decided that when DLA is replaced by PIP there should still be a legislative link.

This means that future eligibility for a Blue Badge will be as similar to the current eligibility criteria for the scheme as possible.

3.6 Renewal Letter

It is proposed that we cease to send out reminder letters to renew Blue Badges as it will free up staff time and reduce postage costs, currently we send out 200 renewals per month.

We have contacted Liverpool, Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Knowsley and Warrington who have not sent out reminders for several years.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The revised Policy, Procedure and Practice, including the associated changes highlighted in this report will ensure that Halton Borough Council's Blue Badge Scheme complies with current DfT Regulations and good practice. However it is recognised that further work is needed to effectively tackle fraud and abuse and to improve data collection. It is anticipated that future legislation and guidance arising from the implementation of the Blue Badge Reform Strategy will assist in taking forward these objectives, in addition to the other proposed changes to improve the Blue Badge Scheme nationally.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Badge Charges

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.

5.2 Independent Assessment

Funding to support the transfer of responsibility came to the Council as part of the Learning Disabilities and Health Reform Grant. It was not ring-fenced but is estimated at £14k for 2011/12.

From April 2011 to March 2012 it is estimated that the cost to HBC

has been £40.3k to pay GP's for medical assessments. (1439 assessments @ £28).

The Council will continue to subsidise the scheme with the provision of administration and Occupational Therapy support despite the increase in charges.

Renewal Letters

We currently post 200 renewal reminder letters per month, the estimated costs are:

Total (excluding print costs) = £284.80 per month

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

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The policy makes provision that Children under three may be eligible for a Blue Badge if they fall within either of the following descriptions: A child who has a condition that requires that they must always:-

- Be accompanied by bulky medical equipment which cannot be carried without great difficulty; and
- Be kept near a motor vehicle so they can be treated in that vehicle if necessary or taken quickly away to a place they can be treated.

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

The Blue Badge allows people with a disability / mobility problem to have better access to employment and learning opportunities

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The Blue Badge allows people with a disability / mobility problem have better access to local facilities and play a full and active role in their communities.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

A robust approach to medical assessments will ensure that those individuals who are eligible are able to receive a Blue Badge.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

No direct implication other than improve access to buildings.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The revised Policy, Procedure and Practice document presents an opportunity to significantly improve the administration of the Blue Badge Scheme in Halton by bringing it in line with current legislation and guidance outlined in the Blue Badge Reform Strategy.

7.2 The main risk of not implementing the revised Policy, Procedure and Practice is that Halton will fail to comply with DfT regulations and good practice guidance. This may lead to inconsistent assessments with Blue Badges being issued unlawfully and will contribute to the

wider problem of lack of fairness and consistency across authorities in the administration of the Scheme.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

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

The measures outlined in this report to improve the consistency of assessments for Blue Badges should also promote fairness and equal opportunities.

An Equality Impact Assessment has previously been completed on the revised Policy, Procedure and Practice document in 2010 and updated as needed for this review.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
The Blue Badge Scheme Local Authority Guidance (England)	People & Communities Team Policy & Resources Runcorn Town Hall	Lynda Holland
Personal Independence Payments and the Blue Badge Scheme	People & Communities Team Policy & Resources Runcorn Town Hall	Lynda Holland