

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Street and Walkways Committee	22 April 2013
Subject: Blue Badge Improvement Service	Public
Report of: Director of the Built Environment	For Decision
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Summary</u></p> <p>The Blue Badge Scheme provides a range of parking concessions for people with severe mobility problems who have difficulty using public transport. The badge entitles holders to park close to where they need to be. The Scheme operates throughout the UK and is administered by local authorities who are responsible for determining eligibility and issue of a Blue Badge.</p> <p>The report updates Members on the Blue Badge Improvement Service that was introduced on 3 January 2012, and further recommends that a Blue Badge continues to be issued free of charge to applicants.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>The Committee is recommended to note:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The changes to the Blue Badge Scheme, and agree • That Blue Badges continue to be issued free of charge to applicants and the costs absorbed within the Director's local risk budget. 	

Main Report

Background

1. The Town Clerks Department (Contact Centre) is responsible for the administration of the Blue Badge Scheme in the City. This includes making decisions on who should be given a badge, carrying out residency and identity checks, and dealing with applications and telephone enquiries from applicants.
2. Whilst the Contact Centre is responsible for the administration of the scheme, officers in the Department of the Built Environment provide technical support and undertake enforcement through the issue of a Penalty Charge Notice for misuse or abuse of the Blue Badge concessions.
3. In February 2011, the Department for Transport (DfT) announced reforms to modernise the UK's disabled parking badge system (the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme). The primary aim of the changes was to prevent badge fraud and create a uniform system across the country.

4. The Blue Badge Improvement Service was introduced on 3 January 2012 and became available to all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. North Gate Public Services were contracted by the DfT to deliver the improvements under the new Scheme.
5. The Blue Badge Improvement Service includes a:-
 - Better high quality secure badge
 - National data base to help combat fraud
 - User-friendly and easy badge request system, with on-line form and payment facilities
 - National helpline for customers
 - Secure network for applications
6. In parallel, the City administers its own Red Badge scheme, which is aimed at residents and workers in the City who require accessible parking. Approximately 200 badges are issued under this scheme, which remains unaffected by the Blue Badge Improvement Service.

Current Position

7. The Contact Centre receives around 45 Blue Badges applications every year. Each badge is valid for three years and there are currently 133 valid permits on issue.
8. The old-style badges will continue to be valid until they expire, which might be up until 2014 for badges issued in 2011. However all new applicants and those renewing and replacing their badges are now issued with a new style badge through the Blue Badge Improvement Service.
9. At present the new badges issued to City applicants are free of charge. However since the introduction of the Blue Badge Improvement Service, local authorities are now charged a standard fee by the agents who issue the badge (Northgate) of £4.60 +VAT plus postage for every badge issued.

Options

10. Under the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme, local authorities are eligible to charge up to £10 for the issue of each badge to cover administration and the charge levied by Northgate. Many authorities in London including London Borough of Camden, Islington and Lambeth have opted to take this approach to off-set some of the costs associated with the Scheme.
12. There is the option to continue to issue the Blue Badge free of charge. Alternatively a fee less than the maximum £10 permitted under the Scheme rules can be applied. However, as the costs of administration are minimal it is not recommended to introduce a fee for the issue of a Blue Badge.

Financial and Risk Implications

- 13 At the moment the City issues new badges under the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme free of charge. However in addition to those charges levied (£4.60 +VAT) by

the agents Northgate, there are costs associated with the consideration of applications, and verifying applicant details to determine eligibility. The cost of each application is therefore greater than £10 taking into account all related costs.

15. The introduction of a £10 fee for each badge issued would generate an income of approximately £450 per annum and could be used to offset the cost of issuing the new badge, which amounts to around £750 per annum. However, the Director has confirmed that his local risk budget can continue to absorb this minimal charge per annum if numbers remain at their current levels.

Legal Implications

16. Changes to the Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) Regulations 2000 allows local authorities to introduce a charge to cover the cost of administration associated with Blue Badge issue. The Blue Badge Scheme Local Authority Guidance (England) 29 February 2012 provides guidelines on the administration of the new Blue Badge Improvement Service.
17. Under the Blue Badge Improvement Service, the cost of a badge is £4.60 +VAT and postage. However local authorities are permitted to charge applicants up to £10 per badge to cover associated administration costs.

Strategic Implications

18. A Blue Badge provides specific benefits to those with a mobility impairment in terms of providing access to services. These benefits far outweigh the minimal cost associated with the cost of administration under the Blue Badge Improvement Service.

Equality Impact Assessment

19. Providing concessions for disabled drivers through the issue of a Blue Badge and the City's Red Badge is aimed at providing accessible parking. As it is not recommended to introduce a fee to cover in part the costs associated with the issue of a Blue Badge, there is no anticipated impact on those with mobility impairments.

Consultees

20. The Town Clerk, the Chamberlain, the Comptroller & City Solicitor and the Officers in the Department of Built Environment have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are included.
21. In addition the Head of Access was consulted, who has indicated a preference for no charge to be introduced. Specifically his comments are: *"The majority of Blue badges are issued to people with mobility impairment and who are deemed Disabled under the Equality Act 2010. It is well documented that disabled people are often worse off financially than other people in society and even a small loss of income can tip people with a disability into greater dependence on health and social services or family and friends. So whilst I fully appreciate there are cost implications in the issuing of Blue Badges I would like consideration be given for the current system (i.e. free of charge) to continue."*

22. The Blue Badge Improvement Service is aimed at protecting parking space for those with mobility impairments ensuring where possible reasonable access to services is maintained. Some authorities have already introduced a fee of £10, and have indicated that this has had no effect on the number of applications received. However as the costs of Blue Badge administration is minimal it is suggested that badges continue to be issued to applicants free of charge.

Conclusion

23. The Blue Badge Improvement Scheme has provided additional benefits to those with mobility impairments by reducing fraud and misuse. As the cost of issuing a Blue Badge is minimal, it is not proposed to pass on the costs to applicants in the way of a small fee as permitted under the new Scheme rules.

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