

**CHARGING ARRANGEMENTS FOR DISABLED BLUE BADGES**

*To:* **General Purposes Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **24th November 2015**

*From:* **Director of Customer Service and Transformation**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Forward Plan ref:* **N/A** *Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **To provide the Committee with background information on the Blue Badge scheme, note the proposal to increase charges from April 2016 and carry out consultation around the scheme.**

*Recommendation:* **It is recommended that the Committee:**

- **Note the information provided on the Council's current subsidy of the Blue Badge scheme;**
- **Note the current Business Planning proposal to increase Blue Badge charges from April 2016 for new and replacement Badges to the maximum permitted under legislation; and**
- **Approve a consultation to further understand the community impact of the proposed increase.**

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## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Blue Badge scheme has been in place since the early 1970's and is based on requirements of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1970. The scheme provides a range of parking concessions nationally and across Europe for people with severe mobility problems. It is designed to help severely disabled people to travel independently, as either a driver or passenger, by allowing them to park close to their destination. Blue Badges last for 3 years and are valid across the European Union.
- 1.2 Since the inception of the service in Cambridgeshire, the demand for Badges and pressures to extend the eligibility criteria nationally have steadily increased. In total, the County has over 32,000 Badge holders and the service is delivered by Customer Services. On average, 10,500 Badges have been issued annually since 2012, with approximately 250 applications annually to replace lost/stolen and damaged Badges.
- 1.3 In October 2008, the Government published a Blue Badge Reform Strategy to include a number of commitments to ensure that the scheme remains relevant, this was followed by a national consultation by the Department for Transport. As a result a number of changes to the scheme were introduced including a number of fraud prevention initiatives (a new requirement for mobility assessments), an extension to the eligibility criteria for certain groups and the establishment of a national database and Badge production service. Local Authorities were empowered (at their discretion) to increase the charge for a Badge to a maximum of £10 from 1 January 2012.
- 1.4 The new national Badge production process has a standard charge to the local authority of £4.60 per Badge, irrespective of whether it is new or a replacement.
- 1.5 In July 2012, the Council's Cabinet agreed an increase to £9 (from £2) for new Badges and £5 (from £2) for replacements. There is no currently no charge associated with administering an unsuccessful application.
- 1.6 In the financial year 2014-15, the Blue Badge Service cost £312,676 to administer against an income of £96,712 (see **Appendix A** for more details). Resource costs associated with increasing demand and the increasingly rigorous nationally determined application processes continue to significantly outweigh the income received.

## 2.0 PROPOSAL FOR CHARGING ARRANGEMENTS

- 2.1 Given the background outlined above, the Committee is asked to approve a consultation with communities to understand the impact of the Business Planning proposal to increase charges for Blue Badges to the maximum permitted under the legislation. This would see the charge for new Blue Badges increasing from £9 to £10, and replacement Badges from £5 to £10. This consultation would run from 24 November to 5 January. It will be open to all, but specifically promoted to Blue Badge holders alongside representative organisations of the groups potentially affected.
- 2.2 Following engagement with Group Leaders, officers have produced an initial Community Impact Assessment which is attached as **Appendix B** of this report. The outcomes of the consultation will be used to develop this

Assessment further to inform a decision of the Committee concerning Blue Badge charges at its meeting on 14 January 2016.

- 2.3 The Business Planning proposal is estimated to contribute an average of £17,000 per annum additional income (a figure based on the data from April 2012-2015) thereby reducing the Council's subsidy of the Blue Badge scheme. The scheme would continue to be subsidised by the Council at the cost of around £113,404 per year. This change will contribute towards the £41m of savings the Council must make for 2016/17 as part of our toughest ever budget. Further efficiency and savings proposals for the Customer Services & Transformation directorate are outlined under Item No.6 of the Committee's agenda for this meeting.
- 2.4 This increase in charging for Blue Badges would bring the Council in line with the practice of all neighbouring authorities (with the exception of Peterborough City Council who charge £5 for a replacement badge).
- 2.5 In addition to this, and given the financial pressures facing the Council, officers are also investigating other options for delivery of this service, such as outsourcing. Options for the alternative delivery of this service will be presented to Members as they are understood and appraised.

### **3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

#### **3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

There are no significant implications against this heading

#### **3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

Blue Badges support the independence of severely disabled people in Cambridgeshire. The Community Impact Assessment as Appendix B of this report examines the potential impact of this proposal, and a specific consultation with Blue Badge holders will be held as set out in paragraph 2.2.

#### **3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

As set out in 3.2, Blue Badges are a support mechanism for vulnerable people and the potential impact of this proposal has been examined and will be subject to further consultation.

### **4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

#### **4.1 Resource Implications**

This proposal represents around £17,000 per year income to the Council, offsetting the ongoing subsidy of the Blue Badge scheme (which would remain at over £113,000 per year).

#### **4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

If adopted in the future, the proposed change in charges would bring the Council in line with the maximum charge permitted under legislation.

### **4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

The Community Impact Assessment at Appendix B provides detail against these implications, and these implications will be further understood through the consultation proposed.

### **4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

As referenced throughout this report, and specifically in paragraph 2.1, it is proposed that specific consultation is carried to fully understand the potential implications of increases in charges. Alongside this, the potential increases have been communicated by the Council to raise awareness as early as possible.

### **4.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

Local Members have been engaged as part of the development of all of the Council's business planning proposals, including this one. Communications on the early budget proposals have also been sent to District, Parish and Town Councils.

### **4.6 Public Health Implications**

Blue Badges aid the access to services and facilities of the severely disabled, and therefore have a positive impact on public health.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
Blue Badge Reform Strategy	<a href="http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/bluebadge/reform/reformstrategy/bbreformstrategy.pdf">http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/bluebadge/reform/reformstrategy/bbreformstrategy.pdf</a>