

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES CABINET MEMBER

BLUE BADGE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME – IMPACT AND IMPLEMENTATION

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member of the new Blue Badge Improvement Scheme as outlined by the Department for Transport.
- 1.2 For the Cabinet Member to note that the improved scheme is aimed at preventing fraud and the abuse of Blue Badges, as well as improved efficiency.
- 1.3 To seek approval for the authorisation of the Access Agreement with Northgate Public Services and Payne organisation to be able to implement the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme in North Lincolnshire.
- 1.4 To seek approval for the level of charge relating to the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Disabled Persons' Parking Scheme (now the Blue Badge) was introduced in 1971. The aim of the scheme is to help disabled people with severe mobility problems to access goods and services, by allowing them to park close to their destination.
- 2.2 North Lincolnshire Council continues to allow free parking for holders of Blue Badges, unlike some Local Authorities who have started to charge Blue Badge holders to park.
- 2.3 The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for the legislation that sets out the process and framework for the scheme.
- 2.4 North Lincolnshire Council is responsible for the day to day administration and enforcement of the scheme. The council is responsible for determining and implementing the administration, assessments and enforcement procedures in accordance with the governing legislation.

- 2.5 North Lincolnshire Council has a statutory duty under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1971 to provide Blue Badges.
- 2.6 In February 2011 The DfT announced that it was conducting a programme of reforms to improve operational efficiency and customer service and also prevent fraud and abuse of the scheme.
- 2.7 In May The DfT appointed Northgate Public Services to deliver the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme, with Payne Security, who will print and supply the new badge design.
- 2.8 The key outcomes of the new Blue Badge Improvement Scheme are:
- A central database of all Blue Badges on issue;
 - The secure printing, personalisation and distribution of the newly designed badge;
 - More security features used in the badge design;
 - On-line applications and payments via Directgov;
- 2.9 The outcomes will help to improve operational efficiency, improve customer service, standardise issuing across Local Authorities and help to prevent fraud and abuse of the scheme. The improvements will also help to ensure that the concession is targeted fairly and sustainably.
- 2.10 Northgate Public Services and Payne Security are investing the capital needed to ensure the new system is built and implemented, in return for a charge per badge issued. Northgate Public Services and Payne Security are the only organisations authorised to provide the Blue Badge issuing service across England and Wales.
- 2.11 Blue Badges will not be available to Local Authorities through any other organisations. Local Authorities will be required to sign an Access Agreement (see App 2) with Northgate Public Services to enable them to purchase the Blue Badges. Local Authorities will pay Northgate Public Services directly, and will pay the same unit price throughout the five year contract.
- 2.12 The cost to North Lincolnshire Council of the new badge, along with the parking clock, the information leaflet, second class postage, access to the Blue Badge Improvement Service systems and enquiry service is £4.60 + VAT.
- 2.13 The Department for Transport legislation will allow local authorities to charge up to £10 to cover the cost of the badge, and also other administration costs associated with processing the applications. As the Blue Badge is issued for a period of three years this equates to a charge of £3.33 per year
- 2.14 The new Blue Badge Improvement Scheme will be implemented nationally in January 2012. From this date only those local authorities that have signed up to the scheme will be eligible to authorise Blue Badges.

2.15 The implementation of the scheme is running to a very tight timescale. The council will be required to return the Access Agreement to Northgate Public Services as soon as possible to ensure that they are eligible for the required training and access rights in time for implementation.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Option 1

3.1 To approve the acceptance of the Access Agreement to ensure that North Lincolnshire Council can continue to issue Blue Badges for eligible residents of North Lincolnshire.

To approve the increase in charges from the current maximum of £3.50 to £10.00 for the administration and issuing of the Blue Badge Scheme.

Option 2

3.2 To approve the acceptance of the Access Agreement to ensure that North Lincolnshire Council can continue to issue Blue Badges for eligible residents of North Lincolnshire.

To maintain the current charges for the Blue Badge of £3.50 for badge and photograph, £2.00 if no photograph is required. In most cases the photograph will be required to be taken by North Lincolnshire Council because it needs to be of passport standard and in an electronic format. The risk of a virus being transmitted through sharing of data sticks etc will limit the council's ability to accept photographs in an electronic format.

Option 3

3.3 Not to approve the acceptance of the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme Access Agreement.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

Option 1

4.1 Option 1 will enable the council to continue to issue Blue Badges to eligible residents within North Lincolnshire. The £10 charge will cover a greater proportion of the administration and assessment costs currently borne by the council.

Option 2

4.2 Option 2 will enable the charges to the public to remain at their present level. Maintaining the current level of cost will result in the Council subsidising the scheme by £2.60 or £1.20 per person, dependent on whether the photograph is supplied by the council.

Option 3

4.3 Option 3: If we do not accept the Access Agreement North Lincolnshire Council will be unable to issue Blue Badges to eligible residents. The council would therefore be breaching its statutory duty to provide the badges under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act of 1971.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT))

5.1 Financial – The cost to North Lincolnshire Council of the new badge, will be £4.60 + VAT. By keeping the cost of the badge to the maximum level of £3.50, or £2.00 without photograph, the council will incur an approximate shortfall of £4300 per year (calculated on the basis of 3900 badges issued during 2010/11), which will have to be found from within existing budgets.

5.2 Staffing – The new system will increase the administrative time taken to process the badge because of the requirement to provide data to a central database designed to audit the badges nationally.

5.3 Property – none.

5.4 IT – The council is investigating how best to change from our existing Blue Badge administration IT system to the new national system product so that customer service is improved and efficiencies can be realised.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 – CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory implications – Required to implement the Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2007.

North Lincolnshire Council has a statutory duty under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1971 to provide Blue Badges.

6.2 Environmental implications – none.

6.3 Diversity implications – enables public to more easily access the Blue Badge system through Directgov or through personal attendance at North Lincolnshire Blue Badge issuing offices.

6.4 Section 17 – Crime & Disorder Implications – The Blue Badge Improvement Scheme will deliver improvements in the prevention and detection of fraud through North Lincolnshire being able to share data with one national database, enabling easier detection of duplicate applications across authorities and effective control of badges lost or stolen. The new design of the badge will make the badge harder to copy, forge and alter.

6.5 Risk & other implications – none.

7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

7.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) has conducted extensive consultation with the public and local authorities regarding the Blue Badge Improvement Scheme. The majority of the respondents to the to the DfT consultation were positive about the proposed reforms. Respondents were keen to tackle abuse of the badge to ensure that disabled parking is made available to those who need it the most.

7.2 Adult Social Services have consulted with Corporate Procurement and will work with them over any contract issues arising.

7.3 If the scheme is approved we will engage in a public information exercise.

8. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the authorisation of the Access Agreement with Northgate Public Services and supports the recommendation at Option 2: that the cost of the Blue Badge remains at a maximum fee of £3.50.

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Background Papers Used in the Preparation of this Report:

The Blue Badge Scheme Local Authority guidance June 2011-09-29 (DfT)
Blue Badge – Good Practice Review – Final Report (DfT)
Blue Badge Reform Equalities Impact Assessment (DfT)