

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Director of Community Health & Care Partnership

Community Health and Care Partnership Committee: 15 May 2013

Subject: Blue Badge Scheme

1 Purpose

- 1.1** To advise the CHCP Committee of the impact of reforms to the Blue Badge scheme in Scotland from 1st January 2012, the impact of the current charging policy and the decisions taken by the Council at its Special meeting on 6th February 2013 in setting the budget for 13/14.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1** The Committee is recommended to increase the charge for a Blue Badge to £20 that will provide free parking for three years.

3 Background

- 3.1** In January 2012 amendments to the Blue Badge scheme came into force.
- 3.2** The role of the GP in recommending the issue of a Blue Badge has now ceased. The council is now responsible for the administration of all applications and the examination of applicants who are not automatically deemed to have a right to a Blue Badge.
- 3.3** The issue of the badges is now done through a national supplier (Northgate) who is contracted for all badge distribution throughout the UK. Northgate charge each local authority £5.38 for every badge that they issue.
- 3.4** In November 2011 the CHCP rejected a recommendation to increase the charge to £10.
- 3.5** At the Special meeting of the Council on 6th February 2013, the Council agreed, as part of the adoption of a set of proposals from the Administration Group for the 13/14 budget, to 'Admin saving 10 – blue badge production admin savings costs – £20,000'
- 3.6** As will be evidenced from the details set out below, as the Council already pays out more to Northgate than it recovers in charges for the badges, it is

impossible to generate any such savings and the only way to meet the budget consequences will be to increase the current charge for the Blue Badge.

4 Current Position

- 4.1** Between April 2010 and March 2011, West Dunbartonshire Council issued a total of 1,940 Blue Badges. 1,004 of these were automatically approved and 936 were issued using the discretionary criteria.
- 4.2** Currently West Dunbartonshire Council charge recipients of Blue Badges the sum of £2.56 for a 3 year entitlement. This generated an income over the above period of £4,966.40.
- 4.3** This represents a 'loss' of £2.82 for every badge issued before taking account of the actual additional costs we have in general administration of the scheme and the cost of carrying out individual mobility assessments for those who do not automatically qualify for the badge.

For clients who are not automatically passported to receipt of a Blue Badge the Council undertakes a review and, if necessary, examination by Occupational Therapists to confirm whether a Blue Badge should be issued.

In March 2013 the number of Blue Badges issued and still valid was 4,328, of which 2,469 were in automatic categories and 1,856 in discretionary categories.

In the year April 2012 to March 2013, 760 applications were received and were successful and a further 850 were reviewed. In the same period, 2,047 were not renewed.

If previous rates of application continue, 43% of applications will require additional investigation and administration by the authority - some 700 plus individual cases each year. The introduction of this element to the OT service pushed waiting times for assessment to 20 weeks. To deliver reasonable waiting times for assessment (now 5 weeks) the current volume of applications and examinations is managed using additional OT staff on short term contracts.

5 Charging

Currently the Council charges £2.56 – 85p per annum. The maximum charge that can be levied is £20 for the 3 year period that the badge covers.

Both Glasgow City and Renfrewshire Councils charge £20 – £6.66 per annum. For those individuals who actually choose to take on the costs of running a car this cost represents the cost of just a little more than a gallon of fuel per annum in return for free parking.

The net cost to the Council at current rates is £41,817. Introduction of the revised rate would reduce the burden to the council to £13,267.

Estimated current costs to the Council include:

	2013/14
Fee to Northgate (£5.38)	£8,807
Admin Costs	£2,200
Occupational Therapy	<u>£35,000</u>
Total	£46,007
Income (current rate)	<u>£4,190</u>
Net Cost	£41,817
Income (revised rate)	£32,740
Net Cost	£13,267

6 People Implications

- 6.1 The introduction of the revised rate will allow the retention of additional OT staff to maintain the current waiting times or all clients and provide appropriate professional review of Blue badge applicants.

7 Financial Implications

- 7.1 The adoption of the £20 fee to cover the three year period will increase the income received by £28,500 which will achieve the £20,000 saving target with the additional £8,500 being used to facilitate appropriate staffing of the scheme.

8 Risk Analysis

- 8.1 Failure to increase the charge will lead to increased waiting times for OT services as the current short term arrangements are not sustainable and will result in increased waiting times both for blue badge assessments and general OT assessments.

9 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1 No negative impact has been assessed.

10 Consultation

- 10.1 The proposal has been consulted with other relevant Council officers.

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Date: 26 April 2013

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Appendices: None

Background Papers:

Wards Affected: All