

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **16 DECEMBER 2014**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF OFFICER COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE AND**
CHIEF OFFICER STREETSCENE AND
TRANSPORTATION

SUBJECT: **REVISED BLUE BADGE AND ENFORCEMENT OF**
THE SCHEME

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.01 To advise members of the new working arrangements for issuing Blue Badges and to seek agreement for the enforcement of the scheme within Flintshire through the Civil Parking Enforcement Officers.

2.00 BACKGROUND

- 2.01 On 1st September 2014 the process for issuing Blue Badges was transferred from the Social Services Department to Flintshire Connects.
- 2.02 At the same time a toolkit was issued by Welsh Government to help local authorities manage the application and verification process to achieve a consistent approach across Wales.
- 2.03 Civil Parking Enforcement across Flintshire has seen a significant improvement in reducing illegal parking. The introduction of this has identified the lack of enforcement around the use of blue badges by Civil Parking Enforcement Officers. The officers regularly witness the miss-use of badges and are keen to include enforcement of blue badge use alongside civil parking enforcement.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 Blue Badge process

Flintshire County Council issue Blue Badges to applicants that have a permanent and substantial impairment which means they are unable to walk or have considerable difficulty in walking. Badges cannot be issued for temporary conditions.

There are two sets of criteria that are applied:

- Automatic qualification – the applicant requires no further assessment and qualifies automatically generally owing to the

level of disability benefits they are in receipt of from the Department of Works and Pensions. In these cases the process is straight forward and a blue badge is issued upon receipt of the qualifying evidence. A copy of the criteria for automatic qualification is attached in appendix 1.

- **Assessment** – an application is submitted and measured against the recently issued Welsh Government Toolkit. There is no longer a need for the Council to contact GP's for supporting medical evidence. It has been recognised that the applicant's GP is not best placed to supply objective evidence due to their role as an advocate on behalf of their patient. There was also a cost of between £20 and £30 charged by the GP for this service and an application could be delayed for up to 6 weeks. The customer is now able to use evidence that they will already have in support of their application, for example;
 - Prescriptions for medication relating to their illness
 - Hospital letters/appointment cards
 - Clinic appointments (i.e. Pain or respiratory clinics)
 - Occupational Therapist Assessments
 - Walking Aids
 - Adaptations to their home
 - District nurses
 - Physiotherapists

This list is not exhaustive and any evidence in support of the application from a professional will be considered.

In order for the toolkit to be most effective all new applications that require assessment will be dealt with face to face from all Flintshire Connects centres. This allows the assessor to talk through the process, complete the assessment decision making toolkit and also clarify anything that the applicant has not covered in their application form. Administrative processes are reduced and applicants can be advised in most cases whether or not they will be issued with a blue badge at the same time. Face to face assessments will be arranged through a pre-arranged appointment which improves the process for a number of reasons:

- **Accuracy** – Advisors are able to work through the toolkit with the applicant and also make a visual assessment of the applicant's mobility reducing the risk of fraudulent applications.
- **Turnaround** – In most cases a decision can be given at point of application.
- **Work load Planning** – Appointments can at non peak times/days to maximise use of resources and enable advisors to deal with customers quicker in peak times.
- **Reduction in avoidable contact** – Less telephone/face to face and postal enquiries requesting updates on application and

next steps etc.

- **Enhanced service** – Ability to discuss other options for help and support available to customer that they may not be aware of, for example; Disabled Bus Pass, Radar Keys, I can't Wait cards (for those who have bladder and bowel conditions that mean they need immediate access to toilet facilities), Home adaptations, support in the home.

Applicants that automatically qualify for a blue badge are not required to attend an assessment appointment. They have a number of options for applying for a Blue Badge. They can complete a paper application form or use the 'on-line' application process. When it is appropriate to do so applicants are encouraged to complete the application 'on line' and for face to face callers Flintshire Connects staff will provide assistance if required using the IT facilities available at the centres.

3.02 **Blue Badge Fee**

Welsh Government does not allow local authorities to charge for issuing Blue Badges however there is provision to charge a fee of up to £10 for a replacement where badges have been lost, stolen or damaged. It is proposed that Flintshire County Council introduce a fee of £10 for the issue of a replacement blue badge.

3.03 **Blue Badge Enforcement**

The new act (Disabled Persons Parking Badges Act 2013) will enable the Civil Parking Enforcement Officers to identify abuse and misuse of the badges, which includes the powers to inspect and retain a badge (without Police presence), if they have reasonable grounds for believing that the badge is a fake, has already been cancelled, should have been returned to the issuing authority or is being misused (including by someone other than the holder when the genuine holder is not involved in the journey). The Officers will be required to caution the driver, and where necessary, collect sufficient evidence to establish reasonable grounds for retaining the badge. The proposal is to introduce Blue Badge Enforcement within Flintshire to be undertaken by Civil Parking Enforcement Officers

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 Cabinet Members are asked to:

1. Note the content of this report and the new arrangements for assessing/issuing Blue Badges.
2. Agree to the introduction of a fee of £10 for issuing replacement badges.
3. Agree to fully adopt enforcement of Blue Badge parking within the remit of the Civil Parking Enforcement service.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 The budget held by Social services for the administration of the Blue Badge Scheme has transferred to Flintshire Connects. The transfer of the service has realised an efficiency of circa £15,000 in administrative costs. Potential income generation through introduction of a £10 fee for the issue of replacement badges.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 None.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 Increased availability of disabled car parking spaces in close proximity to facilities/town centres for those in genuine need through the enforcement of Blue Badge usage.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 More robust and consistent approach across Wales which will ensure that only those who are genuinely eligible for a Blue Badge will qualify.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 Service transferred to Connects with no staffing implications.

One full time post was released as an efficiency within Social Services as a result of the transfer of the Blue Badge service to Connects.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Changes to the Blue Badge Scheme have been implemented across England and Wales.

Consultation on the toolkit for Wales has been undertaken by Welsh Government with all Welsh Councils and dedicated working groups and sessions have taken place and forums for feedback are still in place.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 Appendix 1 – Automatic qualification criteria for a Blue Badge

Contact Officers:

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