ABSTRACT

This report outlines the forthcoming changes to the Blue Badge Scheme as a result of the Scottish Government’s reform of the Blue Badge Scheme.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee approves:

(i) the introduction of a £4.60 charge for the replacement of lost or damaged badges;

and notes

(ii) the planned changes to the Blue Badge Scheme.

2 INTRODUCTION

Following a reform programme aimed at helping local authorities strive for greater consistency and to encourage best practice across authorities, the Scottish Government has outlined changes to the Blue Badge Scheme.

The latest figures available show that there are around 274,000 Blue Badges issued by local authorities currently in use in Scotland. This represents over 5% of the Scottish population. The Scottish Government believes that there is currently a lack of consistency and geographical variations existing when applying for a Blue Badge.

The Scottish Government believes that much of the current practice relating to the delivery of the scheme in local authorities has built up over time, and some practices which are not included in legislation have become embedded as the norm. This led to a consultation exercise in the summer of 2010 in order to try and capture views on potential reforms and improvements.

The Scottish Government believes that the reform programme consists of a number of changes which, when implemented together, should help to improve operational efficiency, reduce costs and improve customer service. They will also prevent abuse of the scheme and ensure that the concession is targeted fairly and is sustainable.
THE CHANGES

Blue Badge Improvement Service (BBIS)

The Department for Transport, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Assembly Government are working together to deliver an improvement service to carry out various administrative functions relating to the Blue Badge scheme across Great Britain. Following a procurement process a contract was awarded to Northgate Information Solutions who will develop this service throughout Great Britain. The BBIS will provide for the following:

Centralised Database

Having a central database will allow a common numbering system enabling more effective control of badges. Enforcement checks will be made easier and quicker from anywhere in the country by any local authority using a desktop PC or a handheld device or SMART phone.

The central database will be delivered through the GSX (Government Secure Extranet) which is fully compliant with Government standards and data protection.

Northgate will develop a mechanism for integration between existing databases and the new central database.

Support Services

Northgate will provide an initial enquiry support service for general enquiries from the public. Locally ACCESSLine and ACCESS offices will continue to be promoted as first point of contact.

New Badge Design and Supply

New badges will be produced through a single supplier (Payne Security). The badges will be made of PVC and will include elements such as complex printing patterns and a holographic feature that can not be photocopied or scanned. The quality of the badges will also be improved to ensure that they remain legible throughout their 3 year lifespan. From 1 January 2012 local authorities will only legally be able to issue or replace an old-style badge with a badge that complies with forthcoming legislation.

Once a badge is approved and requested (via the central database), the badge will be issued from the supplier within five working days. This is a change to our current service where many applicants can visit their local ACCESS office and their badge will be produced while they wait.

On-line Application

The application process will include an on-line eligibility checklist, an on-line application form and on-line payment facility. This will be available from the Scottish Government’s Blue Badge website.

Contract Arrangements

On behalf of the three administrations, the Department for Transport has agreed a standard contract that forms the terms and conditions of the BBIS. A Service Level Agreement has also been drawn up. The contract will run for five years, with the option of a further two years. In addition, each local authority is required to sign an individual agreement, referred to as an Access Agreement, with Northgate to enable them to use the BBIS.
Local authorities will be charged £4.60 for each badge or replacement issued. It is proposed that we will charge £4.60 for the re-issue of lost badges. This is a fixed price for the next five years as part of the contract. Northgate will also offer optional services, with associated costs.

It is important to note that although Northgate will run this new service, local authorities will remain responsible for the local administration and enforcement of the scheme, making decisions on whether an applicant is eligible for a badge, carrying out residency and identity checks, setting the fee to be charged and dealing with online, paper-based or telephone applications.

**Code of Practice**

A code of practice will be issued which will include sections on the application process, assessing eligibility, administration, organisational badges and enforcement as well as various checklists, case studies, a model application form and frequently asked questions.

This will be used to review our procedures although we do not anticipate any significant changes to our application, verification and assessment arrangements.

**Other Recent Changes**

**Severely Disabled Service Personnel and War Veterans**

From May 2011 severely disabled service personnel and war veterans have been able to receive automatic entitlement to the Blue Badge if they satisfy the following criteria.

They receive the armed Forces Compensation Scheme (FCS) award under tariffs 1 to 8, and are assessed by the Service Personnel and Veterans Agency (SPVA) as having a permanent and substantial disability which causes the person to be unable or virtually unable to walk.

4 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The changes described in this report will result in additional costs of approximately £9,000 per year as a result of the £4.60 cost per badge. The financial impact will be contained within income received from service users (£20 per three years).

5 **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

There are no Human Rights implications arising as a result of the recommendations contained in this report.

6 **EQUALITIES IMPACT**

The issues dealt with in this report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective. An equalities impact assessment is not required.

7 **CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, the Director of Corporate Services, the Head of Finance and the Head of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.
8 CONCLUSION

The changes outlined in this report have more to do with security and anti-fraud than customer service. However we will be faced with this change in January 2012 and must prepare our internal procedures to fit with the change.

We will face increased costs from Blue Badge production which will be mitigated somewhat by the reduction in administration by not having to actually prepare and issue the badges and the income from charges to service users.

R Peat
Director of Social Work and Health

NOTE: The undernoted background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

SW&H/RP/GM