

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 24TH SEPTEMBER 2012

REPORT ON: REFORM OF THE BLUE BADGE SCHEME

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 331- 2012

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise members of the Social Work and Health Committee of developments in relation to the provision of disabled parking badges (Blue Badges), nationally and within the City Council.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members of the Social Work and Health Committee;

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report and the progress made, to date, in implementing the new arrangements for administering Blue Badges.
- 2.2 Approve the arrangements that are being put in place to undertake Independent Mobility Assessments from the 1st September 2012, as described in sections 4.3.
- 2.3 Approve the proposed future developments, as described in sections 4.4, which will enhance the provision of the Blue Badge Service.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Scottish Government has allocated £21k to Dundee City Council to put in place arrangements for carrying out Independent Mobility Assessments. As these assessments will be carried out by the Occupational Therapy Service, this funding will be used to provide additional Occupational Therapy hours.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 *Blue Badge Improvement Service*

- 4.1.1 Following a consultation exercise in 2010, the Scottish Government agreed to work together with the Welsh Government and Department of Transport to reform the Blue Badge Scheme across the UK.

- 4.1.2 The new arrangements, which sought to standardise the approach taken to administering Blue Badges across the country and to tackle fraud and misuse, included the introduction of;

- one national database of all Blue Badges awarded from 1st January 2012
- one standard application form, requiring more comprehensive information to aid the assessment of eligibility

- a redesigned Blue Badge with enhanced security features, ordered from a single provider, Northgate
- online applications, payments arrangements and reporting of changes of circumstances

4.2 *Implementation*

4.2.1 Through the preparatory work that we carried out between October and December 2011 locally and through our involvement in national events hosted by Transport Scotland, the Social Work Department was able to implement the new arrangements for administering Blue Badges effectively, from the 1st January 2012. This minimised the disruption or delay for service users at the point when the new arrangements were put in place.

4.2.2 The introduction of the new application form, which is far more extensive than the previous version, generated a small number of complaints from people who were renewing their Blue Badge and were familiar with the previous version. To address this the Social Work Department provided Customer Services colleagues with Frequently Asked Questions, to enable them to explain the background to the changes and secured their support in assisting people to complete the forms. We have had no further complaints in this regard since February 2012.

4.3 *Independent Mobility Assessments*

4.3.1 The revised Blue Badge regulations also introduced a requirement that from 1st September 2012, Independent Mobility Assessments (IMAs) will be carried out, when it is not clear that an applicant is eligible for a Blue Badge under the 'unable to walk' or 'virtually unable to walk' criteria.

4.3.2 IMAs will replace the current arrangements whereby a GP provides a report and an Independent Medical Advisor considers any disputed cases. Accordingly, the Scottish Government has diverted the funding that previously met GPs' costs, to local authorities in order to support them in implementing IMAs.

4.3.3 As the regulations recommend that IMAs are carried out by a qualified Occupational Therapist, it is proposed that the additional resources that Dundee City Council have been provided with by the Scottish Government will be used to increase capacity within the Social Work Department, Occupational Therapy Team for them to take on this new role.

4.3.4 Rather than appointing one, part-time Occupational Therapist to undertake these assessments exclusively, it is proposed that this work will be absorbed within the wider team. This will enable a range of staff to develop the necessary skills and will minimise the impact of a single worker being absent from work.

4.4 *Future Developments*

4.4.1 On the basis of a review of the current arrangements for administering Blue Badges, a number of further developments are proposed, as follows;

- the current procedures for administering the process will be revised and consolidated to address the new requirements of the Blue Badge Scheme.
- systems will be put in place to capture better management information on the demand for Blue Badges, the renewal rates, the numbers of and reasons for refusals, the outcomes of appeals, etc.

- further consideration will be given to the approaches being taken to address the misuse of Blue Badges, through discussions with colleagues in City Development and the development of procedures and protocols. Recognising that Blue Badge misuse is a crime that affects genuine disabled badge holders and the wider community, these procedures will identify the circumstances when a fixed penalty fine will be applied in cases of misuse.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website www.dundee.gov.uk/equanddiv/equimpact/ .

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services and Head of Democratic and Legal Services.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Equality Impact Assessment.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

DATE: 12th September
2012