

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 20th July 2017

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Highways, Planning & Sustainable Development/Head of Planning & Public Protection

Report Author: Traffic, Parking and Road Safety Manager

Title: Consideration of Free Parking for Disabled Badge Holders



1. What is the report about?

To consider whether holders of Disabled Parking Badge (Blue Badges) should be allowed to park for free within the Council's Pay and Display Car Parks.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) requested that a paper be presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee to consider free parking for Blue Badge holders in response to a Notice of Motion that was passed by County Council in January 2017.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee:

- 3.1 confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix B) as part of its consideration; and.
- 3.2 considers the contents of the report and supports the continuation of the existing policy, namely that Blue Badge holders pay the same tariffs as other car park users, for the reasons explained in this report.

4. Report details

Background

- 4.1 Disabled Parking Badges, more commonly known as "Blue Badges", are issued free of charge to individuals with severe mobility impairments, following an assessment carried out by Social Services Officers in the local authority where they are resident.
- 4.2 The purpose of the Blue Badge scheme is to help mitigate against some of the disadvantages resulting from impaired mobility, by allowing badge holders to park in more convenient locations. This is why the Blue Badge scheme allows badge holders to park on yellow lines for up to 3 hours and for unlimited periods in kerbside parking bays that are otherwise subject to time restrictions.
- 4.3 Blue Badge holders presently pay the same tariff as other car park users within Denbighshire County Council's Pay and Display car parks. A list of the Council's Pay and Display parking tariffs is provided in Appendix A for ease of reference.

- 4.4 There is no standard national policy in terms of whether Blue Badge Holders should be allowed to park for free in Council-run car parks. This means that, in practice, some local authorities charge whilst others do not. In North Wales, the five other local authorities allow Blue Badge holders to park for free in their car parks.

Eligibility for a Blue Badge

- 4.5 Strict criteria exist to assess who qualifies for a Blue Badge. An individual may apply for a Blue Badge whether they are likely to use the Badge as a driver, a passenger, or both. In other words, the Blue Badge belongs to the individual and not the vehicle, and, therefore, entitles them to certain parking concessions whether they are the driver or a passenger on any given day.
- 4.6 The basis for eligibility is that the applicant must have severe mobility problems which are due to a physical, sensory or cognitive impairment. Examples of some of the reasons why an individual may be eligible for a Blue Badge, are:
- they have a permanent disability that means they are unable to walk, or have very considerable difficulty walking
 - they have a severe disability in both arms, and cannot turn the steering wheel of a vehicle by hand
 - they are registered blind
- 4.7 It is the individual's "home" local authority that assesses and determines Blue Badge applications. In the case of Denbighshire, the assessment is undertaken by members of staff within the Council's Community Support Services Department.
- 4.8 At present, there are just under 7,000 valid Blue Badges that have been issued to Denbighshire residents. Of these, 2,458 were issued in the 12 month period from June 2016 to June 2017. The magnitude of this latter figure reflects the fact that existing Blue Badge holders must reapply for their Badge every 3 years.

Purpose of a Blue Badge

- 4.9 According to the official definition given by the Welsh Government, the stated purpose of the Blue Badge scheme is "to give greater access to local services by allowing badge holders to park near to their destination either as a passenger or driver". In other words, the Blue Badge can help to reduce walking distances by enabling badge holders to park in more locations closer to their intended destination.

Existing concessions for Blue Badge holders

- 4.10 Under UK legislation, Blue Badge holders are permitted to park in a variety of locations where parking would otherwise not be permitted. Again, the purpose of these concessions is to reduce potential walking distances, or to allow more time for Blue Badge holders to park. A list of the UK standard parking concessions given to Blue Badge holders is summarised as follows:
- Parking for up to 3 hours on single or double yellow lines*
 - Parking for an unlimited time period within on-street parking bays
 - Parking in on-street disabled bays for the time specified by the accompanying traffic signs

*Providing there are no yellow kerb markings present as these indicate a prohibition on loading/unloading, and providing that no obstruction is caused by parking in that location.

- 4.11 All of the parking concessions listed in 4.10 are free of charge. Similarly, Blue Badge holders can park for free in the Pay and Display on-street parking bays located on both East Parade and West Parade in Rhyl. This concession exists because of the underlying UK-wide concession that Blue Badge holders can park for an unlimited period in on-street parking bays.
- 4.12 Blue Badge holders are also entitled to park in disabled parking bays in our Pay and Display car parks. Whilst the same tariff applies as it does to all motorists, the disabled parking bays are usually located closer to the pedestrian exits and have wider bays to provide more space to manoeuvre. Whilst we do not have any supporting survey data, anecdotal evidence suggests that occupancy of disabled parking bays is usually lower than for standard spaces. This means that Blue Badge holders will typically have a greater chance of finding a space within our car parks, especially during busy periods.

Disabled bay provision

- 4.13 The Department for Transport publication, “Inclusive Mobility”, states that a minimum of 6% of the total number of parking spaces in a car park must be marked for use by Blue Badge holders. Denbighshire is compliant with this standard.

Financial Implications

- 4.14 As there is no difference in the tariff charged, there is no existing data available to inform us how much of our existing car park income comes from customers who are Blue Badge holders. This means that it is very difficult to assess what the likely impact would be on car park income, should Blue Badge holders be made exempt from Pay and Display charges.
- 4.15 It is a reasonable assumption that if parking were to be made free for all Blue Badge holders that this would generate a significant rise in applications for Blue Badges, which would result in more refusals, more appeals etc. There would therefore be a significant increase in workload for Community Support Services staff and a reduction in car park income.

Ability to Pay

- 4.16 In considering the question of whether Blue Badge holders should be made exempt from Pay and Display charges. There is an inherent assumption being made that Blue Badge holders are less able to pay when this is not necessarily the case. If such a concession was granted, it could reasonably lead to the question of whether free parking should also be provided for those who find themselves less able to pay for other reasons e.g. the unemployed, individuals on certain benefits, pensioners etc.

Conclusion

- 4.17 It is recommended that the existing policy of charging Blue Badge holders the same as other car park users is retained. The purpose of the Blue Badge is to improve ease of access for badge holders through the various concessions that exist to allow

Blue Badge holders to park at kerbside locations such as on yellow lines for up to 3 hours. Its purpose is not to provide free parking. Providing free parking for Blue Badge holders implies that individuals with impaired mobility are less able to pay for parking. Granting such a concession would be likely to increase applications for Blue Badges on the basis that it would provide the badge holder with free parking. It could also lead to questions about whether we should be providing free parking for other residents whose economic circumstance means they are less able to pay.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

New Corporate Priorities to be determined.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Providing free parking for Blue Badge holders could result in an increase in applications for Blue Badges owing to the incentive of free parking, resulting in an increased workload for members of staff within the Community Support Services Department who assess and determine Blue Badge applications. Car parking income would also decrease.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

Please see Appendix B. Making Blue Badge holders continue to pay will obviously have more of a negative impact upon those individuals compared to if they were given free parking in car parks. However, free parking for Blue Badge holders would also be likely to significantly reduce the availability of car park spaces at busy times.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

This paper is a direct result of the Notice of Motion having been passed at County Council which led to the SCVCG requesting that this paper be presented to the Communities Scrutiny Committee.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

As stated above the existing data makes it very difficult to assess the likely impact of changing the Blue Badge policy. Further work would be required to quantify the financial risk if Members wish to further investigate changing the charging policy.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- Loss of income if parking were made free for Blue Badge holders.
- Increase in Blue Badge applications and associated workload.
- Possible reputational impact albeit this can be defended for the reasons given in this paper.

11. Power to make the Decision

Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers with respect to examining policies and their impact on residents and users of its services.

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