



**Rochford District
Council**

REPORT TITLE:	Free Three Hour Parking For Blue Badge Holders
REPORT OF:	Phoebe Barnes, Director Assets & Investments

INFORMATION REPORT

REPORT SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to update the committee on the introduction of implementing free three-hour parking for blue badge holders.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1 On 28th February 2023, a portfolio holder for environment took the decision That Rochford District Council offers three hours of free parking for Blue Badge holders within Council owned car parks.
- 1.2 This decision was called in by members of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee so that the due diligence of the proposed scheme, together with any budgetary implications, could be scrutinised.
- 1.3 On the 4th April 2023 the Overview & Scrutiny committee resolved that the interim decision of the Portfolio Holder for Environment on free three hour parking for Blue Badge Holders be noted and that a full report with other options be brought to Full Council for consideration.
- 1.4 After Overview & Scrutiny on 4th April 2023, the call in process was complete and the original portfolio holder decision could have been implemented.

However the O&S resolution was interpreted as requiring the options report to be presented to Council before any action could be taken to implement a decision.

- 1.5 The current administration were advised by the monitoring officer and Director of Assets and Investments that as an administration they were able to agree that the portfolio holder decision was implemented, the administration agreed that the original decision should be implemented.
- 1.6 The reasons for the original decision was to align Rochford District Council with other Essex authorities, who bar Braintree Council offered some form of free parking for blue badge holders.
- 1.7 A further report was due to go to the Full Council, following the recommendation of the O&S committee on 4 April 2023 which requested that a full report with other options be brought to Full Council for consideration
- 1.8 As the recommendation was not time bound it is deemed that full options to be debated by Full Council should be a period 12months but no longer than 18months after the original decision came into effect.
- 1.9 The three hour free parking was implemented from Monday 16th October 2023. Providing a valid blue badge and clock are displayed, 3 hours free parking is offered on a no return within a 4 hour window. If users wish to stay longer than 3 hours they need to purchase a ticket for the additional time they require.
- 1.10 Prior to this change, the Council has amend it's parking order and this amendment requires a public notice period. The public notice of amendment was advertised in the local paper on Thursday 3rd August advising of forthcoming changes to the Blue Badge parking within the Council's pay and display car parks. This information was also made available on the Council website and paper copies were displayed at South Street reception. Any representation had to made to the amendments 21 days once advertised.
- 1.11 No representation was made and officers were able to make orders to amend the car park signage. Ahead of implementation the Council displayed A4 signs around the car parks on Monday 2nd October 2023 giving 2 weeks' notice of the change. A5 notices were also placed on vehicles displaying a blue badge through the 2 week notice period.
- 1.12 It is not possible to ascertain the financial implications of offering any free parking to Blue Badge Holders given that Blue Badge Holders are able to park in any parking bays within the Council's car parks. Previously they pay for the time that they park but are entitled to an additional hour at the end of their paid session.
- 1.13 Since the introduction of three hours the Council has issued 16 penalty charge notices not displaying a blue badge and clock. The Council has not

seen any material impact on car parking income from the introduction of 3 hour parking.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 No other options are considered at this time. This report provides an update to the committee since the committee last reviewed the decision.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

3.1 Reputational risk is attributable to any decisions regarding parking for blue badge holders. The original decision that has been implemented was conscious that other Essex authorities were offering free parking for blue badge holders.

4.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

4.1 There has been no further engagement or consultation on the scheme.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no significant financial implications arising from this report. The impact of implementing the changes is difficult to capture as the parking systems does not differentiate between a user paying for parking who does or does not have a blue badge. The Council is only able to monitor its income on a total basis per car park.

5.2 It is deemed that offering 3 hours free parking should not have a material financial impact on the Council.

6.0 LEGAL/GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Blue Badge scheme does not apply in off-street car parks although most authorities (including Rochford) will provide dedicated Blue Badge holder bays.

6.2 The introduction of the Blue Badge scheme back in the 1970's was intended to allow the severely disabled to park as close as possible to their destination (i.e. on street).

6.3 In the past parking operators have offered free parking to Blue Badge holders as some drivers were unable to access the ticket machines. Now as technology advances there are DDA compliant machines and the option to pay for parking by phone.

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- 6.4 For this reason, paying to park in local authority car parks is becoming more common, particularly as there is no correlation between qualifying for a Blue Badge and being on a low income. However, granting Blue Badge holders a concession beyond the expiry time printed on their ticket or mobile phone session is accepted by most disabled motoring organisations as a fair policy.
- 6.5 Implementing the original portfolio holder decision is within the governance of Rochford constitution.
- 6.6 No time frame was put on the recommendation from overview and scrutiny for a report to Full Council. Therefore a report is expected no earlier than November 2024 to allow a minimum period of 12 months to review the options on blue badge parking schemes.

7.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful.
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

The introduction of free parking for blue badge holders is deemed to have a positive impact on anybody with a protected characteristic. Limiting the time allows a fair opportunity for those classed with a disability that requires a blue badge to have access to free parking within Council car parks.

8.0 ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 None.

9.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Having free parking for blue badge holders allows these users access to the high streets within the district, and can support events that outside visitors may attend by increasing accessibility.

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Overview & Scrutiny	04/04/2023