

## REPORT OF CABINET

(Meeting held on 6 March 2013)

### 1. HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT REPORT 2013 (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO 65)

The Department of Energy and Climate Change now require the Council to publish a report that sets out the measures it proposes to take to improve the energy efficiency of residential properties in the District. The first report has to be submitted to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and published by 1 April 2013, with progress reports published every two years. This Council's report, which is based on the template provided by Government, addresses the two principal priorities of reducing CO<sup>2</sup> emissions and reducing the number of households in fuel poverty.

Over recent years, CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in this District have steadily decreased, by 14.8% between 2005 and 2009. The target now set is to achieve a further 10% reduction by 2020. For the most part, this Council will achieve this reduction through encouraging households to take up the opportunities offered through the Government's Green Deal to improve the energy efficiency of their properties and also other initiatives such as the renewable heat incentive. Insulate Hampshire, which has just been recognised as the "Best Local Initiative" in the prestigious national Climate Week awards, provides a good example of joint working with other authorities to engage with households and encourage them to take advantage of the schemes available.

The percentage of households in fuel poverty in the District (12.7% in 2010) is below the national average (16.4%), but higher than the average for Hampshire (10.7%). The Government has indicated that they intend to publish a new fuel poverty strategy and to review the definition of fuel poverty (currently defined as the need to spend more than 10% of income to maintain an acceptable level of warmth in the dwelling) during 2013 with the intention of eliminating fuel poverty by 2016. The elimination of fuel poverty is not a realistic target locally in the short term and it has therefore been agreed that a reduction of 10% in the number of households in fuel poverty in this District should be achieved between 2010 and 2020. If the Government's new strategy brings forwards additional tools to address fuel poverty this target will be revisited.

Some members will recall that this Council signed up to the Nottingham Declaration in 2008, which committed the Council to achieving environmental targets. The Local Government Association has developed a new initiative, called "Climate Local", to which Councils can sign up. In return for committing to continue to address climate change, building on previous achievements, Climate Local allows access to additional resources and support, and to the Climate Local Steering Group. Although Hampshire County Council have already signed up, the Cabinet agreed with the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel's view that this initiative needed proper evaluation, to establish whether it would be advantageous to this Council, before any such commitment was made. A task and finish working group will therefore be established, later this year, to evaluate "Climate Local" and report back.

#### **RECOMMENDED**

***That the HECA report at Appendix 1 of Report A to the Cabinet be formally adopted by the Council***

## **2. COUNCIL CAR PARKS – CONSIDERATION OF INTRODUCING CHARGES FOR BLUE BADGE HOLDERS (REPORT B) (MINUTE NO 66)**

This Council's policies on car parks reflect the Government's assumptions, when calculating the annual financial settlement, that users of this important service should meet the cost. Over recent months a number of changes to charging arrangements have been implemented to ensure that, as far as possible, car parking areas do not incur a net cost to the Council. Part of the strategy has included the use of short and long stay parking clocks, the latter now also covering parking in the various amenity car parks. Research has established that over 70% of car parking acts in the District are now paid for using a parking clock, in recognition of the value for money and convenience that they represent. A short stay parking clock costs 40 pence per week, while a long stay clock costs £2 per week.

The one remaining anomaly in the Council's charging policies is that the holders of Blue Badges do not currently pay. Before considering whether car parking charges should be introduced for people holding Blue Badges, the Council must first be satisfied that this would not disadvantage or otherwise discriminate against people with disabilities. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel established the Parking Task and Finish Group to investigate this, and other parking issues, in detail. In addition to extensive consultations with individuals and groups representing disabled people, the Group also sought specialist advice on access to payment methods and signage.

The Cabinet is aware that the Council's decision to freeze Council Tax for the last 3 years represents a significant financial benefit to all households in the District. In addition, around 10,000 Blue Badges have been issued for this District, where there are currently some 75,000 households. This is a relatively high proportion of the local population. Many local authorities nationally now charge Blue Badge holders for parking, including most of the authorities to the west of this District. Any decision on charging should therefore be taken within this context.

Having considered the detailed report of the Parking Task and Finish Group, the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel had concurred with their recommendation that, subject to certain provisos, charges can be introduced without causing disadvantage or discrimination to persons who have a protected characteristic under the terms of the Equality Act 2010. Having looked at the evidence, the Cabinet is also satisfied with that conclusion.

It has been recognised that people with mobility problems may need additional time to conduct their business or attend appointments. For this reason it is intended that the holders of Blue Badges should receive an additional hour's parking to that paid for. To achieve this it will be necessary to amend the Car Park Order.

Although it is likely that most Blue Badge holders will follow the trend in the general population and use parking clocks, it is important that arrangements are put in place so that they can also pay on a casual basis, without any impediment. The pay and display meters will all need to be changed to comply with BS8300: 2009, but the current machines are coming towards the end of their useful life and are due for replacement in the near future. Access to the machines will also have to be made wheelchair accessible. Arrangements can be made for Blue Badge holders to pay by telephone, without incurring the charge normally incurred by people using this method of payment.

There will also need to be changes to the signage in car parks to ensure that the charges are properly displayed and comply with required standards.

It is anticipated that the imposition of charges will generate income in excess of £75,000 per annum. The payback period for the infrastructure costs, such as ticket machines and signing, estimated at £260,000, is calculated at 3.5 years even if the entire cost of replacing the ticket machines is attributed to this proposal, which it should not.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (a) That, having undertaken extensive research and consultation, and particularly in the light of the modest cost of parking clocks at 40 pence per week for short stay parking and £2 per week for long stay parking, it can be concluded that the introduction of car parking charges for the holders of Blue Badges would not disadvantage this group of the local population compared to the general population living in and visiting the District, and accordingly charges should be introduced;**
- (b) That an amendment to the District of New Forest Council (Off Street Parking Places) Order be advertised, proposing that Blue Badge Holders be charged for using New Forest District Council off street charged car parks, but on the basis of allowing them further time as explained in paragraph 5.2 of Report B to the Cabinet and exempting them from short stay waiting restrictions as set out in paragraph 7.1 of Report B to the Cabinet; and**
- (c) That if, after undertaking the statutory consultations and gaining the consent of the Highway Authority, the District of New Forest Council (Off Street Parking Places) Order 2005 is amended in due course to introduce charges for the holders of Blue Badges, then funding of £260,000 be sought, at an appropriate time, to provide the necessary equipment, signs and alterations.**

**Cllr B Rickman  
CHAIRMAN**