

John Thomson
Deputy Leader of the Council

29 September 2011

Claire Perry MP
James Gray MP
Duncan Hames MP
Andrew Murrison MD MP
John Glen MP

Cabinet Office
Wiltshire Council
County Hall
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Your ref:
Our ref: jt/cc/007.11.m
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Dear

The Government Blue Badge Reform Programme: Blue Badge Improvement Service

I write in response to the letter dated September 2011 received from Norman Baker, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department of Transport regarding the government's Blue Badge Reform Programme which I attach.

I am concerned that at a time when government have decided to devolve responsibility to local government and require us to remove £32 million from our budgets in a drive for efficiency we are faced with an expensive and cumbersome change to the Blue Badge system.

Wiltshire carried out a lean review of its blue badge system some years ago and in doing so it reviewed all aspects of the system including the application and assessment process, the payments process and how we worked with the GPs. In doing so, the council saved the PCT £56k per year and removed £120k from internal costs. A key benefit for the customers was the dramatic reduction in turnaround times and often resolution on first point of contact.

The new system builds cost back into the system and in addition, increases cost and waiting time for the customer. The hybrid 'hand -off' system between the council, Northgate and its partner Payne Security will build in waste and delay. The changes in the process whilst building checks for fraud into the system, assume that there are high levels of blue badge fraud in all areas of the country and that a centralised system is the best way of dealing with that. Instead it has built in additional cost for both the customer and the council.

I attach a spreadsheet prepared by our officers which shows that the basic cost of a badge has increased from £4.84 to £15.02. The council will not only lose money in following the new process but more importantly, where we have previously not charged for a badge will now need to recover the full £10.00 in order to cover our costs.

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I would request that, even at this late stage the government consider ceasing this process and returning the issuing of blue badges to the local authority.

Yours sincerely

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Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Adult Care, Communities and Housing

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Encs