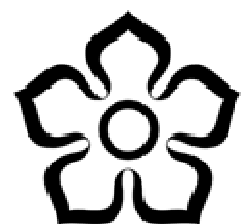


Report to Scrutiny Commission

Adult Social Care Scrutiny Commission
Date of Commission meeting: 6th March 2014

Blue Badge Scheme

Report of the Director of Adult Social Care and
Safeguarding



Leicester
City Council

Useful Information:

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Report**The Scheme**

- 1.1. The Blue Badge Scheme helps over 2.5 million people in England retain their independence by enabling them to park close to jobs, services and facilities. Within Leicester 12,717 Blue Badge permits are currently on issue. The scheme is administered for Leicester City Council by a small team of admin staff, working within the Adult Social Care Business Support Section.
- 1.2. In January 2012 following a review by the Department for Transport (DfT), a number of changes were made in the way the scheme is administered. Central to the changes made was the introduction of the Blue Badge Improvement System (BBIS) which is a national database of Blue Badge holders.
- 1.3. From January 2012 the DfT also transferred funds, previously held by Local Primary Care Trusts for Blue Badge assessments, to Local Authorities. This change was designed to enable Local Authorities to move away from the system of GP making assessments for eligibility, and instead implement an independent assessment of mobility. We currently hold mobility assessment clinics four days a week, inviting applicants to have their mobility assessed.
- 1.4. Other changes included the introduction of a standardised national application form and the amendment of legislation to enable Local Authorities to raise the maximum charge for the permit to £10. The increase is designed to assist Local Authorities to cover administration costs associated with processing applications under the new arrangements.

Administration & Assessment

(Appendix 1 - Blue Badge Team Process)

- 1.5. Applications fall into two distinct categories. The first is “automatic” applications where people have automatic entitlement to a Blue Badge based on specified criteria:
 - receipt of Higher rate Mobility component of Disability Living Allowance currently in the transition of being replaced by Personal Independent Payment (PIP);
 - being registered blind;
 - receipt of War pensioner’s mobility Supplement; or
 - receipt of Tariffs 1-8 from The Service Personnel’s and Veteran’s Agency;

The second category is “discretionary” applications where entitlement is judged on a medical assessment of eligibility.

- 1.6. Automatic applications are received via post, online, or in person. Applications received via the post or online are dealt with to completion by the Blue Badge Admin team. Eligibility and the validity of all required documentation are checked before processing on the BBIS and Adult Social Care (ASC) Carefirst client database.
- 1.7. Automatic applications received face to face continue to be dealt with by Customer Services staff who are trained to complete application forms, check documentation and process automatic applications on the BBIS. Once they have processed the application they forward all paperwork to the Blue Badge team to record the contact on the Adult Social Care system and file the application.
- 1.8. Discretionary applications are received via the post, online, or in person. All discretionary applications are forwarded to the Blue Badge team, who carry out a desk top assessment for each application.
- 1.9. Desk top assessment involves the Blue Badge admin team collating information with regards to an applicant's level of mobility from the application form, from the Adult Social Care client database and from any medical information provided by the applicant. This is then assessed using the guidance provided by the DfT to assess eligibility. (*Appendix 2 - Desk top Assessment form*). Any applications which is not clear are invited for a mobility assessment.
- 1.10. We currently have an assessment room set up where our assessors carry out mobility assessments. The assessors follow the guidance set by the DfT to complete an assessment which involves observing the applicant walk a measured distance from an allocated parking space to our assessment room along with a set discussion regarding the applicant's mobility. (*Appendix 3 - Blue Badge Guidance Feb 2012 (via weblink) and Appendix 4 - Blue Badge Mobility Assessment Questions*).
- 1.11. We have an appeals process which allows any applicant to appeal a decision within 28 days of refusal. Appeals are dealt with initially by the Team Leader who, at the first stage will verify the original decision and reassess the application taking into account any additional information provided by the applicant. At this stage if the applicant has not already attended a mobility assessment they may be invited to be assessed and if required we may also contact medical professionals to obtain further information. If the outcome is still unsatisfactory to the applicant they can request a second independent reassessment where the application is passed to an Independent Manager for review. Any complaints received are dealt with by following the corporate Complaints Policy.
- 1.12. The Blue Badge team are required to maintain both paper and electronic records. This involves the recording of all returned badges, recording all deceased applicants and requesting the return of badges. We are also required to take part in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) every two years.

Statistics & Finances

	2012	2013	Total
Badges issued	4318	4803	9121
New	1391	2025	3416
Renewal	2869	2714	5610

(Appendix 5 - Blue Badge Statistics)

	2012	2013
<i>Expenditure</i>		
Cost of Badges - BBIS (£4.60 per badge)	£16,837	£22,926
Badge Pack Production (VAL)	£263.50	£210.80
<i>Staffing</i>		
Team Leader	£28,514.62	£30,032.15
Admin Officer (B) F.T.E.	£23,713.68	£24,069.73
Admin Officer (C) F.T.E.	£20,765.64	£21,075.99
Admin Officer (D) 0.8 F.T.E.	£15,585.97	£17,541.62
Mobility Assessor (SPOC) 0.4 F.T.E.	£11,634	£11,910
Mobility Assessor (Agency) PT 0.4 F.T.E.	-	£9,028.92
Interpreting	£150	£270
<i>Income</i>		
Fee (£10 per badge)	-£43,229	-£48,172
Total	£74,235	£88,893

Northgate IT solutions charge Local Authorities £4.60 per badge for badge production and standard delivery. This cost is covered by the £10 fee charged to all applicants.

Adult Business Support sustains the stationery, equipment, printing, postage and any other ad-hoc costs incurred in delivering our service.

Misuse & Enforcement

1.13. The Blue Badge team is also required to deal with replacing any lost, stolen and damaged badges, ensuring relevant checks are made on each application to ensure any fraudulent applications are identified. It is also the Blue Badge team's responsibility to deal with all reported misuse of badges liaising with Local Authority parking teams the police and private car parks. In 2013 we received over 40 reports of badge misuse where we attempted to investigate and take action. We are unable to investigate many of the misuse reports received due to the limited information provided.

1.14. The DfT have recognised that legislation around Blue Badge enforcement has made tackling misuse very difficult for authorities for many years. In October 2013 the DfT announced some changes to the scheme the most relevant being to allow Enforcement Officers to inspect and seize badge's,

previously Police were required to seize a badge. (*Appendix 6 - DfT Enforcement changes circular – Oct 2013*)

Future Developments

- 1.15. Our aim is to work with Occupational Therapy staff to further develop our mobility assessment process utilising their expertise and resources.
- 1.16. We plan to recruit a second part time assessor to the Blue Badge assessment role as the demand cannot be met within the current resources.
- 1.17. We are currently working with Northgate who are developing the BBIS system to allow applicants to upload evidence and photos on-line.
- 1.18. We are also working with Northgate to promote the use of the assisted interview module within BBIS; this will allow Blue Badge team and Customer Service staff to complete an application directly onto the BBIS system uploading all relevant documents rather than completing a paper application form when an applicant comes to apply in person.
- 1.19. We are working closely with Leicester City Council Parking Enforcement team to develop the use of the BBIS system to allow enforcement officers to access the system on street using handheld devices to check badge validity. We aim to continue to work closely with Leicester City Council Parking Enforcement team and promote on street enforcement exercises

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny

2. None

3. Supporting Information

- *Appendix 1* - Blue Badge Team Process
- *Appendix 2* - Blue Badge Desk Top Assessment Form
- *Appendix 3* - Blue Badge Guidance Feb 2012: Link provided due to document size
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-blue-badge-scheme-local-authority-guidance-england>
- *Appendix 4* - Blue Badge Mobility Assessment Questions
- *Appendix 5* - Blue Badge Annual Statistics
- *Appendix 6* - DfT Enforcement changes circular – Oct 2013

4. Financial, legal and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

4.1.1 There are no direct financial implications, as the report is concerned with providing details of the processes and how the scheme works.

4.1.2 However, the service is currently funded from a combination of the income generated and other team budgets (ASC Admin Team) within the department.

4.1.3 The above table (1.12) shows the financial costs of administering the scheme.

Yogesh Patel – Accountant (Adults Social Care)

4.2 Legal implications

4.2 “No direct legal implications”

Kamal Adatia - City Barrister & Head of Standards

4.3. Climate Change implications

4.3 There is no climate change implications associated with this report.

Chloe Hardisty, Senior Environmental Consultant (Climate Change)

4.4 Equality Impact Assessment

4.4 The Blue Badge Scheme is targeted for those with disability as their protected characteristic. However, the scheme is quite specific as to which disabled people would receive this benefit based on their need for mobility support. Some are automatically entitled to receive the Blue Badge as a result of their meeting national criteria, others must be assessed by the council to determine whether their needs are in keeping with the scheme's aims.

The main positive impact of the Blue Badge Scheme is that it enables people with mobility problems who have personal transport, to access activities and facilities that would otherwise not be readily available to them, by using specially designated disabled parking bays and being able to park on single or double yellow lines for up to three hours. This enables them to participate in community life, engage in social activities, take part in economic or educational activities, and maintain their identity and self-respect.

The fact that the scheme does not support all disabled people can be considered to be a negative impact. If people do not meet the automatic entitlement criteria, they are able to apply for the discretionary element of the scheme which sets out its criteria aimed at achieving the intended outcomes of the scheme. There is an appeals process in place which enables applicants to

seek recourse as mitigation for their unsuccessful application for a Blue Badge.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead

4.5 Other Implications

(You will have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate any which apply?)

None

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices:

7. Is this a private report ? No

(If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)