
MANAGING BLUE BADGES – ISSUE AND USE

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To respond to the resolutions of Place Scrutiny Committee made at its meeting of 1 September 2016.

Summary

2. A report on Managing Blue Badge Issue and Use was submitted to the meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee held on 1 September 2016. In addition to noting the report the Scrutiny Committee resolved:-
 - (a) That this Scrutiny Committee requests that the Customer Services Manager investigate the possibility of undertaking home visits where applicants are unable to attend in person at the Town Hall especially in light of the removal of disabled parking bays underneath the Council Chamber canopy;
 - (b) That a further report be submitted to the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 16 February 2017;
 - (c) This report responds to these resolutions.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members note the report.

Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth

Background Papers

Report submitted to the 1 September 2016 meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee "Managing Blue Badge Issue and Use".

Bill Westland : ext 6306

S17 Crime and Disorder	The report addresses the criminal fraudulent use of Blue Badges.
Health and Well Being	The report supports the well-being of people with mobility issues by addressing fraudulent use of Blue Badge parking spaces that they could otherwise use.
Carbon Impact	There are no implications.
Diversity	The report supports the well-being of people with mobility issues by addressing fraudulent use of Blue Badge parking spaces that they could otherwise use.
Wards Affected	All wards are affected.
Groups Affected	The report supports the well-being of people with mobility issues by addressing fraudulent use of Blue Badge parking spaces that they could otherwise use.
Budget and Policy Framework	The contents of the report have no impact on the Council's Budget and Policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report supports the well-being of people with mobility issues by addressing fraudulent use of Blue Badge parking spaces that they could otherwise use.
Efficiency	There are no implications.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Issue of Blue Badges

4. The possibility of undertaking home visits where applicants are unable to attend in person at the Town Hall (especially in light of the potential removal of disabled parking bays underneath the Council Chamber canopy) has been examined by the Customer Services Manager.
5. The over-riding aim of the scheme is to enable the badge holder to park closer to their destination if they're disabled. Therefore it is reasonable to expect the person applying for the badge to park close to the Town Hall. The journey to the Town Hall is no different to any other journey the applicant may make. The Council has a reasonable adjustment in the process that allows officers to go to the applicant in their car on an appointment basis. Officers do not have the resources to make home visits. The Council must also be satisfied that the badge will be used by the person applying and not a family member taking advantage of a bed-ridden relative.
6. The option of allowing photos and copies of ID to be posted to the Council has been considered but the fundamental flaw with this is that the Council can't be satisfied that the person applying matches the photo being provided. It would create an opportunity for fraudulent applications to be made.

7. It is now understood that the disabled parking area under the canopy of the Council Chamber will be retained for disabled parking, but limited to three hours. This reflects concerns regarding the need to keep dedicated disabled parking near to facilities such as the Church, Town Hall, Market Square, Feethams Leisure and the Dolphin Centre.
8. At the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 1 September 2016, several other issues were discussed and officers agreed to explore further. These have been examined and are referred to below.

Development of a Flyer or Leaflet

9. The possibility of the use of a flyer or leaflet being developed to be given to Blue Badge recipients highlighting what they can and can't do has been explored. The Blue Badge process is completed by a Central Government partner called Northgate, who send the badge to the applicant, together with the standard rights and responsibilities and a leaflet. This leaflet includes all of the relevant advice on the rules of using a blue badge. The leaflet can be accessed using the link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-blue-badge-scheme-rights-and-responsibilities-in-england>

10. The content of this leaflet together with the Highway Code should provide sufficient guidance and instruction to allow a blue badge holder to understand what they can and can't do. From time to time Customer Services work with the Council's Communications Team to update News Feeds with pertinent Blue Badge information, such as checking expiry dates.

Supporting Civil Enforcement Officers to Deal With Lost and Stolen Blue Badges

11. All reported lost and stolen badges are recorded in the Central Government issuing system (Blue Badge Improvement Service - BBIS). The badge is cancelled and replaced as appropriate. Any warden in the country can check the status of a Blue Badge issued by any authority to check validity.

Are Blue Badge Services Bench-Marked?

12. The process used in Darlington was modelled on Stockton's process so there is similarity with our neighbour. Darlington can make decisions on eligibility within 7 minutes of a telephone application, which means we are faster than all our neighbouring authorities who still have application forms. Our telephony application process is also much leaner than the national system of applying online. An online application takes up to 10 days to process. However, technological advances such as 'gov.uk Verify', will allow a resident to apply, check eligibility, verify their ID, pull down their driver licence or passport photo from the relevant government agency, and pay for their badge all in one transaction. The badge will then be automatically ordered. The Customer Services Manager maintains relationships with his counterparts in the North East to ensure that best practice is maintained, but the actual production of benchmarking data is difficult due to different processes being followed.