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**OVERVIEW OF PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Place Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Work Programme 2016/17**

2. We continue to give consideration to the Work Programme for this Committee and taking into account the ambitious programme of change across the Council and the key role of Scrutiny in ensuring that the programme is able to deliver the service improvements and the budget savings necessary.

**Managing Blue Badge Issue and Use**

3. Scrutiny gave due consideration to how blue badge eligibility is determined and subsequent use monitored in order to minimise misuse.
4. Whilst considering the Blue Badge Scheme Scrutiny also listened and welcomed the views of Darlington Association on Disability.
5. Members were reminded of the obligations under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the 'Public Sector Equality Duty'. This duty requires the Council, when exercising its functions to have 'due regard' to the need to:
  - (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act;
  - (b) advance quality of opportunity between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not share that protected characteristic, and
  - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (this involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to (a) tackle prejudice, and (b) promote understanding).
6. Government policy was that disabled people should be able to travel with the minimum of difficulty and the Blue Badge Scheme provided a range of national on-street parking concessions for people with severe mobility problems, who have difficulty using public transport.
7. Members were provided with a detailed analysis of the current paperless application process, which had reduced the initial decision time from 20 working days to seven minutes, together with the possible three outcomes. All eligible

applicants who have reached the end of the process by proving their ID and paying for the badge are entered into the national database called BBIS (Blue Badge Improvement Service).

8. Misuse of Blue Badges includes using a badge that is no longer valid; use of the badge without the badge holder's permission; use by the holder of a badge that has been reported lost or stolen; and use of a stolen or copied badge.
9. The criteria and evidence checks for issuing Blue Badges have been considerably tightened with all local authorities moving to a national system under the Department of Transport.
10. Scrutiny was advised that identifying misuse of a Blue Badge once issued can be time-consuming and difficult with the most common form of abuse being use of the badge by friends or family of the holder. The Department for Transport recommends that where there is a clear problem and a business case for tackling abuse that a specialist Blue Badge enforcement team carries out undercover surveillance work to build up sufficient evidence to prosecute the individual in the Magistrates Court.
11. Members noted that the majority of complaints, once investigated, are unfounded as it is found that the holder is in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

### **Creative Darlington Board**

12. We received the notes of the Creative Board Meetings held 29 February and 9 June 2016 which provided updates on various topics including Darlington Borough Council's mid-term financial plan's impacts on culture; Creative Darlington Board update; Creative Darlington Priorities for 2016/17 – 2025 and Audience Development for Performing Arts while Capital Programmes Ongoing; and Developing Finance for Arts Activity Opportunity.
13. Members were also given an update by the Creative Darlington Manager on the Creative Darlington Terms of Reference; Theatre Transition Work and Theatre Town Promotion; Darlington Arts Festival 2016; Proposal to Support Darlington Arts Festival 2017 and Luxi Limited Proposal.

**Councillor Bob Carson**  
**Chair of Place Scrutiny Committee**