

**CABINET  
9 SEPTEMBER 2025**

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## **BLUE BADGE POLICY STATEMENT**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet members on the current issues affecting Blue Badge applications and agree the recommendations outlined.
2. The existing blue badge application process, which is aligned to government guidance, is currently experiencing a backlog in applications and as a result there are an increasing number of complaints. This report outlines the revisions made to the process, including the introduction, changes to eligible conditions, procedures and revisions to the process that will address these issues in both the interim and moving forward.

### **Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that Cabinet agree to: -
  - (a) An automatic extension of the blue badge after expiry, or those that are soon to expire, meaning these can be used without risk of a fine.
  - (b) New eligibility conditions.
  - (c) Note the procedural revisions underway across the service.
  - (d) Increase the Service Level Agreement from 20 days to 12 weeks.
  - (e) Note the contents of the Equality Impact Assessment.
4. Any future changes will be subject to consultation with the portfolio member.

### **Reasons**

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -
  - (a) There is currently a high volume of backlog applications for blue badges and an increase in complaints because of this.
  - (b) Existing eligibility conditions have not been refreshed for several years.
  - (c) Revisions to internal procedures to further improve the application process.

**James Stroyan  
Executive Director of People**

## Background Papers

6. The national government guidance for Blue Badge applications were reviewed as part of this report, ensuring continued alignment.  
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-blue-badge-scheme-rights-and-responsibilities-in-england> )

Paul Neil: Extension 5960

Council Plan	The report reflects the council priorities of addressing inequalities and the efficient and effective use of resources.
Addressing inequalities	EIA completed and no negative impacts.
Tackling Climate Change	These changes have a positive impact and promotes independence across the borough.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council's Efficiency Programme.
Health and Wellbeing	Positive impact on residents allowing for continued independence.
S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact.
Wards Affected	All wards.
Groups Affected	People with mobility issues.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not recommend a change to the Council's budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

7. The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet members on the current issues affecting Blue Badge applications, particularly the backlog in applications and to consider:
  - (a) Introducing an automatic extension of the blue badge after expiry or soon to expire badges.
  - (b) A change in eligibility conditions.
  - (c) Proposed procedural changes.
8. The above revisions to procedures will in turn have a positive impact on future blue badge applications, including a significant reduction in the backlog and customers applications being processed in a timely manner.
9. The table below highlights the increase year on year (except for 20/21 due to covid restrictions) of Blue Badge applications received by the Council. This increase, in part, can be linked to a revision to the scheme eligibility criteria in August 2019 which was extended to include people with non-visible and neurological disabilities that may affect their ability to access goods and services.

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total number of applications per year	2407	2525	2229	2959	3254	3444
Total number of online applications per year	0	501	1093	1308	1800	2265
Total number of F2F applications per year		16	13	8	10	8
Total number of telephone applications per year	2407	544	882	1420	1304	1021
Total number of automatic applications which didn't go to the OT	907	891	1004	1219	1319	1399
Total number of applications referred to OT each year	272	369	184	254	277	752
Total number of accepted applications by OT per year	218	362	168	249	268	467
Total number of declined applications by OT per year	1	1	5	0	1	0

10. The latest figures for August 2025 show there are 50 applications in the OT queue awaiting assessment. The average wait time remains is 5 weeks. These figures show a reduction in both numbers and wait times over the implementation period of the revised procedures.

### Summary of current procedures

11. Applications for both new and renewals of blue badges are made through a number of channels.
12. The main channel is online applications followed by telephone calls and then face to face. The customer service team act as the first stage and process these applications, however where a decision cannot be made, these are referred to Occupational Therapy in Adults Services.
13. Darlington's Service Level Agreement for Blue Badge referrals is 20 days from the date of referral to OT. Data from [Blue Badge](#) government website states "local councils usually make a decision within 12 weeks".

14. For renewal applications the DBC application process is the same as a new application.
15. There are a number of proposals moving forward that will reduce the current backlog of applications and ensure the application process is more efficient:
  - (a) Introduction of an automatic extension for current users of the blue badge scheme to ensure those who have expired or soon to be expired badges can still use these without risk of fines. The proposed automatic extension would be 31 March 2026.
  - (b) Revisions to current conditions of eligibility as listed in Annex 1.
16. In addition to the changes above, improvements in current processes are underway. This followed a meeting between Adult Social Care and Customer Services on 23 July. A number of improvements were identified including:
  - (a) In order to streamline the application process it is proposed to introduce a new "Practitioner Agreed Application" pathway. Currently, all applicants are required to complete a full assessment as part of their application. Introducing this change will allow Adult Social Care Practitioners, in their care assessment role, to automatically recommend a blue badge applicant where there is a clear and eligible need, without the requirement for a full application. This is in line with national Blue Badge Guidance that states:

*"Referral to an 'expert assessor' is unnecessary when a local authority determines that, from the information that they have about the applicant, it is self-evident that the applicant does, or does not, meet one of the 'subject to further assessment' eligibility criteria, for example that the applicant is clearly eligible or ineligible and further assessment would not assist the local authority in determining eligibility. The reason for this is that it would be overly burdensome for both local authorities and for applicants to require further assessment in cases where an applicant's disability means that they are clearly eligible or ineligible."*
  - (b) Work is underway within the Lagan Case Management System to ensure this new pathway process requires minimal manual completion of the blue badge assessment criteria for customer services.
  - (c) One of the key reasons there is a backlog in applications was due to single person dependency within the OT Service. It is now confirmed this is now resolved with an increasing number of staff now trained. Moving forward, it is proposed to implement a blue badge rota system rather than reliance on individual OT staff members.
  - (d) Restricted system access was also a factor in delays in the application process. Previously OT staff did not have access to Liquid Logic, where information regarding residents care support needs are stored. This access has now been granted, meaning the OT service have access to the relevant records. This system access restriction still applies to the Customer Service Team.

- (e) Consideration in approving blue badge applications for residents with temporary conditions has been considered. However, the proposal to issue short-term badges is not possible due to a change in national procedures. Previously short badges were issued, now these are only issued for a period of three years.

### **Financial Implications**

- 17. There will be no impact on income from the automatic extension as residents will still need to apply for renewal and make the payment in line with current charging policy. It is not anticipated these changes will see an increase in costs to the Council. There are adequate parking arrangements and disabled places within Darlington to accommodate the changes to the eligibility conditions.

### **Legal Implications**

- 18. No legal implications were identified following discussion with Legal services.

### **HR Implications**

- 19. No negative impact on staff conditions.

### **Carbon Impact and Climate Change**

- 20. These changes should be seen as positives by promoting system efficiencies and the promotion of individual's independence across the borough.

### **Equalities considerations**

- 21. The Equalities impact assessment is attached and identifies no negative impact.

## **Revised conditions**

### **1. The current conditions are outlined below:**

#### **(a) People who automatically qualify for a Blue Badge**

- (i) People will automatically qualify for a Blue Badge if they are aged 3 or over and at least one of the following applies:
  - (1) They receive the higher rate of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA).
  - (2) They receive a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) because they can't walk more than 50 metres (a score of 8 points or more under the 'moving around' activity of the mobility component).
  - (3) They are registered blind (severely sight impaired).
  - (4) They receive a War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement.
  - (5) They have received a lump sum benefit within tariff levels 1 to 8 of the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (Compensation) Scheme and have been certified as having a permanent and substantial disability that causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking.
  - (6) They receive the mobility component of PIP and have obtained 10 points specifically for descriptor E under the 'planning and following journeys' activity, on the grounds that you are unable to undertake any journey because it would cause you overwhelming psychological distress.
- (ii) If they have any score other than 10 points under descriptor E, in the 'planning and following journeys' activity of PIP they may still be eligible for a Blue Badge, but they do not automatically qualify. This includes if they have a higher score of 12. They will have to provide evidence to demonstrate their eligibility, which will be assessed as part of their application.

#### **(b) In addition, it is proposed in this report that the following people will also qualify for a Blue Badge if:**

- (i) One or more of the following applies:
  - (1) They cannot walk at all.
  - (2) They cannot walk without help from someone else or using mobility aids.
  - (3) They find walking very difficult due to pain, breathlessness or the time it takes.

- (4) Walking is dangerous to their health and safety.
- (5) They have a terminal illness, which means they cannot walk or find walking very difficult and have a DS1500 form.
- (6) They have a severe disability in both arms and drive regularly, but cannot operate pay-and-display parking machines.
- (7) They have a child under the age of 3 with a medical condition that means the child always needs to be accompanied by bulky medical equipment.
- (8) They have a child under the age of 3 with a medical condition that means the child must always be kept near a vehicle in case they need emergency medical treatment.
- (9) They are constantly a significant risk to themselves or others near vehicles, in traffic or car parks.
- (10) They struggle severely to plan or follow a journey.
- (11) They find it difficult or impossible to control their actions and lack awareness of the impact they could have on others.
- (12) They regularly have intense and overwhelming responses to situations causing temporary loss of behavioral or physical control.
- (13) They frequently become extremely anxious or fearful of public or open spaces.
- (14) Those who are in receipt of Attendance Allowance do not automatically qualify for a Blue Badge, however it will be taken into consideration in supporting a blue badge application.