

Report for: Cabinet 13 October 2020

Title: Scrutiny panel review of Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People

Report

authorised by: Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods, Stephen McDonnell.

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Ward(s) affected: All

Report for Key/

Non-Key Decision: Non-Key Decision

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1** This report sets out the formal response to the recommendations arising from the Environment and Community Safety (E&SC) Scrutiny review of the administration of the Disabled Blue Badge Scheme. The report Disabled Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny on 22 June 2020.

2. Cabinet Member Introduction

- 2.1** I was keen to involve the Environment and Community Safety scrutiny panel in many of the changes being implemented to parking operational policy and processes. While the parking transformation programme is an accelerated development programme, it is important that changes and new developments are prioritised and targeted where needed most.
- 2.2** I welcome the review of the Disabled Blue Badges Scheme and how access can be improved. I also appreciate the responsiveness of the scrutiny panel who included this review at a late stage in their very busy schedule. I am happy to recommend the majority of their recommendations to Cabinet. I look forward to working closely with the service in implementing those recommendations and measuring and monitoring the outcomes achieved.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1** It is recommended that Cabinet agrees to;

- i. Note the outcome of the Scrutiny panel review of Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People, as detailed in appendix 1 to this report.
- ii. Proceed with the recommendations regarding the Council's blue badge scheme as set out in appendix 2. And agree all recommendations except recommendation 11 and 12 which are not agreed.
- iii. Note that recommendations 16 and 21 are also to be agreed in part and the proposed responses to those recommendations in appendix 2 to this report.

4 Reasons for decision

- 4.1 The recommended actions set out in this report support the work being undertaken to improve the service offer to motorists with disabilities. Those actions will help streamline processes, increase self-serve options as well as protecting the dedicated spaces made available on the public highway for those users.

5 Alternative options considered

- 5.1 In addressing the recommendations set out by the E&CS Scrutiny Panel several actions were considered. This report provides what are considered to be the most effective actions. Therefore, alternative options have not been considered at this point. These actions will be however be refined if required during implementation to ensure that the right outcomes are achieved.

6 Background information

- 6.1 The Disabled Blue Badge scheme provides a national range of on-street parking concessions, providing free parking without a time limit in otherwise restricted environments. The scheme also allows parking for up to 3 hours on yellow line restricted streets, unless a loading ban applies. These concessions exist to help those who qualify under the scheme to park close to local services and facilities.
- 6.2 The Department for Transport (DfT) is responsible for the legislation that sets out the framework for the Scheme, including associated guidance and for sharing good practice.
- 6.3 It is the role of Local Authorities to manage the day-to-day administration policies and procedures, and to support the assessment, local provisions, and enforcement services to ensure customers are:
 - Treated fairly and consistently
 - Provided with a timely and cost-effective service, and
 - That processes are resistant to abuse
- 6.4 An operational review of the disabled parking offer was concluded last year, which resulted in the following changes.

- Introduction of dedicated disabled parking bays
- The revision of the eligibility criteria
- The introduction of an appeals process for unsuccessful disabled bay applications.

- 6.5 The Blue Badge Scheme was also extended in 2019 to include people with 'hidden disabilities', such as people who are autistic, have a learning disability, dementia or a mental illness.
- 6.6 While many improvements have already been implemented to the Council's disabled parking provision, further improvements are being delivered. The E&CS Scrutiny review is therefore timely and helpful, providing the insight and steer required at a crucial time. This review validates some improvements planned and highlights other improvements that need to be brought forward.
- 6.7 It is helpful to know that online access and self-service options are seen as a priority by users. We are well advanced in the commissioning and roll out of a new IT system that will include a new Blue Badge Case Management System (CMS). This CMS will improve the digital offer and will address many of the concerns raised about service delivery.
- 6.8 The review has aided a better understanding of the impact of current multi-organisational delivery of this service. While some of those arrangements are unavoidable, improvements can be explored especially with internal Council services and options explored on how to integrate those services further reducing overlaps and duplications.
- 6.9 Much work has also been undertaken with the Integrated Community Therapy Team (Whittington Trust) to enable the resumption of assessments (face to face appointments) taking account of Covid 19 restrictions. Those discussions have explored how the service can be improved at a time of additional health and safety considerations. Processes are being reviewed and more importantly efforts are being made to ensure that applicants requiring an assessment to determine their eligibility for a Disabled Blue Badge and / or a dedicated Disabled Parking Bay, understand the need for an assessment as well as the process in advance of their appointment. This will not only improve the customer experience but will avoid situations where an assessment cannot be concluded due to an absence of essential information.
- 6.10 The response to each of the recommendations is set out in Appendix 1.

7. Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 7.1 The recommendations in the Disabled Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People Blue Badge and Disabled Bay Operational Review supports three Themes within the Borough Plan 2019-2023 – People, Place and Economy.
- 7.2 **People Theme:** Our vision is a Haringey where strong families, strong networks and strong communities nurture all residents to live well and achieve their

potential. The availability of Blue Badges and access to parking will contribute to specific Outcomes within this Theme including:

- All adults are able to live healthy and fulfilling lives, with dignity, staying active and connected in their communities e.g. easy access for those who require disabled parking services.

7.3 **Place Theme:** A place with strong, resilient & connected communities where people can lead active and healthy lives in an environment that is safe, clean and green. The review will contribute to specific Outcomes within this Theme including:

- A cleaner, accessible and attractive place e.g. better managed parking facilities, especially those that are dedicated to disabled motorists.
- e.g. improved access, including a better developed digital offer making it easier for our residents and customers to access the services they require.

7.4 **Economy Theme:** A growing economy which provides opportunities for all our residents and supports our businesses to thrive. The review will contribute to specific Outcomes within this Theme including:

- A borough where all residents have access to training and skills development opportunities and more people are supported into work e.g. improved access to disabled parking services will support disabled motorists in accessing education, training and employment.

8 **Statutory Officers comments (Chief Finance Officer (including procurement), Assistant Director of Corporate Governance, Equalities**

a. **Finance Comments**

The implementation of these recommendations can be contained within existing revenue resources.

Any new bays will be funded from the existing capital programme budget for the scheme.

b. **Procurement comments**

Not applicable.

c. **Legal comments**

The proposed changes to the Council's Blue Badge Scheme in the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel's recommendations will assist people with disabilities park close to their destination to access goods and services, etc... as legislated for under Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Cabinet is authorised under the Constitution to agree the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel's recommendations in Appendix 1 as such recommendations relate to one of the council's non-executive functions.

d. Equality

The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status apply to the first part of the duty.

The recommendations put forward by the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel aim to improve access and the availability of disabled parking services, improve the process of applying for and renewing blue badges, prompt a review of all correspondence regarding blue badges between the council and disabled residents, and ensure the health assessment process for blue badges is as simple and streamlined as possible.

By accepting the recommendations within the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel's report, access to disabled parking services will be improved for disabled people, allowing them to keep and use a vehicle, giving them the freedom required to travel and access work, and all other facilities that could not be accessed without this facility.

By accepting the recommendations in this report, disabled people will also be benefited due to the implementation of a faster, more efficient process for applying and renewing blue badges. Furthermore, all correspondence between the council and disabled resident will be reviewed to ensure it is courteous, clear, and free of intimidating language, benefitting all disabled blue badge holders and their families. Disabled people will also benefit due to the recommendations regarding health assessment appointments. The recommendations will ensure increased flexibility around appointments and ensure that all delays to the process are minimised.

9 Use of Appendices

- **Appendix 1** – Scrutiny Review: Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People
- **Appendix 2** - Blue Badge Review Recommendations

10 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985