

Report for: Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel

Title: Implementation of recommendations from the Review into Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People.

Report authorised by Stephen McDonnell, Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

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Ward(s) affected: All

Non-Key Decision

1 Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 To provide an update on implementation of the recommendations of the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny review – Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People agreed in 2020.

2 Cabinet Member Introduction

N/A

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel notes the content of this report.

4. Background

- 4.1 Parking provision, including the 'Blue Badge' scheme, makes a considerable contribution to the independence and social inclusion of disabled residents. The Blue Badge scheme provides a range of on-street parking concessions, providing free parking without a time limit in otherwise restricted environments. These concessions exist to help those who qualify under the scheme to park close to local services and facilities. In addition, Local authorities are required to provide disabled parking bays that may be used solely by holders of Blue Badges.
- 4.2 The progress being made in implementing the recommendations of the Environmental and Community Safety Scrutiny Panel is positive. The Covid-19 pandemic presented challenges to day-to-day service delivery. It also hindered the delivery of some new developments. Mobility assessments which account for approximately 60% of Blue Badge applications, ceased during lockdown periods, where guidance prohibited face to face contact. This resulted in some Blue Badge applications being put on hold.

Whittington Health Trust colleagues assisted with desk-based assessments, where medical evidence permitted eligibility to be determined. Unfortunately, this only applied to a small number of cases. The remaining 40% of applications meeting the automatic qualification criteria, were processed as normal by Council staff.

- 4.3 Progress on implementation of each recommendation is attached as Appendix 1. In summary, a new Blue Badge Case Management System (CMS) went live on 12 August 2021. This introduced online payments, as well as integrating communications to customers at relevant stages of the application process - for example, requests for further information, referral for assessment, and request for payments.
- 4.4. 130 out of the 1700 disabled parking bays are currently live on the ground as dedicated disabled bays. The majority of these dedicated disabled parking bays were provided to new applicants, with the conversion of some existing disabled parking bays. It is expected that demand for the conversion of existing bays will increase as awareness of the service continues to be raised. A further 43 dedicated disabled bays are being progressed for delivery.
- 4.5 The recent introduction of map-based traffic management orders provides an effective monitoring tool to ensure that conversion rates of those bays will not impact on wider disabled parking provision in areas of high demand, including town centres. This tool has allowed the service to identify potential redundant disabled parking bays. The service will seek to remove those bays subject to consultation bringing the infrastructure up to date.
- 4.6 The new parking IT system offers Blue Badge holders who reside within the borough a free virtual residential permit for their home Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ). Online and paper applications are available. Online applications automatically validate a customer's residency and Blue Badge status, with a free permit issued instantly. This was based on arrangements in two neighbouring boroughs, replacing the previous 'Companion Badge' scheme. The Companion Badge granted exemptions boroughwide.
- 4.6 Concerns have been raised by existing Companion Badge holders that limiting the new offer to the individual's home CPZ does not grant the protections required. As a consequence, this new scheme is being reviewed through the normal governance arrangements.
- 4.7 Many discussions have taken place with Whittington Trust colleagues to establish how the mobility assessment process can be streamlined and improved. While those discussions have not yet concluded, some changes are being implemented. Further improvements will be delivered in the near future, now that they have caught up with the backlog of assessments.
- 4.8 Improvements have been made to communications with Blue Badge holders, including new applicants. This includes a more detailed explanation of the mobility assessment process. This allows applicants to understand the need for the assessment and arrive better prepared, in particular, bringing along any required medical information. This is expected to improve the experience for applicants as well as reducing missed

appointments and the need to reschedule meetings where the necessary information is not available.

- 4.9 There is an ongoing development plan, as set out in the Disabled Parking Action Plan approved by Cabinet in March 2021. An additional £200k investment was agreed through this process to fund a programme to extend the length of disabled parking bays to meet statutory requirements, making them more useable by those needing wheelchairs or other walking aids.
- 4.10 These extended disabled parking bays are being considered in batches, in tandem with controlled parking zone (CPZ) consultations to provide efficiencies in resourcing. The first batch consists of 22 bays in 4 CPZs – Alexandra Palace, St Luke’s, Fortis Green and Tower Gardens. The statutory consultation for these ended in mid-August, so a report is currently being finalised and a formal decision is due to be taken in September.
- 4.11 It should also be noted that the Council has successfully implemented the extension to the Blue Badge scheme to include people with 'hidden disabilities', such as people who are autistic, have a learning disability, dementia or a mental illness. This involved a smooth implementation, with 450 Blue Badges issued under this category since 2019.

5 Contribution to strategic outcomes

- 5.1 Disabled parking facilities supports two key Themes within the Borough Plan 2019-2023:
- People Theme: A Haringey where strong families, strong networks and strong communities nurture all residents to live well and achieve their potential. Disabled parking facilities makes a considerable contribution to the independence and social inclusion of disabled residents.
 - 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. Disabled Parking facilities enables access to those with severe mobility issues or other conditions who need to travel by car.

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

Finance

There are no specific Finance issues arising from this report.

Procurement

There are no specific Procurement issues arising from this report.

Legal

There are no specific Legal issues arising from this report.

Equality

There are no specific Equalities issues arising from this report.

7. Use of Appendices

Appendix 1 - Scrutiny Recommendations Update September 2021

8. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- Disabled Parking Action Plan March 2021 Cabinet report.
- Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Review – Blue Badges and Supporting Better Access to Parking for Disabled People