




Report title: The Administration of the Blue Badge Scheme in Haringey	
Report of: Beverley Taylor, Assistant Director Frontline Services	
Ward(s) affected All	
1. Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ To advise and update Members on progress made on implementing the recommendations of the Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel following its review of Blue Badge Administration in July 2003.	
2. Recommendations	
2.1 That members note the report and comment upon the issues set out in the report	
Report authorised by: Niall Bolger, Director of Urban Environment 	
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4. Access to information: Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 Environmental Services Scrutiny of Blue Badge Administration The Local Implementation Plan The Parking and Enforcement Plan The UDP	

5.0 Report

The Service welcomed the recommendations from the Environmental Services Scrutiny Panel's report on Blue Badge administration. Many improvements have been made to this service and progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from the review.

This report details the work undertaken to date and for ease of reference each recommendation is listed, with progress made to date.

6.0 Blue Badge issuing and processing – recommendations

- a) Consideration should be given to the use of a standard questionnaire and interview by trained staff, e.g. Occupational therapists or contracted medical advisers to assist in assessing eligibility.
- b) The Director of Environmental Services should explore the viability of appointing an external medical practitioner for the purposes of assessing eligibility for Blue badge applications
- c) The Director of Environmental Services should undertake a review of all applications to determine if any pattern exists between areas or GPs, in order to ensure compliance with government guidance on applying the discretionary criteria.

Progress

Much work has been undertaken in this area. At present medical evidence supporting discretionary applications, is provided by the applicant's own GP. Those assessments are funded by the Primary Care Trust (PCT).

The service explored using an independent Doctors Panel to assess those applications, which would at least ensure that an applicant was not assessed by their own GP. This could continue to be funded by the PCT.

However, the poor quality of some assessments by GP's raised concerns about the value of using GP assessment. Guidance also recommends that Occupational Therapists undertake those assessments as they are much better placed to assess mobility.

Subsequent discussions with the PCT has since resulted in an agreement that their Integrated Community Therapists will undertake those assessments on behalf of the Local Authority. This is expected to be at no additional cost to the PCT.

The service expects that one centre in the WoodGreen area will be operational by the end of 2008. Suitable premises are being sought in other

parts of the borough, to ensure that Assessment Centres are as accessible as possible.

Those Therapists will be fully briefed on the eligibility criteria set out in legislation. This will involve detailed questionnaires being developed to support assessments.

7.0 Blue Badge enforcement – recommendations

- d) The Director of Environmental Services should establish a ‘fraud hotline’ for reporting stolen badges and reporting abuse of disabled Persons parking bays.

Progress

The parking service felt that the most appropriate means of progressing this recommendation was by ensuring that all staff dedicated to dealing with parking service telephone calls were equipped to deal with such issues. The parking service telephone number is widely published and this would make the best use of existing resources.

- e) The Director of Environmental Services should consider a pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of placing a bar code which can be read by the hand held devices issued to parking enforcement staff, on blue badges issued by the Department

Progress

There are resource issues that have hindered progress on implementing this recommendation. The handheld equipment currently used by Civil Enforcement Officers (formerly Parking Attendants) cannot read barcodes and as such there are IT development considerations. However the introduction of a paperless permit system scheduled for the end of this year will allow the service to explore this recommendation further.

It may be helpful to note other initiatives introduced to reduce Blue Badge abuse. The service has introduced a ‘Disabled Companion Badge’ that can be used instead of the Blue Badge in Haringey. This badge displays the vehicle registration number and as such is of no value to anyone else.

- f) The Director of Environmental Services should ensure any increase in administration fees, proposed under the government’s review, should be utilised in improving enforcement and deterring fraud, including the cost for use of bar codes.

Progress

Currently Local Authorities can charge up to £2 for issuing a new Blue Badge. Haringey has attempted to charge for the Blue Badge, but found that collection costs exceed the actual charge. The Disabled Companion Badge carries an administration fee of £20 which covers administration of that scheme.

- g) The Director of Environmental Services should explore the viability of providing a response based enforcement officer for non-CPZ areas.

Progress

Enforcement Officers are deployed to non-CPZ areas. They focus on all contraventions in those areas, including illegal parking in disabled bays. Furthermore, the parking removal operation identifies vehicles illegally parked in disabled bays as highest priority for removal.

- h) The Council should prosecute a number of high profile cases to strengthen the enforcement message – at a time of the Councils choosing.

Progress

The parking service has worked closely with the Metropolitan Police over the past few years to combat Blue Badge misuse. Joint operations now take place every 4-6 weeks and each operation involves checking the validity of up to 80 badges, issued by a number of authorities. This has resulted in a number of badges being seized. Those operations also attracts a lot of media attention. However to date no prosecutions have resulted.

- i) The Director of Environmental Services should ensure that all lost and stolen badges are linked with Parking Control so that in the event of parking attendants coming across fraudulent use of badges the service would be notified automatically.

Progress

A new IT module has been developed bringing Blue Badge Administration under the parking IT system. This allows greater control and management of blue badge abuse and fraud. It also ensures that reporting is now easier and that the information is accurate and immediate.

- J) The Director of Environmental Services should explore the viability of installing dedicated disabled persons parking bays outside the homes of individuals (who request this facility) under exceptional circumstances. The Director should ensure (in consultation with Members) that a strict set of criteria is in place to determine 'exceptional circumstances'

Progress

A decision was taken not to install dedicated disabled bays. The matter was explored at length while developing the Parking and Enforcement Plan [PEP]. It was recognised that while we need to prioritise on-street space for local disabled residents, we need to be mindful that it should not prejudice the needs on non-local Blue Badge holders.

This decision is being reviewed to ensure that this policy is still consistent with other boroughs.

- k) The Director of Environmental Services should look at ways to increase the effectiveness of enforcement, which primarily assist in deterring non badge holders abusing Disabled Persons parking Bays, and maximises income from penalty fines

Progress

Illegal parking in disabled bays is identified as highest priority for enforcement action and this includes removal to the vehicle pound, which is a clear deterrent. In addition the joint operations held with the police, actually checks the validity of Disabled Badges on display in parking bays or on yellow lines. Each of those operations results in badges being seized.

- l) The Director of Environmental Services should ensure that Enforcement Officers are trained appropriately and that they should be sensitive to the needs of Disabled people and the reasons for the Blue badge Scheme.

Progress

This is included in staff induction.

- m) The Director of Environmental services should ensure that contact details and telephone numbers are clearly publicised in order that unauthorized use of disabled person's bays can be readily reported by members of the public

Progress

The Parking Service telephone number is widely circulated.

- n) The Director of Environmental services should ensure that there is dedicated officer support for monitoring the use of disabled persons parking bays outside shopping areas. That the officer has the responsibility to engage in dialogue with shop managers to ensure the efficient use of parking bays for disabled drivers.

Progress

We feel that having a dedicated team would not be the best use of resources, as Civil Enforcement Officers patrol outside shopping areas as part of their daily patrol. Their duties will include taking enforcement action where appropriate on misuse of disabled bays. Their presence also acts as a deterrent.

- o) The Director of Environmental services should review the provision of disabled persons parking bays close to shops and community facilities, such as libraries and health centres.

Progress

The Council's Sustainable Transport Team has recently carried out a detailed review of disabled parking bays across the borough. This included looking at

areas as suggested above which would benefit from additional disabled bays. The findings of this review will be implemented next year subject to funding being made available.

- p) The Council should engage in dialogue with supermarkets to explore ways of enforcing/discouraging illegal parking in disabled persons parking bays and organise an awareness campaign to publicise the problems experienced by disabled people when other people abuse them. For example the 'bay watch' campaign (in conjunction with disabled organisations) - developing a poster campaign aimed at non-disabled drivers, thereby enhancing awareness.

Progress

This recommendation has not yet been implemented. It is felt that the Mobility Panel may offer an opportunity to progress this and engage with Supermarkets.

- q) The Director of Environmental Services should ensure, in consultation with Housing services and regeneration Unit, that all new builds of community and local amenities have disabled persons parking bays.

Progress

The Council's UDP parking standards for new developments requires the provision of disabled person's parking bays. Generally, the required provision is 5% of the total number of parking spaces or a minimum number of parking bays depending on the proposed land use.

- r) The process for appealing against the issuing of a Blue Badge should be carried out under independent appeals procedures

Progress

Haringey will soon refer all Blue badge applications (excluding those that satisfy the automatic criteria) to the Primary Care Trust for independent assessment. Appeals will be conducted by a separate Community Therapist whose decision will be final.

- s) That all recommendations contained in this report be included in the Council's Transport Strategy.

The Council has developed Parking and Enforcement Plan [PEP] as part of its Local Implementation Plan [LIP]. The Parking and Enforcement Plan provide the policy and strategy framework linking the boroughs issues with the aims of the London Plan and The Mayor's Transport Strategy.

The PEP has identified a clear hierarchy of parking need for the Borough to assist overall parking management and prioritisation. Both local and non local disabled motorists have been identified as highest priority of road user.

8.0 Conclusion

Progress has been made on implementing the recommendations of the review. The introduction of the Integrated Community Therapists assessments will be a major move forward for this service and will ensure that resources are targeted at those who genuinely meet the eligibility criteria.