

Internal Scrutiny Committee

Meeting to be held on Friday, 17 January 2020

Electoral Division affected: (All Divisions);
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CAS Blue Badge Service - Revised Eligibility Criteria Update

Appendix A – Blue Badge Applications Received Since Go-Live

Appendix B – Blue Badges Issued Since Go-Live

Appendix C – Blue Badge Criteria & Application Process

Appendix D – Blue Badge Policy

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Executive Summary

Provide an update on the Department for Transport's (DfT) new Blue Badge criteria to extended eligibility to people with 'hidden' disabilities.

Recommendation

The Internal Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the changes to eligibility criteria for Blue Badge applications.

Background and Advice

Lancashire County Council's Blue Badge Service is one of the largest in the country with over 58,000 badges in circulation, and almost 30,000 applications per year.

Between January and March 2018, the DfT consulted with local authorities, individuals, disability groups and other organisations to extend eligibility to people with 'hidden' disabilities. The proposed changes were supported by LCC in order to make the scheme fairer and remove any ambiguity around the current guidance.

In July 2018, the consultation results were announced with 89% of respondents in favour of the proposal. On 30 April 2019, the DfT announced that the changes to the scheme would be coming into force on 30 August 2019. Initially, the proposed changes were expected to see an increase in applications of around 10% (2,500 applications), however, this later rose to 30% (7,500 applications).

Prior to the new criteria going live, all staff were trained in what non-physical disabilities are, what sort of queries they can expect, how to resolve queries and how to assess applications. This enabled us to prepare as much as possible, however, there was an element of the unknown to the new criteria. In order to help with this,

we created a feedback form for staff to raise queries that haven't been covered in training and to help us improve our guidance.

Throughout the last few months we have worked closely with the DfT and other authorities to understand the guidance that was published and worked closely with internal services to make them aware of the changes. Most notably, Lancashire Parking Services, to make them aware of the potential impact on parking spaces, and Corporate Communications, to ensure our web page and social media messages were updated.

Consultations

The DfT consultation was run on a national level. The Blue Badge Scheme is administered by local authorities but the DfT are responsible for providing the national guidelines to which all authorities work.

Implications:

The changes were supported by LCC, however, this also meant an increase in workload for the Blue Badge Service. The changes would mean an increase in initial applications, an increase in badges issued and a requirement to redesign processes and guidance for the new criteria, before undertaking training for all staff.

The focus of the changes was around amending the assessment criteria from difficulty in walking, to difficulty when walking and states that applicants must have 'an enduring and substantial disability which causes them, during the course of a journey, to:

- Be unable to walk;
- Experience very considerable difficulty whilst walking, which may include very considerable psychological distress; or
- Be at risk of serious harm when walking; or pose, when walking, a risk of serious harm to any other person.'

Risk Management

The changes to the criteria brought the risk of an unmanageable number of applications, early applications and a lack of understanding of the conditions affected by the new criteria. To help manage the influx of new applications, we allowed non-physical applicants to reapply earlier than usual in the weeks leading up to go-live, allowing us to concentrate on non-physical applications once they came in.

Go-Live

Applications under the new criteria came in immediately after go-live at 8:00am on 30 August, and had totalled 180 by the end of the day. Lancashire were able to assess and issue their first badge under the new criteria on the morning of 30 August – becoming one of the first authorities in the country to do so, and after the first full week of the new criteria, we had issued 123 badges, a sizeable 16% of the national total.

After three weeks of the new criteria, we have received 732 applications (Appendix A) under the new criteria and issued 406 badges – 11% of the national total. This is in addition to another 1955 badges issued under the existing criteria (Appendix B). Many other Local Authorities have suggested they won't be in a position to process these applications for up to six weeks, highlighting how effective our preparation has been compared to our peers, and we have received positive feedback on social media praising the quick turnaround of our application process.

As of 3 January 2020, there had been 1187 applications under the new criteria, which is a 13% increase. There has also been 878 badges issued under the new criteria, 10% of those issued in that time.

We are also holding a twice-weekly panel meeting to review complex cases before a final decision is made, ensuring we give careful consideration to all applications and ultimately make the correct decision. In September we attended a workshop with other authorities to discuss common themes and our decision making process. Further to this, in mid-October we attended a workshop with an independent assessment company who work with a number of local authorities, to get their support and advice around the new criteria.

All of this has helped to improve our knowledge and understanding of the different types of applications we may receive, and we will remain flexible to make any necessary process changes during this review period.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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N/A		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
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