

Healthier Communities Select Committee		
Title	Information item: Blue badge applications	
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Class	Part 1 (open)	9 October 2018

1. Background

A Blue Badge (BB) provides parking concessions for people with disabilities, allowing them (or whoever is driving with them) to park closer to shopping centres and other destinations. A permit can be used in any vehicle as long as the badge holder is present (whether driving or being driven). It is not assigned to a specific vehicle. In Lewisham, BBs are administered by a team of 1 manager and 3 staff within the Benefit Service who are part of the Customer Services Division. The regulations used are:

- Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (England) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000/682), as amended;
- Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970;
- The Blue Badge Scheme Local Authority Guidance (England) October 2014.

2. Entitlement

2.1 A person is automatically eligible for a BB if they are over 2 years old and meet at least one of the following criteria:

- receive the Higher Rate of the Mobility Component of DLA disability Living Allowance (HRMCDLA);
- are registered severely sight impaired or blind;
- receive a War Pensioners Mobility Supplement;
- receive a lump sum benefit from the Armed Forces and Reserve Forces Compensation Scheme and certified as having a permanent and substantial disability walking;
- receive 8 points or more under the 'moving around' activity of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

2.2 The concession can be awarded following a medical examination if the applicant is:

- Over 2 years old and considerable difficult walking as a result of a disability;
- Drives a motor vehicle regularly, have a severe disability in both arms and are unable to operate a parking meter;
- Under 3 years old, with specific medical conditions which means they must be accompanied by or have nearby bulky medical equipment.

3. Process

Applicants will submit an application form with ID, proof of address, a current photograph and proof of qualifying entitlement eg DLA or PiP. Debit / credit card details are provided for the £10 administration fee for successful applications.

BBs are issued for up to 3 years after which applications must be renewed;

Applicants failing to qualify under the automatic eligibility criteria (2.1 above) are required to attend a mobility assessment with a qualified and independent occupational therapist who will determine whether or not they meet the qualifying criteria (2.2 above).

Once the BB is awarded the applicant is required to collect the concession in person.

4. Fraud prevention

A number of checks are undertaken throughout the application and award process including;

Applicants identity and residency is checked. BBs are only issued in person due to issues with postal delivery and theft as well as abuse of the scheme by family and friends – Over 250 BBs were uncollected and subsequently destroyed. Follow-up comments included;

‘I didn’t want the badge, I’m housebound, my daughter applied to use it for shopping’

‘I never applied for this, it must be someone in my family. I don’t want it, please destroy it’

‘Can’t my carer come and collect it, we got it for her to use’

5. Performance

The Blue badge service merged with the Freedom Pass and Taxicard schemes in 2008. All services were paper based with significant backlogs, the team then consisted of 8 FTE;

A document management system was introduced in 2009 allowing the teams to become paperless. This improved productivity and security of applicants private medical data;

A single holistic mobility assessment was introduced which is cost-effective and efficient for the applicant who may have applied for more than one concession;

The team now consists of 3 FTE, all services are on line and cases processed within 10 days; Telephone demand has reduced from over 12k calls in 2014 to 2.5k in 2017;

LB Barnet commissioned Lewisham to completely overhaul their Blue Badge service, including a review of all current caseloads in order to remove deceased and “gone aways”, creating a new contract and process for occupation therapists, a new on-line application form, retraining of all staff and developing a new suite of letters.

6. Changes

The department for Transport are proposing changes to the qualifying criteria to allow applications from those with the following non-physical disabilities.

The change in qualification is for any person who has an enduring and substantial disability the effect of which is that that person is unable to;

i. walk;

ii. undertake any journey without it causing very considerable difficulty when walking;

iii. undertake any journey without there being a risk of very considerable harm to the health or safety of that person or any other person;

iv. follow a journey route without another person, assistance animal or orientation aid.

It is likely there will be a significant impact for Lewisham, specifically in the following areas;

Resource - Caseload will increase significantly

Revenue – Income from parking charges will reduce

Access – Availability of disabled parking bays will be reduced.

Nationally, the findings suggest that there will be an increase in demand of 6% (53,000) in applications in the first year although locally we anticipate this being much higher at around 12%. Lewisham’s current caseload is 6,473 therefore we can anticipate an increase of at least 400 successful applications in the first year.

For further information, please contact John Bardens, Scrutiny Manager, on 02083149976.