

<b>Meeting:</b>	Corporate Services, Climate Change, and Scrutiny Management Committee
<b>Meeting date:</b>	16/10/2023
<b>Report of:</b>	Pauline Stuchfield, Director of Customer & Communities
<b>Portfolio of:</b>	Cllr Lomas, Executive member for Finance, Performance, Major Projects and Equalities

## **Scrutiny Report:**

### **The Blue Badge Application Process**

#### **Subject of Report**

1. This report describes the context and detail behind the Blue Badge Application Process at City of York Council (CYC). This report is for scrutiny members to consider the information within it in order to determine whether to undertake a more detailed scrutiny review in this area of work.

#### **Policy Basis**

2. The National Blue Badge scheme was initially implemented by the Department for Transport (DfT) to provide parking concessions to disabled people with conditions affecting their mobility. The DfT provide all local authorities with the guidance outlining the eligibility criteria and how to manage this scheme (see link at Background Paper 1) .
3. The guidance was extended on 30 August 2019 to include those with hidden conditions and the research paper to support these changes is available at the link at Background Paper 2. This amounts to a smaller proportion of all applications.

4. In relation to the council's core commitments:

### **Equalities and Human Rights**

The process is driven by assessing levels of mobility rather than comparison or other impacts of health conditions. Whilst this can be considered as fair and a clear requirement of the guidance – those applicants suffering from, for example, degenerative conditions can regard the process and policy as unfair given that the blue badge has to be applied for every three years. Initial feedback from stakeholder groups suggests that a way to mitigate this would be to look at solutions to simplify the application where a blue badge has been awarded previously.

### **Affordability**

The blue badge process carries a charge set by the government at £10 and blue badge parking in York is free of charge in council car parks and bays which is not the case in all cities. The availability of parking areas for blue badge holders can impact on affordability of alternative solutions should insufficient space be available or access is restricted to critical services for example.

### **Health Inequalities.**

This process can help to rebalance disadvantage for disabled people giving them access to transport and potentially to services readily available to the rest of the population. For some a blue badge gives independence and access to social support and activities which can help with isolation and associated mental health impacts.

## **Recommendation and Reasons**

5. Members of this Committee are asked to:
- a. note the information in this report; and
  - b. consider whether to undertake a deeper review including looking at best practice elsewhere within any requirements set down by the DfT and considering the views of stakeholder organisations and users of the service.

Reason: to understand and consider any improvements that could be made to the Blue badge application process to assist disabled and other affected residents of York.

## **Background**

6. Blue Badges help disabled people and other health conditions to use their vehicles park closer to their destination. Residents can apply for a badge for themselves, on behalf of somebody else or an organisation that transports people that need a Blue Badge (details of who can apply for a blue badge are contained in the link at Background Paper 3).
7. The scheme is a national scheme which is administered locally by local authorities after the responsibility of issuing Blue Badges was removed from GPs in 2012 by the government.
8. At CYC the Blue Badge application service was transferred into Business Support Services in 2015 from Adult Social Care. The criteria for Blue Badge eligibility at that time was less complicated than it is now to administer.
9. Since 2015 the DfT have updated their guidance on a number of occasions and in August 2019 they introduced criteria for assessing and awarding Blue Badges to those suffering from hidden conditions. The council follows this guidance in all aspects and staff attend regular DfT training sessions to learn about updates to the guidance and to share best practice.
10. The Blue Badge service has a staffing resource of 1.5 full time equivalent (fte) Business Support Assistants and 0.5 (fte) of the time of the Blue Badge and Business Travel Officer.
11. The Blue Badge team provides a service for all residents and operates in line with internal service agreement timeframes for issuing badges and processing appeals. All applicants who meet automatic eligibility are processed within one week and all applicants who are subject to further assessment are processed within a 4-6 week period and in line with the council's internal policies.
12. A defined and standardised administration route is critical to ensure that customers have their Blue Badge application processed in a timely manner.

13. The process is illustrated in the supporting text and slides at Annex 1 to this report (used in a York Access Forum session held on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023) and the relevant statistics are shown below with a steady increase in applications received in non-pandemic years.

Table 1 Total number of Blue Badges issued 2015-2022

Year	Total no of badges issued
2015	2942
2016	2784
2017	2853
2018	3073
2019	3113
2020	2562 (Covid)
2021	2875 (Covid)
2022	3188

Table 2 Physical and hidden condition applications 2019-2022

Year	Walking	Hidden
2019	96.6%	3.4%
2020	97.8%	2.2%
2021	96.8%	3.2%
2022	95.6%	4.4%

14. As described in Annex 1 and national DfT guidance in the links at Background Paper 1 and 3, residents can apply for a Blue Badge to be considered under either an automatic or subject to further assessment eligibility criteria:

Table 3 Breakdown of numbers of automatic and 'subject to further assessment' applications (1.8.2022 to 31.7.2023) – see category definitions in Annex 2.

Automatic	
AFRFCS	3
BLIND	123
HRMCDLA	269
PIPMOVE	784
PIPPLAN	87
WPMS	14
DS1500 or SR1	113

Total 1280 (32.20%)

Subject to further assessment	
ARMS	3
CHILDBULK	6
CHILDVEHIC	3
HIDDEN	190
ORG	45
WALKD	2453

Total 2700 (67.80%)

15. The data above for the 12 months from 1 August 2022 – 31 July 2023 shows that nearly 70% of all applications received fell under subject to further assessment criteria.

16. This latest data shows that 69.5% of all subject to further assessment applicants had a desk based assessment which led to a decision, 30.5% of those subject to further assessment applicants went on to have a physical independent mobility assessment (IMA) with an assessor.
17. DfT recommends that councils employ an independent mobility assessor to establish Blue Badge eligibility through a physical assessment.
18. A contract procurement exercise was undertaken in Summer 2020 to appoint a certified Blue Badge expert assessment organisation as the current provider at the time was unable to accommodate hidden condition assessments. In December 2020 the contact was awarded to Access Independent who are one of the leading organisations in the country when assessing Blue Badge applications, including those with hidden conditions.

Table 4 Number of physical assessments undertaken 2018-2022 (PPH – previous provider, AI – Access Independent)

Independent Mobility Assessments (IMA's)									
PPH - 2018		PPH - 2019		PPH - 2020		AI - 2021		AI - 2022	
January	29	January	45	January	35	January	21	January	67
February	51	February	34	February	35	February	17	February	92
March	31	March	52	March	25	March	32	March	79
April	56	April	50	April	x	April	15	April	101
May	45	May	51	May	x	May	44	May	48
June	63	June	37	June	x	June	67	June	75
July	56	July	51	July	x	July	39	July	75
August	46	August	55	August	45	August	36	August	26
September	58	September	64	September	78	September	67	September	63
October	65	October	47	October	19	October	33	October	87
November	49	November	36	November	24	November	89	November	99
December	26	December	45	December	22 *AI started	December	51	December	65
<b>Total</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>877</b>
<b>Average</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>37.3</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>73.1</b>

Hidden Disability Assessments									
PPH - 2019		PPH - 2020		AI - 2021		AI - 2022			
		January	x	January	0	January	3		
		February	x	February	1	February	1		
		March	x	March	0	March	1		
		April	x	April	0	April	0		
		May	x	May	1	May	0		
		June	x	June	0	June	2		
		July	x	July	2	July	1		
August	x	August	x	August	1	August	3		
September	x	September	x	September	4	September	5		
October	x	October	x	October	1	October	1		
November	x	November	x	November	0	November	4		
December	x	December	0 *AI started	December	1	December	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>		
<b>Average</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>1.8</b>		

19. Should an application be rejected or assessed as non eligible - the CYC Blue Badge service has a two stage appeal process as described in Annex 1 and receives a very low number of appeals

(5.4% of those refused). Stage 1 of the appeal process looks at the decision in light of all existing information and is reviewed by a manager in the service, Stage 2 is a review of any new information and reviewed by a more senior manager in the service.

## **Consultation Analysis**

20. The Blue Badge team has undertaken extensive research into all the documentation/legislation/guidance produced around the Blue Badge scheme. They have been actively involved in workshop sessions with DfT and other local authorities to ensure internal procedures were created in line with the recommended national guidance when assessing applications. It is clear this is the adopted approach by the majority of councils.
21. The team have also held a number internal meetings with colleagues working in the social care services of the council to gain an expert insight to understand the needs of residents, while continuing to be guided by DfT.
22. The team has engaged with local stakeholder group representatives such as Age UK and Dementia Action to explain the guidance in order to help support staff and applicants in understating Blue Badge eligibility criteria and assisting residents when applying for a Blue Badge. The team have also worked with local representative disabled groups to make improvements to the process during the coronavirus pandemic.
23. On 29 September 2023 the Business Support Manager and Chief Officer attended the York Access Forum to explain the process and answer any related questions, this was in light of comments and questions raised previously in the Forum. The key themes raised prior to the session are summarised in Annex 3 with answers given. The engagement was important to hear lived experiences of using the processes and to understand if any improvements could be made in light of the feedback received. The questions and answers from this session (12 pages) are still being produced as extra data was requested in the feedback. The key areas of discussion were around:
  - availability of paper forms in accessible locations and to voluntary and community organisations supporting disabled residents;

- forms are too long; we need to make the process as easy as possible;
- improve information about where people can find support from council and other agencies that can support with completion of applications;
- provide a clearer explanation about what a 'patient summary' is and how to obtain it;
- advise applicants on how to obtain a patient summary prior to completing a form as it contains much of the information needed on the blue badge form;
- how to make the application process easier after the first successful application eg following the Leeds example where much less evidence is needed upon re-application;
- raise awareness of the appeals process;
- provide the reasons for rejection (this would require further work);
- publish the Blue Badge application as a process flow diagram as this would highlight the application/customer journey before applicants start to complete an application on government portal (or paper form).

## **Risks and Mitigation**

24. Any increased pressure on resources due to an increase number of applications due to process or criteria changes could mean in a poorer service to disabled residents and increased costs. This could have reputational impacts for the council if there are delays in processing blue badges.

## **Wards Impacted**

25. All wards

## Contact details

For further information please contact the authors of this Report.

### Author

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<b>Report approved:</b>	Yes
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### Background papers

- [Background Paper 1 \(see link\)](#)

Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance (England)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-blue-badge-scheme-local-authority-guidance-england>

- [Background Paper 2 \(see link\)](#)

Research to assess Blue Badge eligibility for people with non-physical disabilities

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/822057/research-to-assess-blue-badge-eligibility-for-people-with-non-physical-disabilities.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/822057/research-to-assess-blue-badge-eligibility-for-people-with-non-physical-disabilities.pdf)

- [Background Paper 3 \(see link\)](#)

Who can get a Blue Badge?

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blue-badge-can-i-get-one/can-i-get-a-blue-badge>



## Annexes

- Annex 1

Presentation and Supporting Notes to York Access Forum (YAF) –  
The CYC Blue Badge Process (29 September 2023)

- Annex 2

Category definitions of 'automatic' and 'subject to further  
assessment' used in Table 3

- Annex 3

Answers to questions presented ahead of the 29 September 2023  
YAF meeting