

Briefing Note

Title: Update on the Blue Badge scheme

Date: 26 March 2019

Prepared by: Cherry Doyle and Lisa Powell

Job Title: Customer Services Business Process Lead / Team Leader

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose and Recommendation

This briefing note is to provide an update to Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel on the performance of the Blue Badge service, including recent national changes to the scheme, challenges and improvements, and complaints and appeals.

Due to the volume of change being undertaken in relation to the Blue Badge service, it is recommended that an update is provided to Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel in six months' time.

Overview

Since 2016, Blue Badge processing times have increased, however they have remained consistent throughout 2017 and 2018.

The contract for delivery of the national Blue Badge scheme was changed in early 2019 by the Department for Transport (DfT). This changeover has caused challenges for local authorities, but CWC Customer Services are utilising this change as an opportunity to review where improvements can be made within the processing of Blue Badge applications.

Changes to the national Blue Badge scheme included the following:

- Implementation of a new, improved online form including options to attach documents and pay upfront.
- Change of supplier for creation of Blue Badges.
- Removal of the Case Management System which has meant that local authorities have had to procure a new system.

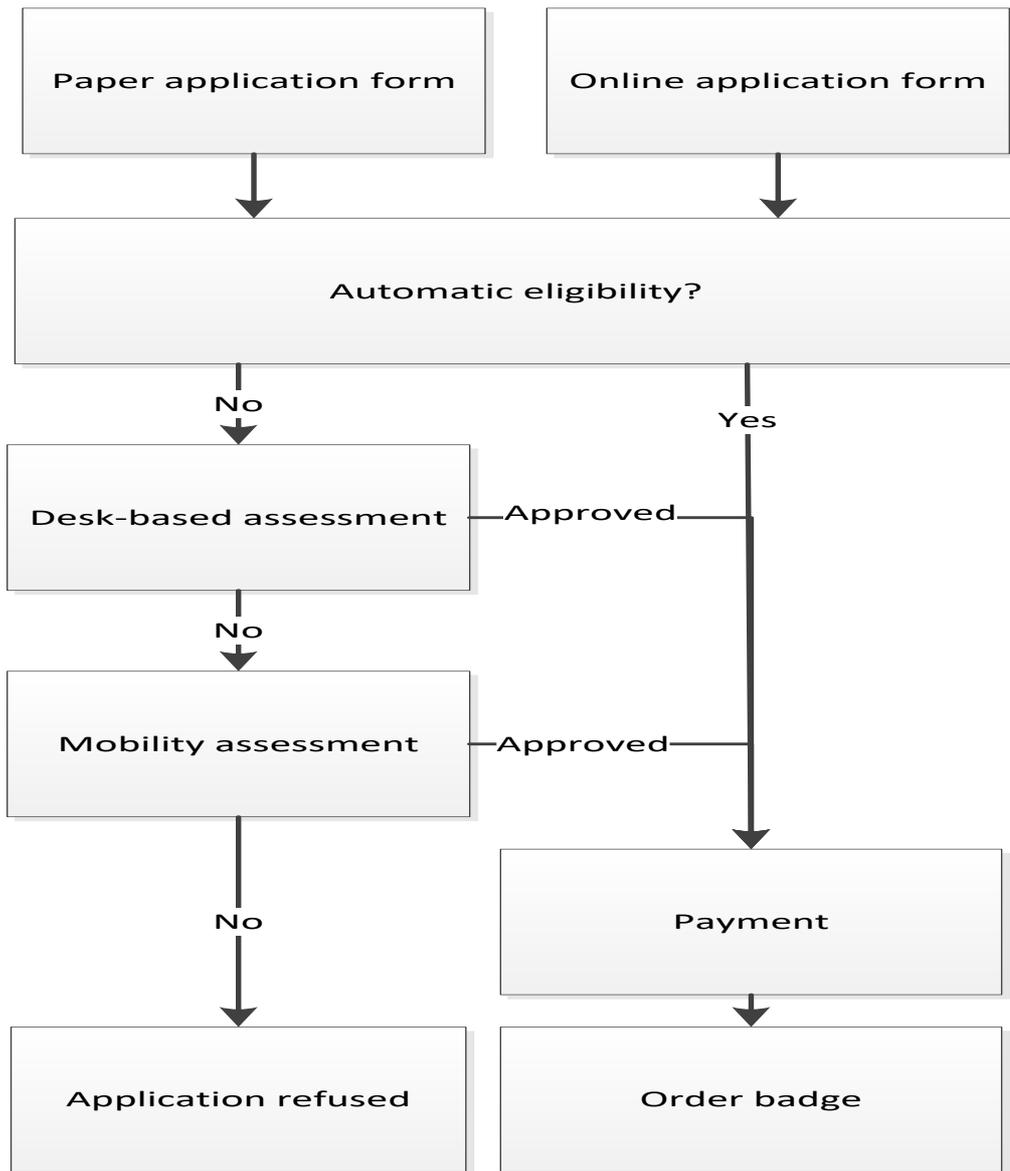
Background and context

The Blue Badge scheme is governed nationally by the Department for Transport (DfT) and administrated locally by local authorities. Within City of Wolverhampton Council, this entire process sits within Customer Services, supported by Independent Living Services, who complete assessments of applicants to determine eligibility to receive a Blue Badge.

The Community Support team run surgeries to assist applicants in making a Blue Badge application. Parking Services are responsible for enforcement of the use of Blue Badges around the city.

The current application and assessment process are shown in fig 1

Fig 1



Performance

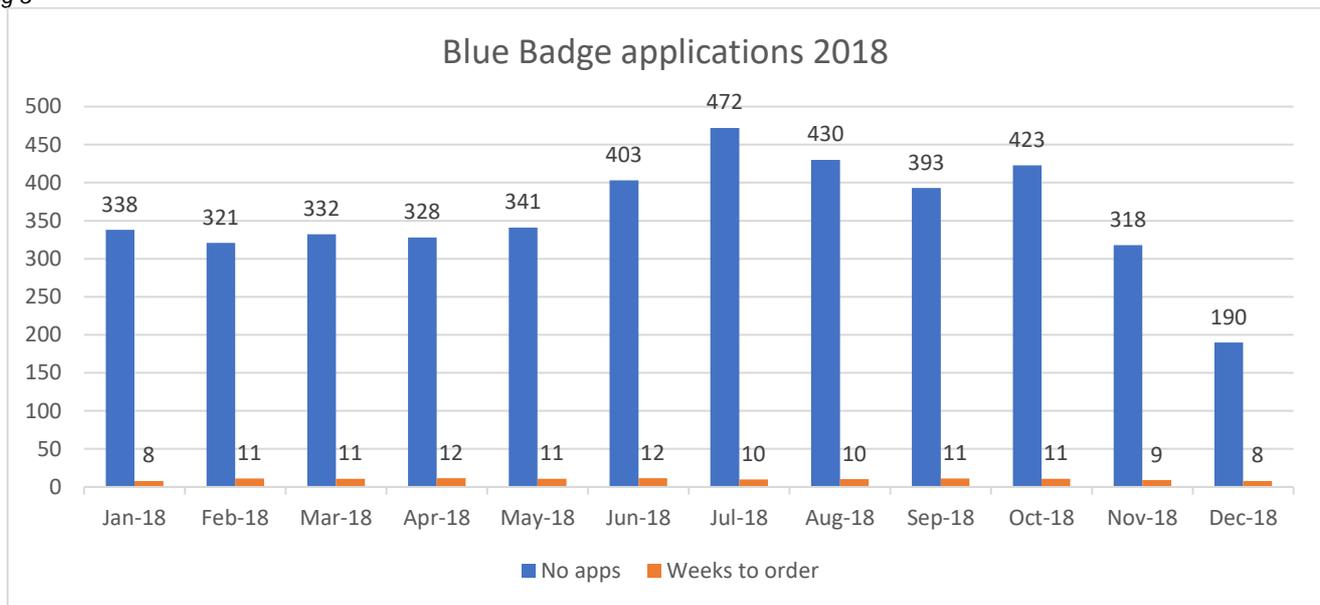
Please see details in fig 2 of the number of Blue Badge application for the last three years plus details of the average time taken to process an application.

Fig 2

Year	No. applications received	Average time taken to process
2016	3474	6 weeks
2017	3325	11 weeks
2018	4289	10 weeks

Throughout 2018, the time taken to process a Blue Badge application has remained steady (see fig 3), despite changes to application numbers received.

Fig 3



Complete data is not currently available for applications received in 2019 due to average processing time.

There have been a number of elements within the overall Blue Badge process that have been identified as areas of focus for improvement and following the completion of the contract changeover, the team will now concentrate on improving performance in these areas.

The ongoing work within Customer Services is focusing on three areas:

- Implementation and embedding of the new Case Management System.
- Operational efficiency to reduce the time taken to process an application.
- Support for customers to use the digital application form.

Complaints

Since January 2018, the Customer Feedback team have received five corporate complaints relating to the Blue Badge service. Of which:

- One was not upheld
- Two related to processes following death of the badge holder
- Two related to the application and assessment process

This equates to 0.1% of applications received within this period.

Since January 2018, the Customer Feedback team have received 20 complaints which were 'resolved at service level' (did not proceed to a corporate complaint). Of which:

- 11 were chasing application status
- Four related to parking tickets received
- One related to a deceased badge holder

- One related to badge misuse
- One related to call wait times in Customer Services
- One related to behaviour of a crossing patrol employee
- One related to behaviour of a bailiff collecting a parking fine

This equates to 0.4% of applications received within this period.

Appeals

Since January 2018, six appeals have been submitted against refused Blue Badges. Appeal hearings are scheduled every four weeks, subject to receiving all information / evidence required to consider the appeal. Appeals are considered by Customer Services, Customer Feedback, and Independent Living Services.

As part of the continuous learning, improvements have been made to communication with applicants to provide more detail regarding the reason for their application being refused.

Key Risks

There is a further national change planned to broaden eligibility criteria (to include hidden and non-physical disabilities) which is expected to be implemented during 2019. This is likely to increase the volumes of Blue Badge applications received by City of Wolverhampton Council.

The DfT is currently developing new guidance for local authorities so they will be able to assess applications for a badge under the expanded eligibility criteria for hidden and non-physical disabilities. The following [link](#) gives details about the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria published by DfT in July 2018.

This is intended to be published to coincide with the revision of the statutory regulations in April 2019. This guidance will be available to local authorities before the changes come into force so that they will have sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the guidance and make any necessary arrangements needed to be able to administer the scheme under the expanded eligibility criteria. The timescales for these changes to come into force are not yet known.

Due to the amount of change being undertaken in relation to the Blue Badge service, it is recommended that an update is provided in six months' time to allow new processes and performance improvements to become established, plus the evaluation of the impact of the scheme changes following the publication of new guidance from the DfT.

18.3.18