

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Cabinet Board

31st March 2016

Report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services – Karen Jones

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

Blue Badge Scheme in Neath Port Talbot Council

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Members about improvements the Customer Service Team has made regarding the Blue Badge re-application process in Neath Port Talbot.

Executive Summary

2. As the main first point of contact for the council the Customer Services team is able to identify opportunities to improve the customer experience. The appropriate and intelligent sharing of information is a key efficiency driver to utilise details already held to, wherever possible, further improve the customer journey by reducing duplication of effort for customers and council staff alike. The following report explains how this has been achieved in Customer Services for the Blue Badge scheme and highlights the potential of joined up working not only across the Council but also with partner agencies such as the Department of Works and Pension (DWP) when eligibility for a service is being considered.

Background

3. Over 11,000 Blue Badges are in circulation in Neath Port Talbot Council and as all badges are only valid for three years these should be re-applied for when nearing expiry. Our approach of seeing applicants in persons over previous years to verify identity and entitlement presented us with an opportunity to improve the re-application process for numerous applicants.

4. There are two categories of Blue Badge entitlement – automatic and discretionary. Applicants who receive Disability Living Allowance at the high rate mobility component or the relevant points in Personal Independence Payment are classed as ‘automatically’ entitled to a Blue Badge when that benefit is evidenced via a current confirmatory letter from the DWP. Wherever possible, if the applicant has not produced the appropriate DLA or PIP letter we are able to telephone the DWP and access the Apollo process to verify the required benefit entitlement ourselves. However, the process only allows this system to be separately queried one applicant at a time so we have highlighted the potential to Welsh Government, the Department of Transport and DWP of having the ability to routinely view the DWP records ourselves to further improve the customer experience. So far however this has not been possible but, if agreed, the identified benefits for customers and councils could be replicated across every authority in the UK.
5. Since May 2015, Customer Services have also reduced footfall to the civic centres for ‘discretionary’ re-applications and wherever possible have re-approved the badge based on the intelligent use of previous related information already held within the Council. The applicant not attending in person results in a reduction in transaction times, although occasionally when we do not have telephone contact details, a letter or email is sent confirming the new badge has been approved rather than seeing the applicant in person.
6. This approach reduces the need for a reminder letter, paper and postage costs and staff interviewing times by significantly improving the customer journey. Feedback from applicants is very positive being pleased to not attend in person again and also increases staff job satisfaction by relaying this positive news to the applicant.
7. This capacity release translates in to improved productivity and morale, reduced duplication and lower costs through a simpler, better service. It makes the process a ‘back office’, rather than a face to face one, which can be done around other work or outside of the limits of council opening times which is important within the context of a significantly reduced staff head count to meet the FFP budget targets. Footfall reductions to the Civic Centre sites is welcomed as diminishing resources could result in longer wait times for customers to be seen in person.

8. The following figures show Blue Badge discretionary re-applications for the 10 month period 1/5/15 to 29/2/16: Total number of all Blue Badges due for re-application was 3,257. Of this total, there were 1170 instances where a consideration could be made using existing information with 585 badges then issued without the applicant attending in person.
9. Although the Blue Badge scheme is devolved to local authorities to administer the Council does not receive a grant or applicant fee. Some financial savings have been made e.g. postage costs by not routinely sending a reminder letter (£210.60) with associated staff time redeployed to undertake alternative work.
10. Whilst the process of checking lists, making the decision on whether or not a badge can be issued, ordering the badge and contacting the applicant does not much reduce the overall handling time of a Blue Badge application, it has certainly increased job satisfaction for staff.
11. Our simple business process change highlights the ability to better utilise existing personal information held. We have also explained this approach to the Welsh Government Blue Badge task and finish group in our recent consultation feedback as it raises the potential to replicate this across all authorities.
12. Also, we used the consultation process to request if some badges could be issued longer than 3 years to further reduce the administrative burdens and costs associated with the re-application processes as the prospect of recovery is unlikely for several chronic medical conditions. The outcome of the consultation process is awaited.

Financial Impact

13. There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

Equality Impact Assessment

14. There are no equality impacts associated with this report.

Workforce Impacts

15. There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

Legal Impacts

16. There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

Risk Management

17. There are no risk management issues associated with this report.

Recommendations

18. For information only that Members note the improvements made to the Blue Badge re-application process in Neath Port Talbot Council

Officer Contact

19. Karen Jones, Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services
k.jones3@npt.gov.uk
01639 763284

Mrs. Jayne Banfield, Customer Services Manager
j.banfield@npt.gov.uk
01639 686165