

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

6 APRIL 2010

SUMMARY OF THE SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINAL REPORT: BLUE BADGE PARKING SCHEME

Purpose of the Scrutiny investigation:

The overall aim of the Scrutiny investigation was to consider breaches relating to the Blue Badge Scheme as well as to assess the current assessment process for applicants who apply for a blue badge under the discretionary criteria.

Review Request

The Executive Director of Social Care submitted a request to the Overview & Scrutiny Board on 20 October 2009 for the Board to consider the appropriateness of undertaking an investigation into breaches relating to the blue badge scheme. The Board agreed that the subject was appropriate for review and the Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel was asked to undertake the investigation.

Terms of reference:

The terms of reference of the scrutiny investigation were as follows:

- a) What is the current process for assessing blue badge applicants who do not meet the automatic qualifying criteria?
- b) Is the enforcement action taken in response to any misuse of blue badges identified appropriate?
- c) Can any lessons be learned in respect of enforcement from the local authorities awarded blue badge 'Centre of Excellence' status by the Department of Transport?

Findings:

Over the course of the review evidence was gathered from the Executive Director of Social Care, the Parking Solutions Manager and the Assistant

Director of Primary and Community Care at the PCT. Information was also received from three of the eight local authorities awarded Blue Badge 'Centre of Excellence' status by the Department of Transport.

The panel does wish to highlight some issues, which it has identified during the course of its work and these are reflected in its conclusions and recommendations, as outlined below.

Conclusions:

Based on the evidence considered during its investigation, the panel made three conclusions. These are shown in full in the final report and relate to the following:

1. That disabled people highly value the benefits offered by the blue badge scheme and the Council has a responsibility to ensure that the scheme is not abused.
2. That in line with the Government's Comprehensive Blue Badge Reform Strategy the necessary preparations need to be made to enable the Council to make the switch to independent medical assessments for applicants applying for a blue badge under the discretionary criteria.
3. That the level of misuse / abuse of blue badges within the town needs to be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that it remains the case that a reasonable and proportionate enforcement policy is adopted.

Recommendations:

The scrutiny panel's final report contains five recommendations. These are shown in full in the report and relate to the following:

1. That more publicity is needed to ensure that residents and particularly family members and friends of blue badge holders are fully aware of the rules of using a blue badge and the negative impact that misuse by able-bodied people has on genuine blue badge holders.
2. That an annual programme of 'mini blitz' enforcement exercises which focus on preventing the misuse and fraudulent use of blue badges be undertaken and the findings be reported to the Panel.
3. That an online reporting mechanism for members of the public to report suspected cases of misuse of a blue badge be developed to further enable incidents of misuse / fraudulent use of blue badges within the town to be detected.
4. That the Council undertakes a joint piece of work with the PCT to examine the way in which medical assessments for blue badge applicants are currently commissioned in Middlesbrough. This would be with a view to developing and implementing a move to independent assessments, as outlined in the Department of Transport's Blue Badge Reform Strategy.
5. That the Council aspires to develop a service in line with the best practice identified at the nationally recognised Centres of Excellence.

The Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel's full report on this topic is attached for the Overview and Scrutiny Board's consideration.

COUNCILLOR PETER PURVIS

**CHAIR OF THE SOCIAL CARE AND ADULT SERVICES SCRUTINY
PANEL**