

Question from Kate Halliday

1. *The current average wait time for a Blue Badge Application, and the steps that are being taken to improve wait times.*

We are currently receiving in the region of 9,000 Blue Badge applications each year and this upward trend over recent years from around 5,000 following the inclusion of the non-visible disabilities within the eligibility criteria. The pace at which applications are determined is impacted by a variety of factors, including some that are out of the Council's control, e.g., insufficient evidence of eligibility received from the applicant, referral to an independent medical assessor, non-payment. Overall, since the beginning of 2023, from the date applications are received, we are processing those that are wholly in our control within 12 weeks and for those with factors out of our control it can be in excess of 12 weeks. This remains in line with our stated commitment, which is made clear on the Council's website, and is also consistent with the expectations of the DfT. We do also prioritise cases where it is clear that the applicant meets certain special rules relating to terminal illness.

We accept that the processing of some Blue Badge applications is taking longer than we would like and for those who are waiting for their Blue Badge, we understand their concerns and recognise the impact that the processing time is having on both our existing badge-holders and new applicants. However, we absolutely want to make the application process as efficient as possible. For this reason, we have recently redesigned the team that has responsibility for assessing Blue Badge applications and have invested in new staff who are currently being trained to undertake the required assessments. It will take time to fully train the staff and to increase the resilience within the team, but we recognise that this is key to reducing the time it takes to make decisions and to further streamline the Blue Badge process to help improve delivery of the service going forward. This is a medium-term project.

Whilst we locally refer to new and renewal applications, the law makes no distinction between applicants who have / have not previously held a Blue Badge. In each case, it is a wholly new application; hence, the process is exactly the same with an assessment of eligibility being undertaken in all cases. The assessment process ranges from something that can take a few minutes where there is automatic entitlement and the evidence is clearly available, through to much more complex and time consuming assessments that require specific input, evidence and opinion from multiple independent medical experts.

2. Confirm that the scheme is no longer issuing renewal notices to existing Blue Badge holders, and if so, consider re-introducing this in order to make the system more efficient for customers and the council.

In 2018 the DfT introduced the national online portal for Blue Badge applications. Upon submitting an application for a Blue Badge and a badge being issued, the system will automatically be set to send a renewal reminder by email. Unfortunately, Shropshire Council has got no control over the national system, all of the system processes were developed and introduced by the DfT.

If any Member receives an inquiry from a resident about a Blue Badge application that cannot be resolved directly with the resident, further advice can be sought by contacting 0345 678 9014 or BlueBadge@shropshire.gov.uk.