

**Committee and Date**

Audit Committee
23 November 2023

Item

Public



Blue Badge Audit Recommendations

Responsible Officer:

Mandy Beever, Transactional Management and Licensing
– Team Manager

email: Mandy.Beever@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 251702

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):

Councillor Chris Schofield, Portfolio Holder for Planning and
Regulatory Services

1. Synopsis

This report provides an update for the Committee on the actions taken and the current position in response to the Blue Badge Audit 2022/23.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Shropshire Plan recognises the importance of tackling inequalities including rural inequalities which reduces risk and enables children, young people, adults, and families to achieve their full potential and enjoy life. The fundamental purpose of the Blue Badge service is to support individuals and businesses in a way which allows them to thrive whilst protecting the safety and welfare of the public who live, and work in Shropshire; together this will help to achieve a Healthy People.
- 2.2. An Audit of the Blue Badge service was undertaken between October 2022 and April 2023. There were 10 recommendations identified 1 was categorised as 'significant' and 9 were categorised as 'required attention'.
- 2.3 This report provides information on the action taken by the Blue Badge service in response to the recommendations and provides additional information on the implementation timescales for the 3 outstanding recommendations, which were categorised as 'required attention'.

3. Recommendations

3.1. That members note the position as set out in the report.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1. This is an information report providing the Committee with details of the work undertaken by the Blue Badge Service and therefore a risk assessment and opportunities appraisal has not been carried out.

5. Financial Implications

5.1. The fee of £10.00 charged for a Blue Badge is a statutory fee and the Council does not have the ability to increase this fee. It costs the Council £5.01 for each Blue Badge ordered, this cost covers the printing and posting of each Blue Badge. The statutory fee is insufficient to cover the cost of the work associated with the administration of the Blue Badge scheme, this results in the additional administration costs being borne by the local taxpayer.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1. There are no anticipated climate change or environmental impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

7. Audit recommendations

7.1 There were 10 recommendations in total at the end of the Blue Badge Audit, 7 of those recommendations have been completed. A summary of the recommendations can be found at **Appendix 1**.

7.2 Recommendation 1.1 *'The Blue Badge Scheme Policy and related procedural documentation should be reviewed and updated at the earliest opportunity. This should be formally approved and disseminated to all relevant officers,'* is still outstanding. Work to complete the requirements of this recommendation is scheduled to commence in January 2024 with a view to putting the revised policy and procedures into place by 1 April 2024.

7.3 Recommendation 3.1 *'The service needs to introduce a system or reporting tool to enable them to identify that they are processing blue badge applications within the four-week timescale as per the policy. Once in place, performance monitoring should be introduced and undertaken on a regular basis for application times and any other relevant timescales,'* is still outstanding. Work to complete the requirements of this recommendation has begun however, the revision of the policy, considering the increase in the volume of applications, is likely to result in an amendment to processing times. Performance monitoring is currently being

undertaken to enable the service to actively monitor the current position and the improvement in processing times for the new officers. Discussions are currently underway with our IT suppliers for the development of improved monitoring facilities within the system. Work to complete the revised policy is scheduled to commence in January 2024 with a view to putting the revised policy and procedures into place by 1 April 2024.

7.4 Recommendation 6.1 ‘*The service lead must ensure that processes are in place to respond to applicants who have raised appeals/reviews within a timeframe of five working days. Evidence of the outcome of the review/appeal to the applicant should be retained.*’ The DfT (Department for Transport) have not set out a timeframe for appeals/reviews to be processed. They recommend that Local Authorities establish an internal procedure to deal with appeals/reviews against an authority’s decision not to issue a Blue Badge. The revised policy will set out Shropshire Councils procedure and will be made available on the Councils website. Furthermore, this procedure will be clearly signposted to unsuccessful applicants in their decision letters. Prior to the revised policy coming into effect all appeals/reviews received will be processed as a priority and any unsuccessful applicants will continue to have information on how they can submit an appeal/review within their decision letter. Work to complete the revised policy is scheduled to commence in January 2024 with a view to putting the revised policy and procedures into place by 1 April 2024.

7.5 A new professional officer role has been created within the Blue Badge, parking enforcement, appeals and challenges function. This officer has only just been released from their substantive role, now that they are in post, they will be responsible for the day-to-day monitoring of Blue Badge processing times, decision review requests, policy, and procedures.

8. Background

8.1. The Blue Badge scheme is a central government scheme operated by Local Council’s on behalf of the Department for Transport (DfT). The Council acts as the DfT’s agent and is required to administer the scheme in line with the Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance (England)ⁱ.

8.2. Post the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a recognition that Blue Badge application numbers were increasing and for that reason there was an internal redesign (together with the parking enforcement appeals and challenges function) to improve resilience and marginally increase capacity to process Blue Badge applications.

8.3. Included below to demonstrate the increase in applications is a chart showing the total number of Blue Badge applications received by financial year.

Financial Year	Total Blue Badge Applications Received
01/04/2019 to 31/03/2020	6991
01/04/2020 to 31/03/2021	5587
01/04/2021 to 31/03/2022	7186
01/04/2022 to 31/03/2023	8604
01/04/2023 to 30/09/2023	5016 (half year)

- 8.4. A long-standing officer, with over 25 years' experience of co-ordinating and processing Blue Badge applications, retired in March 2023. This along with the increase in applications resulted in the need to undertake the service redesign.
- 8.5. The number of officers involved in processing Blue Badge applications has increased from 2 to 4; however, the full-time equivalent has only increased marginally from 1.4 to 2.3. Nevertheless, we do have increased resilience as we now have the flexibility to move 4 rather than 2 officers into Blue Badge processing. We are doing this to address the increased volume, but it will take time.
- 8.6. A new professional officer role has been created within the Blue Badge, parking enforcement, appeals and challenges function this officer has only just been released from their substantive role. This officer will be responsible for the day-to-day monitoring of Blue Badge processing times, decision review requests, policy, and procedures (this officer has responsibilities for similar functions in the parking enforcement appeals and challenges service area).
- 8.7. There is a requirement for ongoing training for all the new officers and this will have an impact on Blue Badge processing times. However, the redesign of the service, once all officers have had time to be fully trained, will support the successful delivery of the service, and ensure that all the Audit requirements are met.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Department for Transport, Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance (England)
[Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance \(England\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/blue-badge-scheme-local-authority-guidance-england)

Local Member: This report covers all areas of Shropshire.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Action Plan for the Blue Badge Scheme 2022/23

ⁱ Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance (England) - [Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance \(England\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/blue-badge-scheme-local-authority-guidance-england)