

Briefing Note

**Title: Update for Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel
on the Blue Badge scheme**

Date: 28 January 2020

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Job Title: Customer Services Team Leader

Intended Audience: Internal Partner organisation Public Confidential

Purpose

This briefing note is to provide an update to Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel on improvements and current performance within the Blue Badge service.

In March 2019, a report was presented to the Adults and Safer City Scrutiny Panel and focused on the performance of the service, pending national changes to the scheme, challenges, improvements, complaints and appeals.

This Briefing Note will provide an update and details of the improvements made by the service, performance statistics and long-term plans.

Overview

In 2019 the contracts for delivering the National Blue Badge Scheme was changed by the Department for Transport (DfT), as a result, City of Wolverhampton Council, along with other local authorities faced challenges of migrating data, backlog of applications and retraining inhouse processes to accommodate the change.

City of Wolverhampton Council Customer Services used this change as an opportunity to review and improve the Blue Badge Service.

The main focus was on:

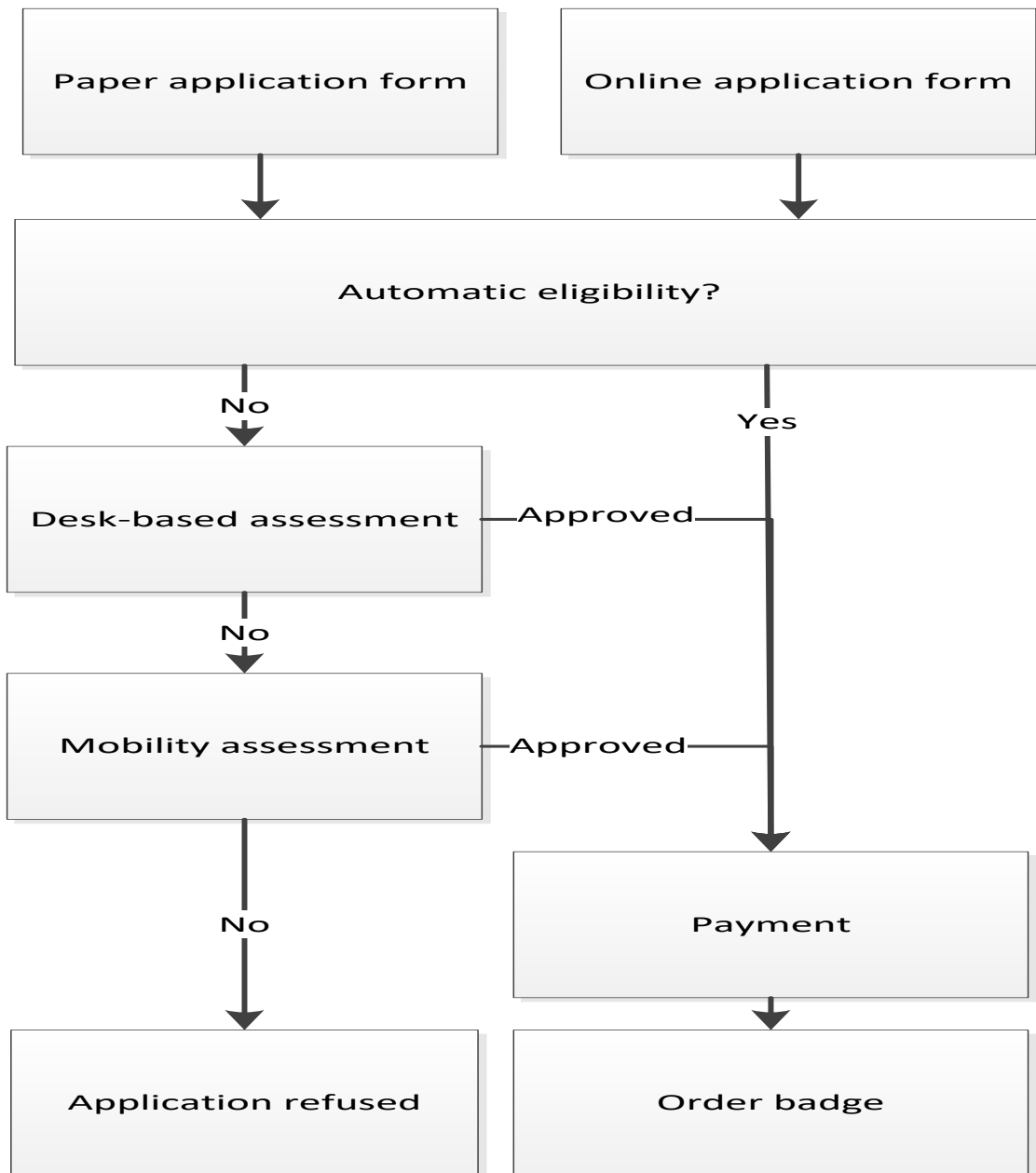
- Customer Journey for initial enquiry to application outcome.
- Operational efficiency to reduce the time taken to process an application.
- Support for customers to use the digital application form

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 (Occupational Therapists), who complete assessments of applicants to determine eligibility to receive a Blue Badge.

The application and assessment process are shown in fig 1

Fig 1



Blue Badge Improvements - Time Line of Events

- **5 February 2019** 'Go Live' date for new Blue Badge Customer Management System (CSM)
- **February 2019** – Training commenced for new system and process changes
- **March 2019** – New processes implemented
- **April 2019** – Call routing for Blue Badge Calls changed

- **June 2019** – Additional Customer Service Officer joined the team
- **30 August 2019** – Launch of new criteria for ‘Hidden Disabilities’
- **4 December 2019** – Blue Badge Surgery Trial

Performance

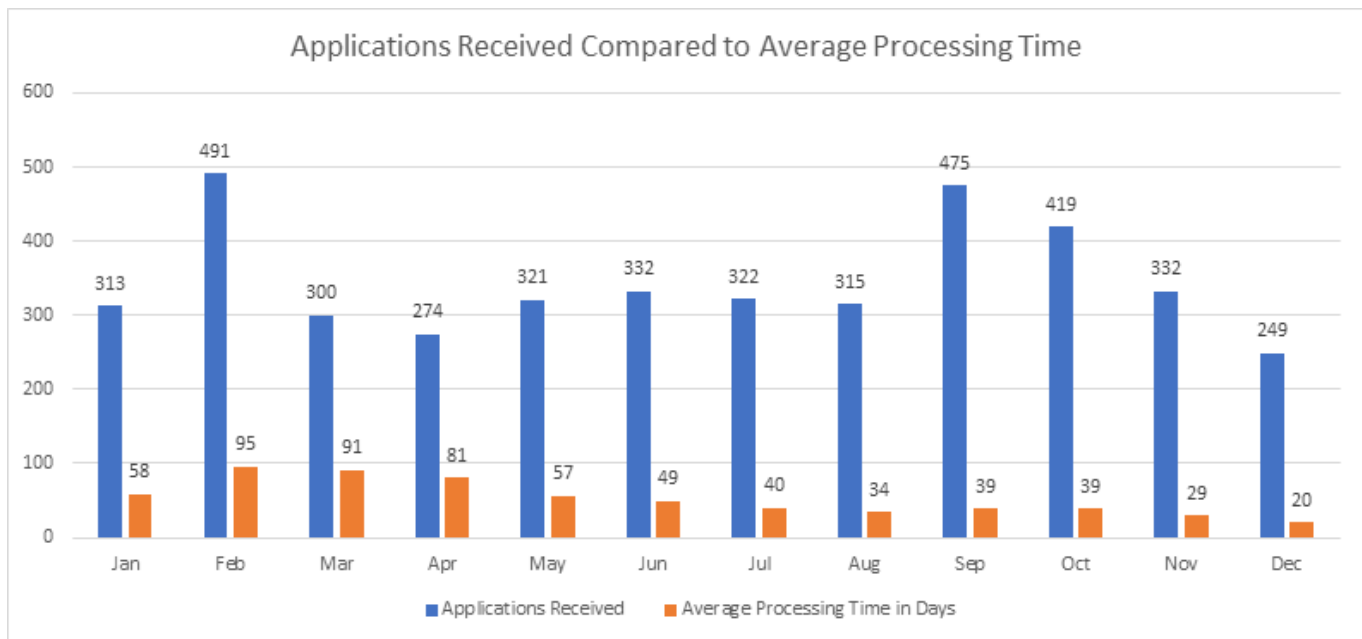
Please see details in fig 2 of the number of Blue Badge application for the last four years plus details of the average time taken to process an application.

Fig 2

Year	No. applications received	Average time taken to process
2016	3474	6 weeks
2017	3325	11 weeks
2018	4289	10 weeks
2019	4143	8 Weeks

In 2019, there was a peak in the application processing time from February to April this was mainly due to the transition period as the service migrated to the new Blue Badge Management System. Over the last six months the processing time continues to reduce, even though the number of applications has increased. (see fig 3).

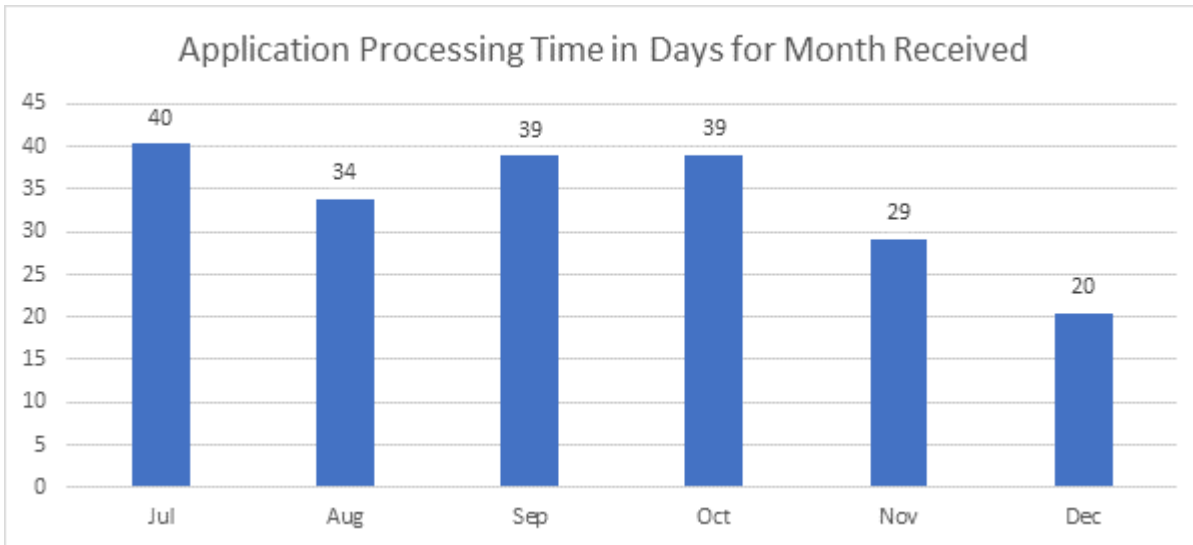
Fig 3



Reviewing the last six months data demonstrates the improvements to the service that have been made since June 2019 and have had a significant impact on reducing the application processing times.

In 2018 the average processing time was 10 weeks; the team are currently working on an average of 5 weeks. (see fig 4)

Fig 4



From the changes to the Blue badge criteria to include 'Hidden disabilities', at the end of December 2019 an additional 193 applications were received for the 'Hidden' criteria, the average processing time for these criteria is currently 7 weeks. 'Hidden' applications naturally have a longer processing time due to the complexity of the application, the new processes and improvements implemented by the team have ensured the processing time are still that of a satisfactory time scale.

Complaints

Since January 2019, the Customer Feedback team have received one corporate complaint relating to the Blue Badge service which was upheld. The complaint related to the customer being unhappy about the application process. This is a reduction from 2018 when five Corporate Complaints were received.

Since January 2019, the Customer Feedback team have received 19 complaints which were 'resolved at service level' (did not proceed to a corporate complaint).

2019	Complaints Received	Reason
January	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eleven chasing application status • One related to a deceased badge holder • Two related to badge misuse • Two related to call wait times in Customer Services • Three related to the application process
February	6	
March	2	
April	2	
May	6	
June	1	
July	0	
August	0	
September	0	
October	0	
November	1	
December	0	

This equates to 0.46% (11) of applications (4143) received within this period.

Appeals

In 2018, 6 appeals had been received against refused Blue Badges, due to recent changes in the in-eligibility criteria there has been a spike in Appeals with 11 appeals received since August 2019.

Appeal hearings are scheduled every four weeks, subject to receiving all information / evidence required to consider the appeal. Appeals are considered by Customer Services and Independent Living Services.

As part of the continuous learning, improvements have been made to communicate with applicants to provide them with more detail relating to the reasons their application was refused, this has reduced the amount of appeals received.

Further Improvements

GovPay

Customer Services are currently in the process of implementing a new payment option for Blue Badge Applications. GovPay enables the applicants to pay online as part of the application process, the upfront payment could reduce the processing time of an application by up to 7 days. The implementation of this payment option is expected to be completed later this year.

Blue Badge Surgery

The Community Support team have previously held surgeries to assist applicants in completing a Blue Badge application. Also, the Library service also offer a 'check and send' service to assist Blue Badge applicants. However, the amount of support offered by the Community Support team has reduced since December 2019. To ensure ongoing support is provided, Customer Services are currently trialling Blue Badge Surgeries from the Civic Centre, these are provided during two, 2-hour sessions that are held every fortnight and began on 4 December 2019. So far, these surgeries have been very successful with up to 8 applications completed at each session and customer feedback has been very positive for these sessions.

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