

**WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
1<sup>st</sup> May 2014**

**Recommendations from the Blue Badge Review Panel  
28<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

The Blue Badge Review panel was convened to scrutinise the allocation, procedure and effectiveness of the scheme and investigate the possible misuse / abuse of Disabled Parking Permits throughout the District.

The aims of the group were to:

- Examine and understand the policy and procedure for the application of a blue badge.
- Understand the allocation criteria and eligibility for blue badges.
- Ensure effective communication to residents and interested parties.

There have been three meetings, all attended by Members and a representative from the Parking Enforcement Team.

As Chairman of the Panel, I wish to thank all the Members of the Panel for their hard work and commitment; Graham Ballinger, Rose Bishop, Paul Harrison, Vi Higgs and Mike Price. Also, Anne Clarke, Head of Adult Services, Worcestershire County Council (WCC), Jane Bowen, Operations Manager, Worcestershire Hub Shared Service (WCC), Emma Woodcock, Assistant Customer Services Manager, Steve Brant, Operations Manager and Sharon Clifford-Smith, Operational Support Officer WFDC for their input.

The Panel looked at the procedure for obtaining and renewing permits. The Blue Badge scheme is a national scheme managed on behalf of Northgate by WCC under the administration of Jane Bowen.

At the evidence gathering meeting with the expert witnesses, Members were advised on the introduction of the scheme and the changes made in 2012, the application process, overt and covert features incorporated in to the badges to make it harder for them to be replicated, and the assistance given by the Customer Service team at the Kidderminster Hub.

A database of Blue Badges is held nationally and the scheme provides parking concessions for people with a permanent or substantial disability, evidenced by receipt of ophthalmologist report, receipt of higher rate of mobility component of Disability Living Allowance, War Pensioners mobility supplement, Armed Forces and Reserve Forces (compensation) scheme or other supporting medical evidence.

Applicants can apply online, via the Hub or by post and have to supply supporting documentation and a passport style photograph. The fee is £10 and permits should be received within 28 days, although there is anecdotal evidence received by Members that there can be longer delays.

Evidence shows that nationally there is vast misuse and fraud of these permits, especially in areas where there is free or concessionary parking for users in car parks. £45million was the latest national figure misuse. It had been agreed that Wyre Forest District Council's proposal to explore the possibility of charging Blue Badge holders for car parking would not be progressed.

In Wyre Forest, there is little evidence of fraud but the latest figures for misuse are available from Civil Enforcement Officers who have confiscated 9 badges in the last 2 months and are now issuing Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's) for misuse of on-street parking. Approximately 40 / 50 users have been warned about abuse.

It was stressed that fraud concerning misuse of permits was taken very seriously and people were urged to contact the Benefits Fraud Hotline to report any suspected misuse.

**Recommendations from the Panel:**

- 1. The report be noted.**
- 2. A publicity campaign via the Media Team be produced to promote the correct use of permits and to help prevent public misconception of the scheme.**
- 3. The Benefits Fraud Hotline telephone number be published and guarantee of anonymity.**
- 4. The continued efforts by the Kidderminster Hub and Worcestershire County Council to improve the application process and streamlining of issuing permits be endorsed.**
- 5. The Civil Enforcement Officers continue with the work they are doing to combat misuse of permits.**

Councillor J Greener

Chairman of the Blue Badge Review Panel, May 2013.