TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to:	**Health Scrutiny Committee**
Date:	**01/11/24**
Report for:	**Information**
Report author:	**Lucy Boubrahmi – Customer Service Lead**

Report Title

Trafford Blue Car Badge Service

Summary

This report provides an update on the BCB service following the introduction of new technology. This report follows on from the previous BCB report from May 2024

Recommendation(s)

The committee is asked to –
1. Note the finding of the report and ongoing improvements BCB team plan to make over 2025. Especially the early indications that the new system has made a positive impact on the customer experience indicated by –
   i. The significant reduction in call lengths
   ii. The volume of new applications completed

   Both of which show that residents and organisations are completing the applications with no difficulties regarding the reliability of the new form

2. Consider a further update to scrutiny in mid/late 2025/26 to allow more detailed progress report on how the new system and processes have impacted on the customer journey along with analysis of the Customer Survey.

1.   Background

1.1   The Blue Badge scheme enables those who qualify to park close to goods and services.

1.2   The Blue Badge scheme is administered by Local Authorities utilising guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT). The full guidance to Local Authorities can be found online (Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance (England) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk))

1.3   The administration of Blue Car Badges sits under the remit of the Customer Service Lead, within the Strategy and Resources Directorate.

1.4   The team is currently managed by 0.69 FTE Customer Service Manager, 2 FTE Blue Car Badge Officers.

1.5   The team currently award over 3000 applications each year.

1.6   All new applications from 10 September 2024 are being processed via the new platform Microsoft Dynamics.

1.7   No data from the old platform C360 has been migrated which means we are currently managing applications/appeals pre-10 September on C360.

1.8   Since the new platform has been introduced, new applications are being submitted using the GOV.UK form.

2   BCB awards

2.1   Currently there are 2.35 million valid blue car badges held across the UK.

2.2   2.26 million people automatically qualify for a blue car badge with 42% holding a blue badge.

2.3   Across the Northwest there are approximately 372k Blue Badges in circulation.

2.4   In Trafford as of 29 October 2024, 10,331 residents hold an active Blue Car Badge.

2.5   Typically, a Blue Badge is awarded for 3 years or to the end date of a qualifying benefit is due to be reassessed.

2.6   Refused badges are usually where an applicant does not meet the DfT guidelines ([Blue Badge scheme local authority guidance (England) - GOV.UK](#)) to issue a badge or the information provided is not enough to determine eligibility, therefore the badge is refused.

2.7   Since "go live" on 10 September 2024 (as of the 29 October 2024) we have received 779 using the GOV.UK form

- New applications 379
- Reapplications 400

2.8   Out of the 779 applications 44% have been completed.

2.9   Below is the current caseload on Microsoft Dynamics broken down by eligibility criteria

Eligibility Criteria	Volume
Armed Forces Compensation Scheme	0
Child under 3 who needs to be near a vehicle	1
Child under 3 with bulky medical equipment	0
Cognitive Impairment	0
Combined hidden & walking	21
Disability in both arms	0
DLA	57
Non visible (hidden)	37

PIP	255
PIP non visible (hidden)	12
Registered blind	19
Risk in traffic	0
Terminal illness	35
Walking ability	342
War pensioners mobility supplement	0

3 Update on Customer Journey

3.1 There have been some concerns raised by residents and organisations regarding the renewal process at Trafford and the pressure points faced by some members of the community when reapplying for a BCB

3.2 There is no way to "skip" the renewal process, however there are things we can do to make the renewal process for those residents with conditions that will not improve and continue to require a blue badge to access goods and services.

3.3 From 10/09/2024 the Council has moved to a new form which is completed by the resident or on behalf of the resident via GOV.UK website.

3.4 The new form has much better functionality and integration than our previous "in house" form. It integrates seamlessly with Manage Blue Badge (MBB) the system where we order BCB.

3.5 This better integration will allow us to easily identify cases where "no further assessment" is required, this is used for conditions where the prognosis is unlikely to improve. This information is used by GOV.UK at the renewal stage of new badges and will produce a much shorter application.

3.6 This shorter form will make the process for those residents who continually require a BCB to access goods and services much simpler.

3.7 Unfortunately, the old system did not capture this information in the same way as the new form and we didn't have the functionality to make the renewal process shorter, which meant residents even if they needed no further assessment still had to complete a full application form.

3.8 To improve the customer experience for renewals, we are currently carrying out a manual task to identify cases on the old CRM system where no further assessment is required. This is a challenging task in terms of data extraction and manual input. However, the work will have a positive impact on a significant number of residents who are due to renew badges.

3.9 So far, we have updated over 200 cases that are due for renewal, that do not require further assessment. These customers will benefit from the shorter application functionality. The only requirement is that resident has their current badge number to enable them to access.

3.10 The new platform has the capability to integrate with other Microsoft packages such as Microsoft BI and Power Platform. Whilst phase one has been delivered, we are starting

to work towards phase two in 2025, looking at potential enhancements to improve the customer experience and back-office processes.

3.11 The functionality provided by the new processing platform means we have been able to resolve many of the barriers and pressure points that have been experienced using our previous platform C360. Please see below for details

- Email address no longer required to complete an application form
- If customer/representative have an email account, they can save and return to the form
- No portal requirements
- Faster more responsive system
- Easier to attach information at the point of application
- Much easier to complete a form on behalf of an applicant.
- New form is currently used nationwide by a high number of Local Authorities.
- Improved software and processes in place to make booking Independent Mobility Appointments much easier.
- Payment process is much easier.
- More information collected at point of application which will reduce emails/letters requesting further information.

3.12 Although the technology used to apply and process new applications has improved, we will continue to provide a range of support for residents who require additional support or are digitally excluded.

3.13 Residents can visit any library in the borough and use the public PC's, connect their own device to the free WIFI or loan a device to take home.

3.14 Residents also have the option to contact the Access Trafford Contact Centre to have a form completed on their behalf.

3.15 Although we are only two months into using, he GOV.UK early indications are showing a reduction in call lengths into Access Trafford Contact Centre.

3.16 Currently we are unable to supply reliable data in terms of number of forms completed by the Contact Centre team. However, the below table shows the average call lengths for BCB enquiries across several time periods and gives an early indication of the positive impact of the new form. The significant reduction in call lengths during September and October 24 implies that less assistance is required by residents.

Time Period	Answered BCB calls	Average Call length minutes:seconds
August 24	291	08:04
September 24	322	07:10
October 24	301	06:16
October 23	405	08:13
2023/24	4907	08:11
2024/25 (to 31/10)	2143	07:20

4   Quality Assurance

4.1   As detailed above the DfT guidelines are followed to determine eligibility for a BCB. Currently the only automatic qualifications based on medical conditions are for people who are registered blind or have a terminal illness.

4.2   It is appreciated residents who have a degenerative condition such as Huntington's Disease or Parkinson's Disease, may believe that they qualify without further assessment for a badge under the scheme.

4.3   Unfortunately, when initially applying for a badge based on walking criterion there may be cases where an assessment is required as it maybe unclear from medical evidence how the condition currently impacts their ability to walk.

4.4   The team currently maintain the integrity of the scheme by continually ensuring that applications are processed within the DfT guidance and regulations.

4.5   The team are involved with other GM authorities to proactively bench mark our blue car badge offer.

4.6   We are working with Parkinsons UK to arrange additional training for staff to build on current knowledge, we hope this will add additional context to applications and medical evidence that support applications.

4.7   As an organisation work is underway making further digital improvements, this includes a redesign of the current website which will improve accessibility to information and advice.

4.8   As a service Access Trafford is working on a range of improvements, such as a new telephony system which we hope to be in place by the end of 2025.This multiplatform system will enable more streamlining of back-office processes.

4.9   In addition to this we are currently working on restructuring the BCB team to add more resilience into the small processing team.

4.10   As part of our internal improvement strategy, we will be examining feedback to see where improvements can be made to our correspondence with residents.

4.11   The customer (resident) is central to the services Access Trafford provide as we promote online opportunities where possible, however we will always ensure that our most vulnerable residents are not excluded.

4.12   Continuing to support our most vulnerable residents who are unable to self-serve by completing forms over the phone, where the resident can complete an application in the comfort of their own home.

4.13   During 2024 over 600 BCB applications were completed by the Access Trafford Contact Centre with residents over the phone.

4.14 With digital improvements across the organisation, we should see the online experience for residents be simplified and become a more positive interaction.

4.15 With more automated process with the new CRM system, we hope to improve SLA's and reduce unnecessary contact with residents.

4.16 More reporting functionality will help with monitoring and reporting current performance.

4.17 At the time of this report, the information dashboards are currently unavailable (expected early in 2025), these will enable the team to see in real time the numbers/types of applications we have in the system and allow easier workflow management.

4.18 Improved reporting tools such as Microsoft BI will help us to provide statistical information in real time and highlight potential areas of improvement. We hope to make progress on the use of Power BI in early 2025.

4.19 As part of our commitment to improving the Customer Experience in 2025 the BCB will be conducting a customer survey of residents/organisations who have applied for a BCB so we can identify areas of improvement from a user perspective.

5   Recommendations

5.1 Note the finding of the report and ongoing improvements BCB team plan to make over 2025. Especially the early indications that the new system has made a positive impact on the customer experience indicated by –
- The significant reduction in call lengths
- The volume of new applications completed

Both of which show that residents and organisations are completing the applications with no difficulties regarding the reliability of the new form

5.2 Consider a further update to scrutiny in mid/late 2025/26 to allow more detailed progress report on how the new system and processes have impacted on the customer journey along with analysis of the Customer Survey.