

**BOURNEMOUTH, CHRISTCHURCH AND POOLE COUNCIL**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 October 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present:-

Cllr S Bartlett – Chairman

Cllr S Aitkenhead – Vice-Chairman

Present: Cllr J Beesley, Cllr L Dedman, Cllr C Goodall, Cllr S Mackrow,  
Cllr L Northover, Cllr K Salmon, Cllr T Trent, Cllr O Walters and  
Cllr C Weight

Also in attendance: Cllr M Cox

54. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Broadhead. Cllr Rice did not attend the meeting.

55. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members

56. Declarations of Interests

There were no declarations of interest made on this occasion.

57. Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meetings held on 23 September 2024 and 1 October 2024 were approved as a correct record.

58. Action Sheet

The Chair outlined the points on the action sheet. Items were noted and those completed or open-ended would be removed from the action sheet.

59. Public Issues

There were none received on this occasion.

60. Blue Badge Service Update Report

The Portfolio Holder for Customer, Culture and Communications and the Director of Customer and Property Business presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'A' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Board was advised that the report provided an update on the recommended officer actions

made in relation to the Informal working group report submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 October 2023. The Board was informed that the report included an update is also provided covering current blue badge processing performance which highlights a number of ongoing challenges currently facing the service, along with an action plan for improvement. The Board considered the report and the information provided by the Portfolio Holder and Officers. A number of points were raised and responded to including:

- Flexibly trained staff – It would be useful to have staff who would be able to backfill vacant positions, but it was important that this was aligned with the right staff and that the impact of staffing levels was not just shifted to a different area.
- Incorrect applications – this previously resulted in the application being refused and a new application needing to be made but staff would also look at where applications could be amended /corrected to allow them to be processed without a completely new application
- Enforcement – It was noted that parking enforcement would not be undertaken until three months after the expiry of a blue badge, but it was noted that this would only apply to Council car parks or on street parking.
- Online application – there was nothing online to indicated that there was an alternative way to apply. It was noted that members of the public could go to a customer services centre to access a paper copy, but this would then need to be inputted by a member of staff.
- Number of applications - It was noted that presently 900 applications were received each month, and it had only been possible to determine 850. It was currently taking approximately 14 weeks to process an application. In some cases, additional evidence was needed but this time was mostly just the time taken to start processing the application. It was noted that this wasn't particularly an issue with Local Government Reorganisation but a matter of resources.
- Resources – It was noted that the cost of the services was approximately £100k more than the funding received from the payment for the blue badges. Fees were only paid when the application was processed and approved. It was suggested that applicants could be given the option to set a calendar reminder to renew applications. The Board also asked about the cost of processing potentially fraudulent applications, it was noted that the impact of this was minimal.
- Cycle of Applications – It was confirmed that the process of simpler verification of renewals had probably disrupted the cyclical flow of applications to some extent. It was suggested that the requirements for processing should be taken up universally through the Local Government Association. It was noted that a Doret MP had already agreed to take up with issue with government. There had been an 11 percent increase in new applications since the previous year.

The Board discussed a number of issues around this being a national issue and made a number of suggestions which the Board requested the Portfolio Holder or Leader and the Chief Executive to take forward.

**The Board RESOLVED that**

- (a) The progress update on previously agreed actions were noted.**
- (b) The update on current blue badge processing performance is noted.**
- (c) The Portfolio Holder/Leader and the Chief Executive be asked to write to the Department for Transport to raise the concerns outlined by the O&S Board and that the Portfolio Holder take the issue forward with local MPs and the Local Government Association to encourage local authorities to raise these issues with the Department for Transport and request that central government gives local authorities the freedom to set fees which cover the cost of administering the system and that the system should be simplified in terms of renewal processes.**
- (d) A further update be brought back to the Board in approximately 6 months.**

Voting: Nem. Con.

A concern was raised that any increase in fees should not be prohibitive to people receiving a blue badge.

It was suggested that staff be multidisciplinary trained in order to provide cover for absences. It was also suggested that there should be an auto approval for blue badges for those with unaltering lifelong conditions

61. Work Plan

The Chairman presented a report, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member of the Board and a copy of which appears as Appendix 'B' to these Minutes in the Minute Book. The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Board was asked to consider and identify work priorities for publication in a Work Plan. The Chair outlined the current work programme to the Board and noted that there were a number of issues which were still waiting completion of key lines of enquiry or further information. The following actions were noted:

The item on funding for arts, culture and leisure would be focused on arts and culture and that a separate item on leisure would be in future. This needed to be programmed into the work plan.

The item on Working more collectively across BCP geographical areas / Locality Governance required further scoping but it was noted that a Community Governance Review had been initiated through Council. Lots of comments from members regarding engagement with Council but want to consider timing. Performance across different channels – email traffic 'report it function'.

The Chair asked for expressions of interest in a working group on Council Performance.

Customer Services Reporting / CRM system had also been suggested as a potential working group for the Board. The Board was advised that in terms of timing this would be a good time this. It was noted that the Board could only have one working group in progress at a time although this could be included within the work plan for future availability.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that Key Lines of Enquiry Documents only need to be completed once an item has agreed to be included on the work plan after consideration of a scrutiny request form by the Board/Committee.

It was noted that the date for the briefing on the Integration of Dorset Local Enterprise Functions into Council should be January 2025. Dates for the other briefing sessions were discussed.

**RESOLVED that the work plan be noted and amended as discussed.**

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

CHAIRMAN