

Equality Impact Assessment



Name of project/proposal

Blue Badge - Transformation of Service - T17 & T19

Contact name

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Department

Corporate Services

Date to be published on Hantsweb

22 Mar 2017

Purpose for project/proposal

The purpose of the project is to move to a position where, in so far as possible, all applications for a blue badge in Hampshire are made online. This is in keeping with the Council's digital by default approach. This is with a view to making the process both faster and easier for the customer, whilst also more efficient and effective for the County Council - which is in line with residents' expectations regarding value for money. In addition to improving the customer experience, the shift to support more people to apply for and renew their blue badge on-line will support savings reductions in the region of £45,000 as planned from 2017

The T19 part of this project will be made up of greater technological improvements, which will reduce the time taken to assess applications while at the same time protecting the integrity of the scheme and safeguarding HCC reputation. The impacts identified fall in line with those identified for T17 because ultimately this is about the impact of "Digital by default" strategy in general but also on the Blue Badge community specifically.

Consultation

Has a consultation been carried out?

Yes

As part of the the County Council corporate transformation plan, consultation has been undertaken with specific stakeholder groups (detailed below). Ongoing customer feedback will be collated and used to inform the design of, and ongoing improvements to, the on-line service.

First engagement HCC Disability Forum

It was agreed that people will be able to use technology for online payments and uploading of documents and, for those who cannot self-serve on-line, it was recognised that support is available through a number of existing informal and formal networks, including family, friends and other 3rd party organisations.

The Disability Forum was asked whether a large or small percentage of the population who would not be able to use the online application? Although no direct answers to this question were given, the consensus across the meeting was one of acceptance and positive contribution of ways to overcome barriers for traditionally excluded groups.

It was also suggested that advice on the page on other agencies who can supply support would be helpful including Citizen's Advice Charity and Age Concern.

There are volunteers who now go out to more remote areas to collect/deliver library books as the mobile libraries have gone, so that is another source of support for helping apply online.

It was communicated to the group that the County Council will make sure access to the system and the application process is as simple and helpful as possible

There was a unanimous feeling across the group that they understood why the council has to do this but that it should be easy for the customer to do online, and if not to access additional support

Age Concern (AC) - consultation with Age Concern, the organisation has agreed to support communications around the changes to the service and provide support to service users.

.Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) - CAB willing to support Hampshire County Council by supporting applicants who may come to them for help

Statutory considerations

Impact

Age	Low
Disability	Low
Sexual orientation	None

Race	None
Religion and belief	None
Gender reassignment	None
Sex	None
Marriage and civil partnership	None
Pregnancy and maternity	None
Other policy considerations	
Poverty	Low
Rurality	Low
Other factors	None
If other please describe	

Geographical impact All Hampshire

Have you identified any medium or high impact?* Yes No

Why do you consider that your project/proposal will have low or no impact?

For those who really can't self-serve, we will continue to provide means for them to access the service – so the risk of exclusion is actually very low. Our approach will be digital by default and paper based applications will be the exception and not the rule, so we may be limiting choice, but we won't be limiting equal access. The outcome of the engagement process should also enable us to put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the online process is more desirable for the end user – so limiting choice does not result in decreased service satisfaction.

We therefore need to challenge how much Hampshire County Council (HCC) does and how much the potential Blue Badge holder needs to do. HCC needs to make use of the technology that is available in order to deliver more efficient and effective services while being aware of those customers who may not be able to respond to it positively.

The most important reason for this project is to secure the Blue Badge Scheme's future as it has been identified that providing the service in the current form is financially unsustainable.

The main beneficiary of the project will always need to be the disabled community, but we do acknowledge that the change will be a challenge for a proportion of this vulnerable group. The challenges would be in how the part of the group, who are not digitally able, gain access to this service without being marginalised or treated unfairly. We will always have an access method (paper application) for these exceptional cases, which will be a small minority and as a last resource.

Consultation has been carried out with a disability forum and with two organisations who support the community. This has informed us to the degree that confirms a standard trend that is occurring across the nation as more and more public services try to find more efficient ways of delivering service. Some benchmarking with other councils shows the trend of encouraging community support for people in this category (family, friends, carers, organisations) there is sufficient evidence that reveals successful completion of applications for Blue badges by them.

There is general acceptance although there were two areas that were flagged up.

1. The transition period should provide access to telephonic access to advice - not support in filling out the application, but advice on where they can make the application and/or obtain support.

2. The most clearly identified impact would be on those people who really need a Blue Badge, but do not apply because they feel we have made access to the service too difficult for them. HCC is aware that these people do exist and that they are a small minority. HCC do believe that the change of behaviour regarding getting support from family or friends etc. will go a long way to mitigating this risk

The two groups who are affected are the disabled community and also older people, predominantly, because most Blue Badges are held by people over 70. Experian data revealed that there is a smaller proportion of people in the older group who may have challenges using the Web to access services and that they would prefer face to face access to services (which is not sustainable). It is also acknowledged that a higher percentage of this group are now IT literate compared to 10 years ago, which is a trend which is expected to continue.

For those people who cannot use the internet at all, HCC will need to have something in place to ensure they are supported.

Discussions have been had with Age Concern and Citizen's Advice Bureau who have agreed to support applicants who may come to them for assistance.

Final decision date

Final decision date due	15 Mar 2017
Decision to be made by	DMT