



Middlesbrough Local Involvement Network (LINK)

Blue Badge Report

October 2009

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Middlesbrough LiNk Report

Blue Badge Scheme in Middlesbrough 2009

Purpose of Report

The Transitional LiNk group became aware of concerns about the use and abuse of the Blue Badge Scheme from conversations with disabled people during 2008. Even before the LiNk launch, the transitional group agreed to set up a working group to investigate the current use of the Blue Badge Scheme in the borough, to identify whether the concerns we had heard about were endorsed by many users and to make realistic recommendations to improve the scheme. This report is the result of the LiNk's investigation.

Working Group Remit

To describe the current use of the Blue Badge Disabled Parking Scheme within Middlesbrough and make recommendations to the local health services and Middlesbrough Council.

Working Group

The working group which was set up in November 2008 was made up of a number of interested individuals, some of whom were LiNk members or part of the LiNk core group and others with an interest in the subject. (Appendix A for members of the group) A total 11 people have been involved in the group.

Blue Badge Scheme Working Group Action Plan

The working group decided to undertake the following programme of action.

- Understand the national issues with the scheme and how this applies locally
- Identify the number of badges being used
- Identify the current enforcement measures
- Identify how many dedicated spaces are available for blue badge users
 - ❖ In the town,
 - ❖ In Supermarkets
 - ❖ At James Cook University Hospital South Tees Trust
 - ❖ At GP practices and PCT offices
- Ask Blue Badge holders for their experiences

Investigation – Actions and Results

National Picture

The Blue Badge Scheme was created in 1971 (at that time it was an orange badge) to enable more people to retain their independence. It provides a vital lifeline for more than 2.3 million disabled people in England. It helps them retain their independence by making it easier to access services, visits to family and friends as well as seek work, education or to shop.

A review of how the Scheme was working was undertaken in 2007 where it was recognised that there were problems of abuse of the scheme. Two thirds of Councils reported that abuse was a major issue. In October 2008 a strategy was announced to improve the way in which the scheme works. See Appendix B for the strategy aims and timetable of changes.

Middlesbrough Picture – Actions

The LINK sent letters to Middlesbrough Council, South Tees NHS Foundation Trust, Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust (PCT) and supermarkets. These explained the purpose of the investigation and requested information and the requirement of health and social care commissioners to provide the LINK with information within 20 working days. (Appendix C for the letter and questions)

Replies were received within the timescale from James Cook University Hospital (South Tees NHS Foundation Trust), Middlesbrough PCT and 2 out of 22 GP practices. After two follow up letters we received three replies from Middlesbrough Council.

We did not receive any replies from the supermarkets (Sainsbury's, Aldi, Tesco and Morrisons) despite follow up letters. The LINK has no statutory powers to obtain information from supermarkets but we hoped that they would help us.

The working group members devised a questionnaire for Blue Badge users and we circulated this as widely as possible to get the views of people who used the scheme regularly.

Middlesbrough Picture - Results

Badges

- 5309 badges were issued in Middlesbrough in the year to March 2007 and 5711 were issued to March 2008
- In the year to March 07 this equates to 38 per thousand population

- In the year to March 07, 2666 were issued on automatic qualification and 2538 on the Authority's discretion
- 105 were issued to institutions in the year to March 2007 and 112 to March 2008.
- In the year to March 2008, 38 badges were not renewed as they were no longer required and 12 were reported stolen. To March 09, 3 badges were reported as stolen with 69 being lost.

Disabled Bays

- There are 85 designated disabled bays across Middlesbrough Council in off street car parks.
- Blue Badge holders can also park free of charge and without time limit in all spaces in the Council pay and display car parks and not just in dedicated disabled bays
- There are 40 dedicated on street disabled bays in the town centre.
- There are 113 disabled parking bays for patients at James Cook University Hospital of which 32 are within the visitor's barrier car park with the rest being sited around the hospital.
- Oakfield Medical Practice reported a number of dedicated spaces (19) in the North Ormesby Health Village though they are shared by all the different premises, 4 GP practices, dental practices, optician, speech and language, renal unit and the PCT building.
- The Park surgery has 5 spaces dedicated to blue badges.
- Middlesbrough PCT main office does not have any dedicated parking for disabled people. *'As part of any invitation to meetings at Riverside House people are asked if they have any access needs, including disabled parking. If a need is identified appropriate parking space is reserved to ensure full access'*

Enforcement – Council

The Council told us it has not initiated any prosecutions for the misuse of disabled badges. The Civil Enforcement Officers have been carrying out regular inspections for Blue Badges since September 2006 using powers under section 94 of the Traffic Management Act 2004. The Council feels that the following enforcement procedure has proved to be effective in reducing the Blue Badge abuse in Middlesbrough.

‘Any motorist found to be mis- using a badge has their details noted and is issued with a warning notice and a leaflet explaining the rules of inspection. Any motorist who then fails to purchase a pay and display ticket in a car park or refuses to move the vehicle from a dedicated disabled bay or yellow line is issued with a £70 Penalty charge Notice for the relevant parking contravention.’

‘Any motorist who refuses to produce a badge for inspection on request is informed that their vehicle will be dealt with as if no blue badge was displayed and will be issued with a £70 Penalty Charge Notice for the relevant parking contravention.’

‘Details of all Blue Badges that have been misused are passed to the Social Services section who are responsible for badge issue and renewal. They then send a warning letter to the blue badge holder. This informs the badge holder that their badge has been found being used by another person. Details of the date time and location of the incident are given along with a warning about the seriousness and possible consequences of the offence. The holder is advised to ensure that their badge is used properly in the future and is given copies of the Department for Transport leaflets on Blue Badge conditions of use and inspections. They are also informed that their details have been noted and that any further misuse of the Blue Badge could result in the badge being withdrawn.’

- 480 penalty charge notices were issued in the year to March 2007
- Routine inspections of Blue Badges by parking enforcement teams identified 60 incidents of misuse in the same time frame.

Enforcement – James Cook University Hospital

South Tees NHS Foundation Trust told us that *‘usage of disabled spaces at James Cook University Hospital is monitored by security patrols checking valid permits are displayed within the vehicle window screen. In order to claim the free parking the disabled driver attends the hospital reception where reception staff have received instructions in how to use the validation machine. They also check the details within the disabled permit and record the name of the person. Tickets are not validated unless the disabled permit holder is present.’*

Enforcement - GP Practices

The spaces used by patients at the Oakfield Practice are not monitored at all. *'Anyone and everyone use these spaces. Tuesday is market day and the car park overflows especially on this day. Disabled people unfortunately come way down the list when it comes to people abusing these spaces.'*

At Park Surgery the use of the spaces is monitored by the building caretaker and staff. *'When our staff ask to see the photograph they get verbally abused. When they have seen it the badge does not belong to the driver or passenger'*

How the NHS and Middlesbrough Council think the Scheme could be improved

The PCT will be using the Equality Impact Assessment Systems Process to further strengthen their commissioning arrangements to ensure that all service users get the highest level of service possible. This includes looking at parking arrangements.

The South Tees NHS Foundation Trust is currently seeking planning approval for the red zoning of James Cook University Hospital's North and South entrances as not only disabled badge holders but also taxis block these entrances making access for ambulances difficult. Blue Badge holders feel that they have the right to do this. Red zoning means no vehicle parking at any time other than emergency vehicles.

The Park Surgery felt that putting the photograph on the front of the badge would help.

A major issue for the Council is the organisational cost of processing. The £2 charge does not nearly meet the expenditure. In addition the cost of making payment to GPs and then recharging the PCT is labour intensive and appears to add little value to the process. Alternative mechanisms such as the use of an Occupational Therapist are being considered.

Middlesbrough Councils Parking Solutions commented:

'The main problem however appears to be that the Blue Badge Scheme is widely perceived by the public as being abused and discredited. Parking Enforcement Officers, on the ground, report that the general public feel that the scheme has fallen into disrepute due to a general perception that badges are being obtained and used by people with little or no obvious disability. This in turn leads to high levels of abuse of disabled only parking facilities by able bodied drivers reported across the country. Taking local GPs out of the eligibility process and replacing them with properly trained occupation health type doctors to advise Council on blue badge applicants would

help ensure that only genuine cases receive badges. This might in turn help to increase public respect for the scheme.'

The access team manager felt that a standard application process and a computer system database solely for Blue Badges which gave up to date accurate information available not only to social care but to parking officers as well would be helpful.

Other agencies concerned about the scheme and how it works in Middlesbrough

The LINK working group also learned that a letter had been received by Erimus Residents Disability Action Group in November 2008. This letter was responding to the Group's letter of concern about obstructive parking and the misuse of disabled parking facilities. The response informed the group that, whilst Civil Enforcement Officers have the power to inspect Blue Badges it is not their role to question a person's eligibility to hold a badge. The reply also reminded the group that the Council has no powers to carry out enforcement in private car parks, at James Cook University Hospital or supermarkets.

The LINK working group also learnt of the activities of the Middlesbrough Shopmobility schemes and the surveys that have been undertaken at the Council owned car parks. They were informed of the national Bay Watch Campaign that national supermarkets have signed up to so that disabled spaces are properly used.

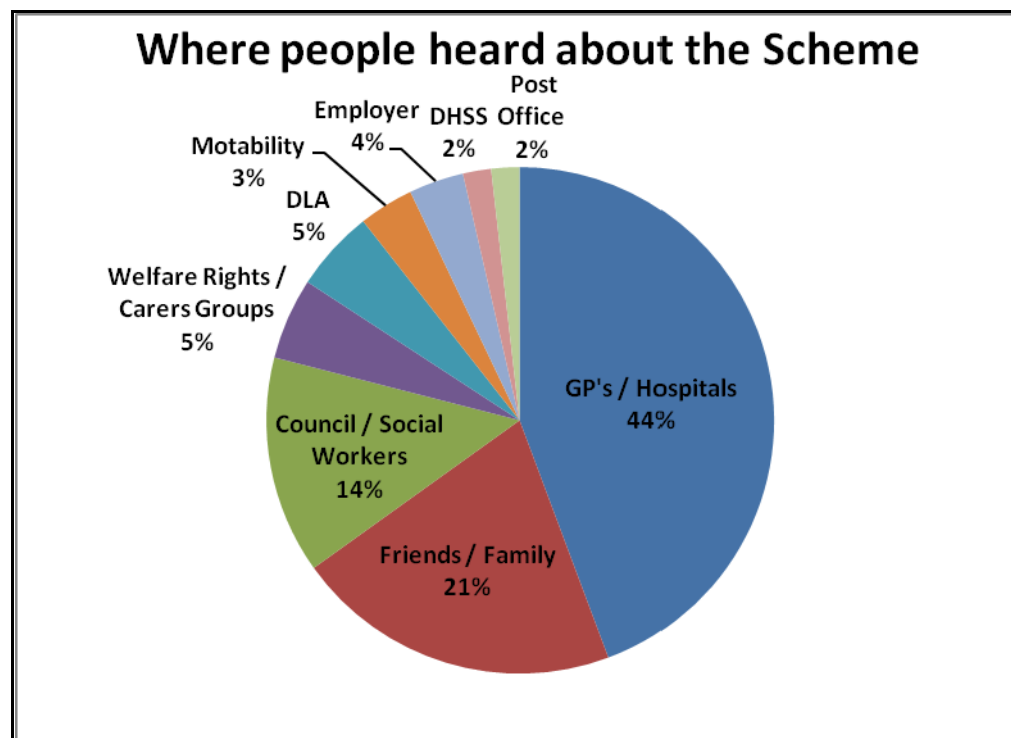
Views of Blue Badge Users

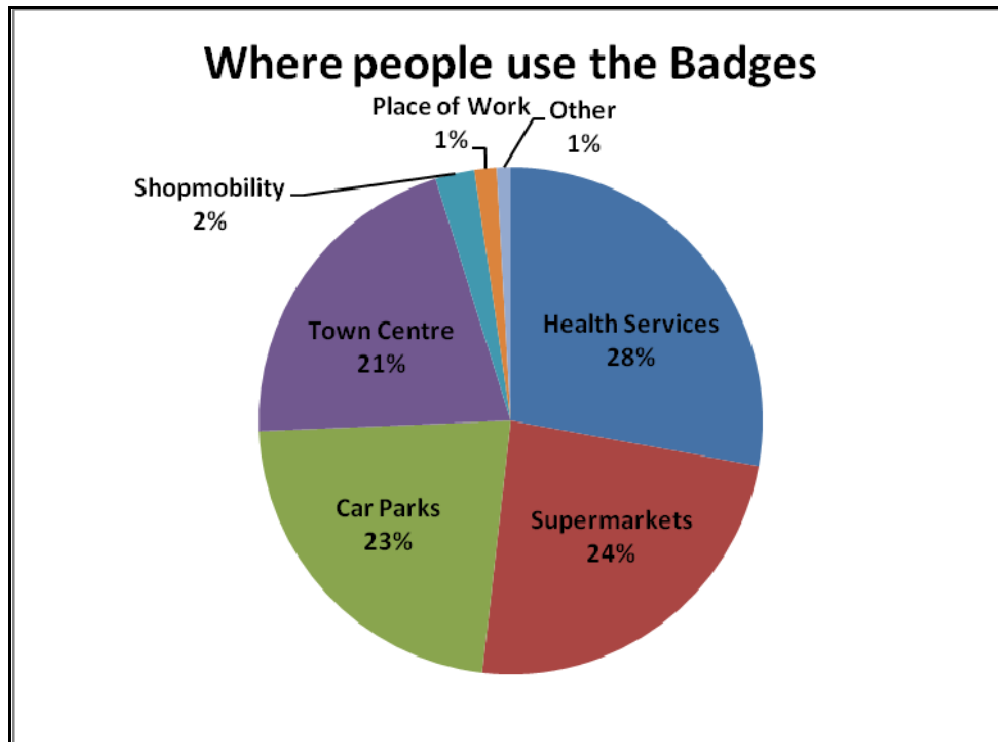
The LiNK working group circulated a questionnaire about the scheme and how it was working in Middlesbrough for completion by Blue Badge users in May/June 2009. Although (because of date protection issues) we were not able to use the data base of the Blue Badge holders the questionnaires were circulated widely in libraries, GP practices to the LiNK membership and in James Cook University Hospital. 98 Questionnaires were returned to the LiNK office by the cut off date of 30th June 2009.

Questionnaire Results

98 Questionnaires were returned with 36 from men, 52 from women and 10 were jointly completed or undisclosed. 91 respondents were Blue Badge users, 1 was completed by a disability organisation and 6 were interested members of the public. Of the Blue Badge holders 43 qualified automatically for a Blue Badge and 48 qualified under discretionary criteria.

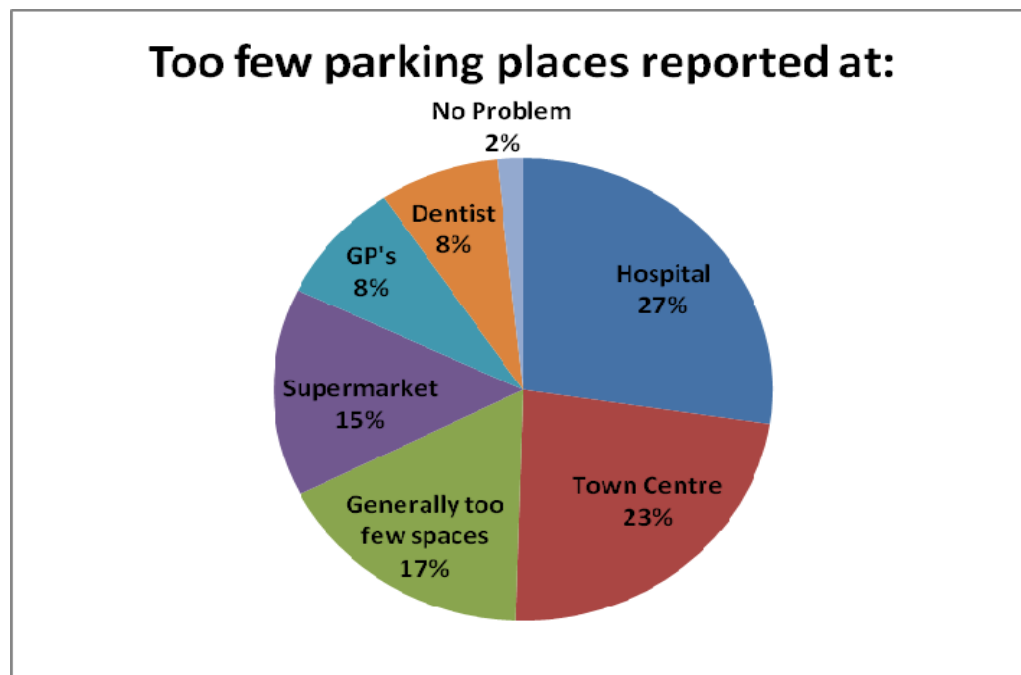
66.3% of respondents had no problems obtaining a badge but 4.1% reported that they did have problems while 29.6% left no comment. Those who did have problems commented that there was strict criteria to be met and were set difficult tasks by doctors and were often refused first time.

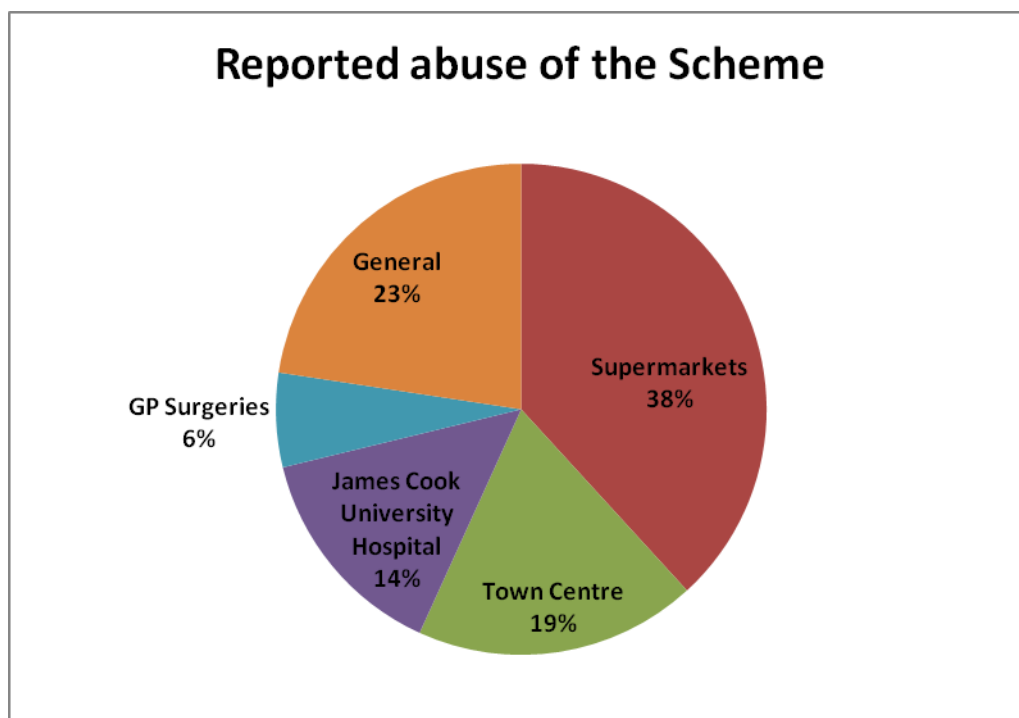




29.3% of people had complained about the lack of spaces or abuse. Out of that 14.7% of people had complained and nothing had happened though 2.4% reported that extra spaces had been provided.

Only 7.2% of people had heard about the changes to the Blue Badge Scheme as set out by the Department for Transport





Views of the proposal to create Red Zone parking around the North and South Entrances of James Cook University Hospital.

61 respondents supported the proposal of a Red Zone around the two entrances at James Cook University Hospital. However 16 of these felt it was essential that it was combined with more disabled bays and 9 felt that sufficient dropping off places were provided

28 people did not support a Red Zone as they felt it would create more problems for disabled people. Concerns centred on the burden of walking additional distances to the entrance, in particular for people who were unaccompanied and could not be dropped off near the entrance.

Final Open Question

42 people did not make any additional comments. Of the 56 who did some made multiple observations so there are more than 56 responses

- ❖ 18 people felt that enforcements procedures should be improved. This included 8 who felt that fines needed to be imposed
- ❖ 17 people wanted more monitoring of badge use.
- ❖ 15 people wanted more disabled bays in the town centre. The need for more bays in James Cook University Hospital was also identified.

- ❖ 5 people felt that badge holders should get more information on the scheme.
- ❖ 5 people wanted the criteria revised. 2 felt they should be widened to include people with dementia and 3 felt they should be tightened to reduce abuse.
- ❖ 6 people said they were happy with the scheme and appreciated its benefits

Quotes

The questionnaires elicited a wide range of helpful, forceful and moving comments and a selection of these is given below.

'The suggestion that I could use my badge at my GP's surgery is a joke – cannot get anywhere near the doctors.'

'The Cleveland Centre (for the doctors' surgery) have removed all disabled parking spaces.'

'I do not drive. I use my blue badge when my daughter or friend takes me out. I am very pleased and grateful for my Blue Badge.'

'The badge should have photo on the front and back and the design should be changed every 4 years.'

'Red Zones work well in city centres like Edinburgh.'

'Ours is a mini bus and a great number of disabled places do not cater for minibuses.'

'The use of the blue badge has, over the years enabled access, mainly by wheelchair, to many things that would not otherwise have been possible. It is one of great helps that minimises problems I have with my MS.'

'In James Cook's car parks, people park anywhere as blue badge holders have to take them (the badge) with the ticket to get stamped. I seldom manage to get in a bay.'

'You get nowhere complaining about lack of spaces or abuse as stores are not interested. I think the old Woolco and Dickens store at Portrack had the best idea. They used to wheel clamp cars and charge £5 to take it off. The money then went to the Butterwick Hospice.'

'I had problems obtaining the blue badge – the original was collected by my wife/daughter and renewals collected by my wife as there are no disabled parking areas at the local office (Middlesbrough House).'

'Under the auspices of the LINK please help to make conditions better for the disabled at the James Cook University Hospital or try to prevent either the NHS or Middlesbrough Council from imposing more problems (as they have in the town) and

also push for the restoration of blue badge parking status at Middlesbrough Cleveland Centre.'

'I have complained many times about abuse of disabled bays but no-one takes any notice of you. Even the street wardens don't want the hassle of going to check.'

'I complained about the lack of spaces at Hemlington Initiative Centre and they kindly had 7 more disabled bays built.'

'I have never complained about lack of spaces or abuse because no one cares and to approach a member of the public could be dangerous.'

'Our surgery has three disabled spaces regularly used by nursery attendees dropping off children. There is an interesting argument how others should behave if there is a full car park with empty disabled spaces (eg bringing an elderly relative or an ill patient to surgery)'

'I have complained to security staff at James Cook about inappropriate blue badge parking – they seem powerless to do anything saying it is a matter for the police.'

'I complained to Tesco about abuse of disabled spaces and had a written reply saying report it to security, which I have done and the manager who stated that he will not put his staff in a position of abuse.'

'My hubby was threatened by a 20 year old that he would smash his face in! The lad was sat in the car blasting music while waiting for his mam – no badge at all!'

Conclusion

Whilst the scheme is very much valued by its users there are general problems and its implementation within Middlesbrough has flagged up a lot of issues.

Both users and administrators of the scheme recognise that there are changes needed. Blue Badge holders, however feels that there should be better monitoring and enforcement and do not support the view from the Council and South Tees NHS Foundation Trust that current enforcement methods have been effective in reducing abuse.

It must be noted that although Middlesbrough Council have no legal power to enforce Blue Badge inspections in private car parks, 480 penalty notices were issued in the year to March 2007.

The issues for Blue Badge holders at GP practices do not seem to be recognised with the PCT saying this is not an issue for them and the practices not viewing it, for the most part, as a problem for them either with only 2 Practice Managers replying to the LINK.

Similarly there are problems at James Cook University Hospital where there appears to be an over optimistic view that the current arrangements are effective when 14.4% of people have experienced abuse on the site.

Knowledge of the proposed changes is patchy and more publicity is needed.

Recommendations

- ❖ The PCT should make a greater effort to ensure that GP practices enable disabled patients have as much access to medical services as non-disabled people and should actively seek to improve the disabled parking facilities at their own offices and at primary health care facilities, particularly at the Cleveland Centre in the Mall.
- ❖ Middlesbrough Council should ensure that disabled users can access its own offices
- ❖ South Tees NHS Foundation Trust should revise their procedure and ensure better monitoring of the Blue Badge usage.
- ❖ South Tees NHS Foundation Trust should not implement Red Zones unless more disabled bays are provided and dropping off places are available. Consideration should be made for disabled people who are not accompanied to hospital and appropriate disabled bays provided.

- ❖ The LiNk to publicise the problems highlighted in accessing supermarkets, the lack of monitoring of disabled bays and the lack of response to complaints.
- ❖ Middlesbrough LiNk should facilitate an event for Blue Badge holders to inform of the current scheme and the changes and the timetable

Blue Badge Report Summary

Middlesbrough LiNk was told of problems with the Blue Badge Scheme in the town and investigated by asking Middlesbrough Council for information and on use and enforcement. We also asked for information on how the Scheme worked in health services and at supermarkets. We distributed questionnaires throughout GP surgeries, James Cook University Hospital, Life Store and many other places around the town to understand not only the views of those who run the Scheme but also those who use it.

We found that just under 6000 badges were in use in Middlesbrough in 2008. Whilst enforcement is undertaken, badge holders feel that there continues to be significant abuse. They want better monitoring and enforcement especially at James Cook University Hospital and at supermarkets. GP practices were also identified as places where access for Blue Badge holders was poor. Of the 98 questionnaires returned only 7.2% reported they were aware of the Department for Transport strategy for improvement of the Blue Badge Scheme.

Appendix A

Working Group membership

Eric Chambers- Physical Disability Reference Group and LINK member

Gail Chester- Shopmobility

Craig Duerden- MVDA and LINK member

Mark Jones- Action for Blind People and LINK member

Bob Macmillan- LINK member

Brian Robinson -LINK member

Karl Sheldon - Albert Centre and LINK member

Jenny Shepherd -UNITE volunteer and LINK member

Anne Frizell- LINK host organisation

Wendy Black – LINK host organisation

Danielle Pope- LINK host organisation

Appendix B

Comprehensive Blue Badge Reform Programme – High Level Implantation Plan issued Department for Transport October 2008

Summary

A review of the Scheme in 2007 highlighted several areas where improvements needed to be made to the administration of the Scheme, the eligibility criteria and to prevent abuse. After further consultation, the Government published a reform strategy in October 2008 that included a suite of commitments that are designed to ensure that the Blue Badge Scheme stays fit for purpose in the 21st century, and to improve the lives of disabled people who rely on it.

Summary of the strategy

1. The Scheme will be extended to:
 - ❖ people with certain severe temporary mobility problems (lasting at least one year);
 - ❖ people with severe mental impairments;
 - ❖ seriously disabled service personnel/veterans; and
 - ❖ more children, under the age of three, with specific medical conditions.
2. Badges will have improved security features
3. Local Authorities will have new or amended powers to reduce mis-use and to prevent fraud and abuse of the Scheme
4. The management of the Scheme will be improved and the assessment process will be fairer and more consistent across England
5. A data sharing system will be in place to deliver customer service improvements and to improve the administration and enforcement of the Scheme
6. The exchange of good practice between Local Authorities will be increased.

The Government has committed to delivering the commitments included in the Reform Strategy within five years. The 6 main projects should result in the following changes being in place by the following dates. It should be noted that these dates are dependent on many factors and may be subject to changes to ensure that the programme remains focussed on effectively delivering its objectives.

By:

- ❖ 2009 – The eight Blue Badge Centres of Excellence are in place and their action plans to share good practice are being implemented.
- ❖ 2010 – Regulations to extend the eligibility criteria to more severely disabled children under 3 years old and severely disabled service personnel and veterans should be in place.
- ❖ 2010 – Initial payments of a grant to support Local Authorities in moving to independent medical assessments of eligibility should be distributed, alongside improved guidance.
- ❖ 2010 – Good practice from the Centres of Excellence should have been consolidated and disseminated to other Local Authorities.
- ❖ 2011 – The data-sharing system should be developed and roll-out initiated.

Middlesbrough Local Involvement Network (LINK)

- ❖ 2011 – A new design of Blue Badges that include more security features should start being issued to new applicants and those renewing Badges.
- ❖ 2011 – New Badge application fee to apply.
- ❖ 2011 – Regulations to extend the eligibility criteria to people with a severe mental impairment and to people with certain severe temporary mobility problems lasting at least one year should be in place.
- ❖ 2011/2012 – New or amended enforcement powers for Local Authorities should be in place.

More detail on the proposals can be obtained from the Department for Transport website.

www.dft.gov.uk

Appendix C
Blue Badge questionnaire

Middlesbrough Local Involvement Network (LINK)
Blue Badge (Car Parking Card for Disabled People)
Questionnaire

Middlesbrough LINK is an independent network made up of a mixture of both local individuals and organisations. We are responsible for finding out what people want from their health and care services and are also responsible for monitoring the care that services provide and reporting our findings. All areas of England have a LINK as it is the government's intention to give people a stronger voice in how their local health and social care services are planned and delivered.

Middlesbrough LINK is undertaking a piece of work to investigate the use and misuse of the Blue Badge Parking scheme for people with disabilities within the Borough. We intend to describe the current use of the scheme and to make public any recommendations to health and social care authorities.

We would be grateful if you could answer the following questions and return it by **30th June 2009**.

Part 1 – Information about you

Name:

Address:

.....Postcode:

E-mail:

Company name or organisation (if applicable):
.....

Please tick one box from the list below that best describes you or your company or organisation.

Disability organisation Member of the public

Other (Please describe):

Are you a Blue Badge Holder? Yes No

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation or interest group how many members do you have and how did you obtain the views of your members:
.....
.....

Part 2 – Experience of obtaining the Blue Badge

Did you automatically get a Blue Badge? Yes No

Who informed you of the Blue Badge Scheme?
.....

Did you have to visit your GP in order to obtain a Blue Badge?
 Yes No

Did you have any problems obtaining a Blue Badge?
(Please describe)
.....
.....
.....
.....

Part 3 – Experience of using the Blue Badge

Where do you usually park using your Blue Badge?

<input type="checkbox"/> Town Centre	<input type="checkbox"/> Supermarket	<input type="checkbox"/> GP Surgery
<input type="checkbox"/> Place of work	<input type="checkbox"/> Dentist	<input type="checkbox"/> Shopmobility
<input type="checkbox"/> Car Parks	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Middlesbrough LINK is supported by Carers Federation, 1 Beech Avenue, Sherwood Rise, Nottingham, NG7 7LJ

LINK

Where have you experienced too few disabled parking spaces?

.....

.....

.....

Where have you experienced abuse of disabled parking spaces?

.....

.....

.....

Have you ever complained about lack of spaces or abuse?
(Please describe)

.....

.....

.....

.....

There is currently a proposal to create Red Zone Parking around both the North and South entrances at the James Cook Hospital where no parking is permitted by any vehicle at any time (apart from emergency vehicles). Blue Badge holders will not be exempt and may have their permits removed if they do park in Red Zones.

What would be your thoughts be on a red-zone parking area being created around the North and South Entrances at James Cook Hospital?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Registered Number: 3123142 Registered Charity Number: 1050779

Part 4 – General comments

Have you heard about the changes to the Blue Badge Scheme by the Department of Transport?

Yes No

Please tell us anything that could improve your experience of the Blue Badge Scheme?

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.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Please return it before 30th June 2009 to:

**FREEPOST
MIDDLESBROUGH LINK**



Middlesbrough LINK
302/3 Vanguard Suite
Broadcasting House
Newport Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 5JA

Tel: 01642 230434

FREEPHONE 0800 141 2642

Email: enquiries@middlesbroughlink.org.uk
www.middlesbroughlink.org.uk



Appendix D



Communication and Engagement Team
Riverside House
18 High Force Road
Riverside Park
Middlesbrough
TS2 1RH

Tel: 0800 0130 500

Middlesbrough LINK
c/o Anne Frizell (Team Leader)
Broadcasting House
302/3 Vanguard Suite
Newport Road
Middlesbrough
TS1 5JA

12 October 2009

Dear Colleague,

Re: Middlesbrough LINK Blue Badge Scheme Report 2009

Having reviewed the draft Blue Badge Report and responding to the LINK regarding accuracy on 2 October 2009, there are a number of areas on which we would like to comment prior to final publication.

We regards to the conclusion and recommendation regarding access at primary health care facilities, we are disappointed that the LINK feel that *'the issues for Blue Badge holders at GP practices does not seem to be recognised with the PCT*' (page 5) as we are committed to working with Practices to improve access for all patients, and offer support and guidance to assist them in doing so.

However, it should be noted that most GP Practice premises are owned by the GP partners themselves, and as such the duty to comply with Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA) regulations would lie with the Practice. We do, however, work with Practices in offering advice and support in meeting this duty and provide assistance in making any necessary changes, for example in response to complaints received by patients. NHS Middlesbrough expects all new healthcare premises to be fully DDA compliant and to have completed an Equality Impact Assessment in advance, to ensure that all negative/ neutral impacts are addressed prior to completion of the new project.

It would be helpful to know at which Practices the LINK found there to be issues, and of their precise nature in each instance – for example, is there not enough parking dedicated for use by people with disabilities, or is it inappropriate or improperly used?

This would enable us to respond more specifically based on the history and current context of each Practice as, for example, it may be that Practices found to have limited parking for disabled people are necessarily constrained by their location, or awaiting re-development or relocation to more modern premises with appropriate parking facilities. We would also be interested to learn of any examples of best practice which the LINK found at Practices or of suggestions for improvements or solutions.

As part of NHS Middlesbrough's role as a commissioner of NHS services we seek to ensure that GP Practices have undertaken Equality Impact Assessments (EIA's) to ensure that their services are accessible to all. If there are Practices that are found to have limited accessibility, then we would review the barriers and reasons for this, and look to establish a solution alongside the Practice.

We whole heartedly support the view that "disabled patients should have as much access to medical services as non-disabled people" and would be happy to work with the LINK to discuss their ideas for how this goal can be achieved and any identified barriers over-come.

With regards to the specific recommendation to improve disabled parking facilities at NHS Middlesbrough offices, as noted in the LINK's report "*As part of any invitation to meetings at Riverside House people are asked if they have any access needs, including disabled parking. If a need is identified appropriate parking space is reserved to ensure full access.*" It should be noted that Riverside House is the headquarters of NHS Middlesbrough and as such does not provide health care services. Employees with additional access requirements are supported through Human Resources to ensure their particular needs are addressed. In addition, it is intended to relocate the offices to new accommodation in 2010, which would include dedicated disabled parking.

In response to the concern regarding access to health services at The Mall, we would be happy to work with the LINK and the Practice themselves to look at how this could be improved.

Should you require any further information or wish to discuss this issue further, please contact Phillipa Woodhouse, Public Participation Officer, on 01642 352832 or email phillipa.woodhouse@middlesbroughpct.nhs.uk

Yours faithfully



Paul Frank
Associate Director of Communication and Engagement
On behalf of NHS Middlesbrough



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