

Christopher Stapleton

By email: request-236252-942bdd57@whatdotheyknow.com

26 November 2014

Our ref: 1457464

Dear Mr Stapleton

Thank you for your request for a review received on 25 November 2014. I am sorry that you are dissatisfied with our attempts to handle your request under the under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

You requested further information and sought clarification to Question 2 in relation to Disabled Freedom Passes.

You further stated “you (Harrow) have described changes in the process for allocating Disabled Freedom Passes, but you have not actually described changes in the eligibility criteria. Could you please give me a full and clear answer to Question 2, explaining exactly the changes to the eligibility criteria for a Disabled Freedom Pass”?

Please see our answer below which I trust gives you the clarification that is needed:

Process changes that were introduced for concessionary travel as a whole following a review of the area were:

- 1. Harrow procured and appointed a contractor, Access Independent, to carry out all non automatic mobility assessments to ensure consistency and improved customer experience.**
- 2. Stopped reliance on GP endorsements.**
- 3. Designed and implemented a single assessment form (SAF) for all 3 areas of concessionary travel simplifying application process.**
- 4. Introduced electronic version of SAF which is now live on Harrow’s web site.**
- 5. Compiled and distributed to staff “the Officer’s guidance” which is a comprehensive handbook / procedures manual so a consistent approach is adopted in assessments and staff have a manual explaining the guidance & criteria.**
- 6. Compiled and published on web Harrow’s interpretation of the National criteria for Disabled Freedom Passes and Blue Badges as well as Harrow’s local criteria for Taxi Cards.**
- 7. Introduced a formal Appeal’s process (via the mobility contractor) so any rejections are formally dealt with via qualified physiotherapists and within published timescales.**

8. Trained all relevant staff in the new process and procedures.

9. Centralised all concessionary travel work into our contact centre, including Children's services Blue Badge work.

The above changes ensured the process moved Harrow away from GP endorsements which was wholly unsatisfactory and against Department for Transport (DfT) guidance which strongly recommended that non-automatic cases were assessed by independent health professionals. This change does mean that sympathetic Doctor's letters or subjective staff assessments have now been eradicated, Blue Badge assessment having moved to a more formal and consistent approach relying instead on a process where a contractor carries out mobility assessments against the criteria using a set methodology; an application is assessed to obtain a pre-determined 'score' against a range of mobility criteria in order to be approved. Dependent upon the score, below a certain level, either the applicant is invited to attend clinic for further assessment, or the application is rejected. Anyone refused has the right of appeal when additional information is needed, using a supplementary information pro-forma.

Centralisation has also occurred ensuring correctly experienced and knowledgeable staff now deal with day to day issues and are able to give authoritative advice on criteria and eligibility.

The introduction of the single assessment form simplified the process and one form now deals with all 3 areas and asks all the questions necessary, negating the confusion and need to complete another form if more than one concession is applied for.

If you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Web site: <https://forms.ico.gov.uk/enquiry.aspx>

Yours sincerely

Anna Batoryk
FOI Officer - Business Support
Resources
anna.batoryk@harrow.gov.uk