

Monmouthshire Select Committee Minutes

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee held at The Council Chamber, County Hall, Rhadyr, Usk, NP15 1GA with remote attendance on Monday, 25th November, 2024 at 10.00 am

Councillors Present

County Councillors: Jan Butler, Christopher Edwards, Penny Jones, Maureen Powell, Sue Riley, Jackie Strong, Angela Sandles and Peter Strong

Also in attendance:

Darren Williams (Citizen's Advice Bureau)
Caroline Roberts (St. David's Hospice)
Josie James (Macmillan Welfare Team)
Vanessa Badderley Potter (Chepstow Town Councillor and Deputy Mayor)

Officers in Attendance

Hazel Ilett, Scrutiny Manager
Robert McGowan, Policy and Scrutiny Officer
Ian Saunders, Chief Officer Customer, Culture and Wellbeing.
Cheryl Haskell, Community Hubs North & Libraries Strategic Lead Manager

APOLOGIES: Councillors Simon Howarth and Laura Wright

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Powell and Councillor Riley declared that they have Blue Badges. Councillor Riley explained that Caroline Roberts is her nurse. Councillor Butler declared that husband has a blue badge.

2. Public Open Forum

Vanessa Badderley Potter (Chepstow Town Councillor and Deputy Mayor) attended the meeting and spoke briefly during the meeting to explain that vulnerable people struggle to complete the Blue Badge Scheme application form and that fear of not being accepted as well as pride, might prevent people who need the badges from making the application.

3. To discuss the Blue Badge criteria

Cheryl Haskell delivered a presentation on the Blue Badge scheme and answered the members' questions with Ian Saunders:

- Thanks to the Cheryl and the team for their work ~ feedback is very positive from residents. According to the Welsh Government guidance, it should take no longer than 12 weeks for an application to be assessed. Is that still the case? What tends to be the main issues that delay the renewal of a permit for those applying?

Have you been able to adapt the process to improve on this turnaround for approval or a decision in some way?

Cheryl explained that the aim is to process applications as quickly as possible, but some applications, especially discretionary ones, may take longer due to the need for additional evidence. The team is small, with only one Blue Badge administrator, but three additional people have been trained to assist. The process can be delayed if waiting for evidence or an independent assessment.

- I've noticed that local government authority websites have different application processes. Some apply locally, while others apply directly to the national government scheme. Which one is better?

Cheryl mentioned that Monmouthshire uses the online digital service as the default option, which is faster because it avoids manual input. She explained that the form is written by the Department for Transport for England, and additional questions are asked to meet Welsh Government criteria.

- How quickly can a person expect to receive a Blue Badge after an SR1 form is filled in for someone with a terminal diagnosis?

Cheryl stated that if they have an SR1 form, the application can be fast-tracked and processed immediately.

- What are we doing to address the belief that the Blue Badge scheme is abused, and how can people report suspected abuse?

Cheryl explained that they work closely with parking enforcement to combat misuse. Badges suspected of being misused can be reported to her, and they will be treated discreetly and confidentially. They also rely on technologies embedded in badges to help parking enforcers identify fakes.

- St Davids's Hospice Representative, Caroline Roberts asked why Monmouthshire requires the actual SR1 form for fast-tracking Blue Badge Applications, while other councils accept a nurses' statement that an SR1 form has been completed.
- A member asked whether there is consistency in the Blue Badge application process between Monmouthshire and other local authorities in the Gwent area?

Cheryl explained that Monmouthshire follows the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales Guidance, which requires the SR1 form to support the application. She acknowledged the concern and said that she would reflect on this practice, would consult with colleagues and also Welsh Government to ask them to clarify and potentially amend the procedures to ensure a consistent approach.

- If someone is diagnosed as terminally ill but expected to live longer than a year, should they apply for a fast-track Blue Badge initially and then a discretionary application for the following period?

Cheryl advised that if a person's life expectancy is likely to be longer than a year, they should apply under discretionary rules from the start. This way, they would be awarded a badge for three years, removing the anxiety of reapplying after one year.

- A member asked how it is enforced, giving an example of county hall and the fact someone may need temporary access to disabled spaces.

It was confirmed that this should be discussed at the Democratic Services Committee.

- Citizens Advice Bureau Representative Darren Williams explained that sometimes his clients don't understand criteria before they apply, so a lot of claims are submitted which are not successful.
- Do we have any data on possible abuse of scheme? What are the main reasons for abuse of the scheme, is it a case of people being awarded badges who shouldn't have them or a case of badges that have expired?

Action: Cheryl to check whether there is any Monmouthshire data.

- Reference was made to the length of the award of a blue badge, and members heard that a petition had been submitted to the Senedd about lifelong diagnoses and badges awarded for life.

Action: The Committee requests the Cabinet Member make further inquiries as to the outcome of the Senedd petition.

Chair's Summary:

- The Vice-Chair confirmed that the Committee would request the Cabinet Member to make contact with Welsh Government in respect of the attendance allowance form and the need to simplify it.
- She asked Cheryl to make further enquiries with colleagues across Gwent and Welsh Government in relation to the SR1 form.
- The Committee would also ask the Cabinet Member to discuss at a future Democratic Services meeting the parking issues at county hall and the point that had been raised about potential transient disabilities.

4. People Scrutiny Committee Forward Working Programme and Action lists

Noted.

5. Cabinet and Council Planner

Noted.

6. To confirm the following minutes:

- 7a People Scrutiny Committee – 17th July 2024
- 7b People Scrutiny Committee – 23rd July 2024
- 7c Special Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee – 19th September 2024

The minutes were agreed, proposed by Councillor Powell and seconded by Councillor Strong.

7. Next Meeting:

Tuesday 21st January 2025 at 10.00am.

The meeting ended at **11.36 am**.