

Mrs J Yatak

Chief Executive's Office  
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December 20 2007

Dear Mrs Yatak

**Re: Blue Badges and the ending of services at 151 Walworth Road**

I am writing with respect to the issue of the ending of services at 151 Walworth Road – which handled the Blue Badge and Freedom Pass services. I know that you have had considerable amount of communication with both councillors and officers over this issue – particularly on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November. I do not intend to detail all the reasons and discussions behind the changes but the service proposals were designed to achieve the following:

- Access to the service was previously available at only one site in the borough and Blue Badges had to be picked up from that one site – sometimes at considerable inconvenience.
- Improve the support for the staff team in concentrating on processing applications.
- Increase the available capacity to manage increasing demand
- Improve access and efficiency – so that the forms needed to apply for and renew Blue Badges are available at all the One Stop Shops, on the Council website and by phone.
- Blue Badges could be sent by registered mail direct to the service-user.
- The co- location of the Blue Badge team with other services, which would allow home visits to be made and better access to other services.

However, as you have rightly given us feedback that all of this planning has not been as effective as it could have been because:-

- Lack of communications with service-users, and other people or services that might link service users with the service, before the changes were begun.
- Lack of involvement of service-users to check the implementation and details of the plan (although there is no doubt that service-users and their representatives have agreed this service change).
- A flaw in the renewal process that could have left some Blue Badge holders for a short period of time.

In order to act on this feedback several actions have taken place:

- A member of the staff team has remained at the Walworth One Stop Shop to deal with office visits that require urgent application or renewals. This will remain in place until the other issues have been resolved.
- A communication strategy has been put in place which includes:
  1. A letter is being sent (prioritising those whose Blue Badges are due for renewal in the first 3 months of 2008) advising of the changes, and the new options for accessing the service.
  2. A poster and leaflets have been designed for GP surgeries, libraries, housing offices, etc advising how to access the service.
  3. Letters are being sent to key stakeholders, including South Pensioners and Disabilities Forums, SDA, Southwark carers etc.
  4. An article will be included in the January edition of Southwark Life.
- Service-user feedback from the Pensioners Forum, Disabilities Forum and the SDA will be used to review the service over the next 6 months. The issues have been discussed at the Older Persons and Physical Neuro and Sensory Disability Partnership Boards already.
- The renewal system for Blue Badges has been changed so that there is no possibility of users being without their Blue Badge for any period.

I apologise, on behalf of the Council and I hope this letter shows that lessons have been learnt by all staff involved. Thank you for the time and trouble you took in raising and pursuing these issues.

In addition, I understand there was an incident on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November when you overheard a member of staff talking to the manager of the One Stop Shop alleging that you were 'barred' from the Walworth Road building. You were understandably upset and angry about this and left the building voluntarily until the issue was resolved.

I wish to extend my apologies that this complete misunderstanding took place. I re-assure you that you are in no way 'barred' from Council premises and apologise, on behalf of the Council. It has been made clear to those involved that this should not have happened and that they were incorrect with respect to their assumption and subsequent actions.

I hope the above answers your concerns and complaints. Please contact Rod Craig if there are further issues with respect to the service. Thank you for bringing the issues to our attention.

Yours sincerely



Annie Shepperd  
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