

Freedom Pass - Written Submissions – Personal Experiences

Submission Thirteen

Miss Sally Masson,
Scrutiny Project Manager,
Freedom Pass Review,
Scrutiny Team,
Room 316,
Southwark Town Hall,
Peckham Road,
London SE5 8UB.



16th July 2008.

Dear Miss Masson,

Re:- Freedom Pass Review.

- 13.1 I would like to make the following statement for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel regarding the above subject. I believe that part of this statement will already have been made by other people, but I will use it as an illustration as to the apparent disarray that the Disabled Unit found itself with regards to the Renewal of Disabled Freedom Passes.
- 13.2 Firstly, my own experience which appears not to have been as bad as a lot of blind people I know. It could have been because I made several telephone calls or it could just have been plain good luck. When, in the middle of February my wife's attention was drawn to the fact that bus passes were due for renewal and they would expire on 31st March. On 15th February, I contacted the Disabled Unit and I was given to understand that the Letters of Authorisation had been sent out on Monday so I should receive it within the next 5 days. When I have not received it by 20th February, I contacted them again the following day, 21st February. Then I was told they had been sent out on the Monday and should receive it by the end of the week. So when I had still not received it on the Monday morning, I contacted them again and was told that TfL were very late in informing them of the alterations to the questionnaire and the documents should be sent out by the end of the week. On Friday 29th February I contacted them again and firstly, I was told that the letters had been sent out in batches over the last few weeks, when I questioned this I was put through to someone else and I was once again told about TfL and that the letters were on their way. I finally received my application pack on Saturday 1st March which I sent off at the start of the next week, and I received my Letter of Authorisation at the beginning of April.
- 13.3 During my conversation on Monday 25th February when I pointed out that, by the time people received their application forms and returned them, and they'd been processed and the Letter of Authorisation would not be carried out by the end of March, and I was informed that TfL had agreed to extend the life of the Pass until 31st May, however, I noted that there was no indication of this fact included in the information sent out with the Pack which I feel it should have done, because I know for a fact that people where I work, who, like me are blind were panicking when they'd heard nothing from the Council and when they had returned their Forms and not received their Letters by 31st March. So I believe the Unit could have done far more to publicise the extension of the Passes.
- 13.4 I would like give other evidence as to why I believe was in complete chaos over the Freedom Passes and it appears to be no logical system whatsoever. Firstly, one friend of mine who received his Application Pack at the same time as me, sent his back within the first week the first week of March, did not receive his Letter of Authorisation until the end of April/beginning of May. A second experience was a married couple whom we know, who I believed they received their Application Packs, the husband received his Letter of Authorisation at the beginning of April whereas his wife did not receive hers until the last week of April, with her Letter of Authorisation she also received a duplication pack with a letter asking her to complete the enclosed form and return it and asked her not to contact them for at least a month.

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- 135 Final piece of evidence: a pair of twins who live in the same block of flats, one of them received their Application Pack early in March and their Letter of Authorisation early in April, the other twin, despite several telephone calls received his Application Pack towards the end of the last week of March and received his Letter of Authorisation on 21st May.
- 136 Finally, I think you should ask why, when other boroughs were contacting their disabled residents with regards to renewing their Freedom Passes as early as the end of January, was Southwark Council so late in sending theirs out. It appears that Southwark Council decided to implement TfLs' instructions whereas other boroughs had decided not to, or was it that they had already sent their Letters of Authorisation out before the new instructions were released to the boroughs?
- 137 I hope this evidence and questions will help the Scrutiny Panel to decide what happens in the Disability Unit and help them to make positive suggestions as to how procedures can be improved for the future.

Yours sincerely,