



Blue Badge Discovery Project Report

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About the Improvement Service

The Improvement Service (IS) is the 'go-to' organisation for Local Government improvement in Scotland.

The IS was established in 2005 as the national improvement organisation for Local Government in Scotland. We were set up to deliver improvement support that would help Local Authorities to provide effective community leadership, strong local governance and deliver high quality, efficient local services.

Our purpose is to:

- Provide leadership to Local Government and the wider system on improvement and transformation
- Develop capability and capacity for improvement within Local Government
- Deliver national improvement programmes for Local Government and partners and support Local Authorities to improve at a local level
- Provide research, data and intelligence to inform Local Government's policy-making and decision-making and to drive improvement
- Deliver national shared service applications and technology platforms
- Broker additional resources from outwith the sector to support the delivery of Local Government's priorities

We do this by providing a range of transformational change, performance and improvement support, data and intelligence services and digital public services.

We ensure that all the work we deliver is firmly focused on achieving our vision and purpose, and on adding value for Local Authorities, for the Local Government family and for our broader group of diverse stakeholders.

Developing Digital Shared Services



The Improvement Service (IS) has a track record of utilising its skills and assets to develop, provide, and deliver digital public services on behalf of Local Government, enabling Local Authorities to achieve savings, efficiencies, and improved standardised citizen services that avoid a “postcode lottery” depending on where they reside in Scotland.

The IS digital portfolio highlighted above, provides a variety of services which can support Local Authorities with part of a service process or can deliver services end to end.



1.0 Introduction

The Local Government Transformation Programme is an ambitious programme of reform led by Solace Scotland and supported by the Improvement Service. The IS report, ['Delivering a future for Scottish local authorities: the challenges they face, the questions that need asking and a model for the future'](#), published in October 2022, identifies six anchors as key building blocks for transformation, and each anchor has a chief executive sponsor from a Scottish council.

One of those groups – “Identification of new digital shared services that could be delivered nationally or regionally” has looked for candidate services. Applications for Blue Badges was identified as a potential service to be delivered nationally on behalf of Scottish Local Authorities.

In February 2024, it was agreed to run an 8 week discovery project on how Blue Badge applications are currently administered by different Scottish Local Authorities.

Several Local Authorities noted interested in participating in the discovery project to start on 25th March, and end on 17th May 2024.

The Local Authorities that were interested in fully participating in the discovery project were: Highland, Perth & Kinross, South Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, West Lothian and East Lothian.

The Local Authorities that were interested in the project and wished to participate but could not commit resources as a full participant were: Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire.



2.0 Discovery Project Remit and Methodology

In broad terms, the discovery project set out to:

- Develop a fuller understanding of the current application process and administration of the Blue Badge scheme in select Scottish Local Authorities
- Analyse and assess ways it might be improved, bringing multiple benefits
- Analyse and assess the pain points in the customer and admin journeys
- Assess any technology options available, including the potential to establish a national platform for Blue Badge applications in Scotland

The discovery project deployed a range of methodologies, including:

- [The Scottish Approach to Service Design](#)
- Improvement Service - Service Design Double Diamond
- [Government Digital Services \(GDS\) Agile Delivery](#)

The discovery project deployed a range of research methods, exercises and techniques, including:

- Desk research - to examine current gov.uk online application, and information available to customers on council websites.
- User interviews - with council admin teams, including shadowing
- Collate an Ecosystem Map – as a way of organising all the different elements of the process
- Develop process maps - of current processes to visualise the variations between council processes
- Online Survey - with council admin teams to clarify process detail
- Show and Tell sessions - with participants from Local Authorities to update them on progress and to further validate some of our findings
- Analyse statistics - provided by the participating Local Authorities
- Collaborative ideation session - with stakeholders exploring the art of the possible
- Investigate technology currently used and available to streamline the process



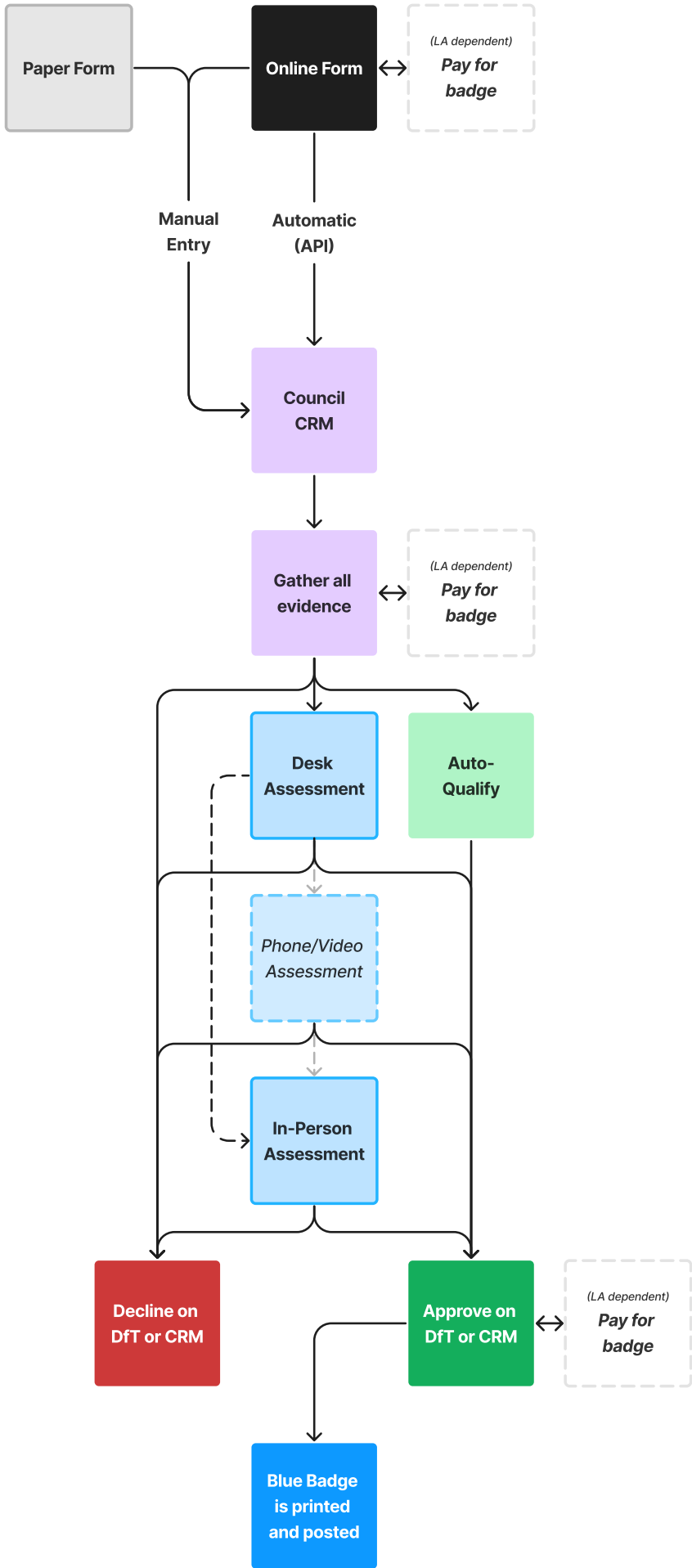
3.0 Discovery Findings

Our initial phase involved conducting Desk Research, where we collected publicly available information from various sources including local authorities, Transport Scotland, the Scottish Government, and the UK Government.

Throughout our research, it became evident that while there are some commonalities in the messaging, applicants may encounter different information depending on where they search. Additionally, we noted that certain Local Authority websites used outdated language that could potentially be offensive to some individuals.

Despite these variations there is some consistency, for example, all 32 Scottish Local Authorities use the same online application system. However, the extent to which Local Authorities promote online applications over traditional paper methods does vary.

Following our initial desk research, we moved to conduct User Interviews with each council separately. It became apparent that Local Authorities employ their own internal systems and processes for dealing with applications, resulting in many differences from council to council. In an attempt to capture all the variations in a single high-level process map the following was created:



Paper applications accepted by Local Authorities must be manually entered into a digital system used by the council. The online application system shared by all councils offers integration with council systems, but not all Local Authorities have invested in this integration, leading to manual data entry across systems.

Payment processes also vary, with some Local Authorities using a module on the online application system to take payment as submitted, while others request payment separately upon receipt or even approval of the application.

Additional information or evidence, such as qualifying evidence, may be required from applicants, typically communicated manually via email, before assessment can proceed.

The assessment process itself varies based on eligibility, with some applications qualifying for automatic approval while others require further assessment. Desk assessments, conducted either by council administration teams or qualified Independent Mobility Assessors (IMAs), serve to evaluate eligibility criteria more comprehensively. However, the delegation of desk assessments and administrative functions differs among Local Authorities.

Notably, in-person assessments are consistently conducted by a council's qualified IMA across all Local Authorities, ensuring uniformity in assessment standards. Payment for badge issuance is typically requested following assessment approval, after which the badge is ordered through the GOV.UK Department for Transport (DfT) system and delivered to the applicant via Royal Mail.

After User Interviews were conducted, we had a fair understanding of the landscape of Blue Badge applications across many parts of Scotland and this has been represented above. To further evidence our findings, quantitative data was required. Through communication with each Local Authority statistics were gathered on various parts of the process and are outlined in section *4.0 Statistics*.

We felt it was necessary to clarify many individual points of detail with each council, so an email survey was issued, providing valuable quantitative data. Once answers were collated, this provided documented evidence that could be directly compared. This has been explained in section *5.0 Detailed process breakdown*.



4.0 Statistics

We requested statistics of total applications received and approved through various methods and in various categories. Due to the considerable variations in systems and processes used across all 32 Local Authorities not all requested statistical categories were available when requested. For example, Highland and South Ayrshire did not have a collected statistic for the total number of applications they receive but were able to provide us with the total number of applications that were approved. Conversely, East Lothian were able to provide the statistic for number of total applications but not how many applications were approved.

It should be made clear that any statistics we did not receive were mostly a result of the statistic not being immediately available. We are confident that with further analysis many of the gaps could be filled. There will, however, be some more detailed statistics that are not recorded by council systems or may be impossible to breakdown any further.

We have received statistics from most of the Local Authorities involved in the project. As can be seen from the table below, the number of Blue Badge applications received per Local Authority per annum varies considerably from 2532 in East Lothian, to 3671 in Perth & Kinross and 5925 in West Lothian, to 8964 in North Lanarkshire. We would assume that cities and more populated areas, like Glasgow and Edinburgh, would receive a higher quantity of Blue Badge applications. However, these Local Authorities were not involved in the discovery of this project so we cannot confirm this currently.

The statistics in the table below were based on a recent period of 12 months but not always the same 12 months. (i.e. financial year, calendar year, year-to-date).

	Highland	Perth & Kinross	South Ayrshire	North Lanarkshire	West Lothian	East Lothian
Received	5,539	3,671	-	8,964	5,925	2,532
- Online	68%	58%	95%	-	-	98%
- Paper	32%	42%	5%	-	-	2%
Approved	4,535	2,913	3,199	8,587	4,757	-
- Automatic	2,170	1,274	1,119	3,296	3,424	-
- Other	2,365	1,639	2,080	5,291	1,333	-
In-Person Assessment	*	245	*	~400	~520	386
Cost per App	£26.29	-	£35	-	£18.55	-

The cost per app has not been calculated by all councils and it should be emphasised that, where a cost was provided, the methodology of calculation is highly unlikely to be identical per Local Authority. Were all councils to use the same calculation methodology the result would undoubtedly be different to what was provided.

The statistics with a ~ symbol refer to statistics that were estimated based on a smaller time period and multiplied to approximate a 12 month period.

Where a * symbol has been placed, in-person and desk-based assessments are completed by the same department/team and not recorded separately.

It is clear to see from these initial statistics that some Local Authorities encourage an online route more than others. With East Lothian sitting at only 2% of applications as physical paper applications whereas Perth & Kinross receive 42% by paper. The reason for this and other differences will be explored in the next section.



5.0 Detailed process breakdown

Accessing Information and Initiating the Application:

Accessing accurate information about the Blue Badge application process is often the first of many hurdles experienced by applicants. While many Local Authority websites aim to provide clear guidance, inconsistencies and outdated language can cause confusion and frustration, especially for those who are elderly or have disabilities and rely heavily on this service. The lack of uniformity across Local Authority websites underscores the need for standardised, up-to-date information that is easily accessible to everyone.

Further complicating matters are the differences in the availability of paper applications and online assistance. While most Local Authorities offer various channels for applicants to obtain time-consuming and less efficient paper applications, others, like Renfrewshire, primarily promote online submissions and remote assistance. However, regardless of the method used, all applications need to find their way into the council's digital system for processing, demonstrating why reliance on paper applications is less efficient and would incur higher costs. Nonetheless, considering the diverse nature of applicants and their accessibility needs, many find it particularly beneficial to have non-digital options available. East Lothian and West Lothian have found a balance by inviting applicants uncomfortable with online/digital routes to make an appointment with an advisor at a local office (WLC) or with Library staff (ELC) where they can assist them to complete the application.

Processing Applications:

The processing of Blue Badge applications varies significantly from one Local Authority to another. This reflects variations in administrative systems, how resources are allocated, and preferences within procedures. The different departments/teams responsible for processing Blue Badges and the number of FTE within those teams working on Blue Badge processing is one of those variations:

East Dunbartonshire – 2 FTE in the Shared Services team.

East Lothian – 2.4 FTE in a Council Support Blue Badge Team within Transport Services that also administrate concessionary travel and home to school travel.

Highland – 2.5 FTE admin in the Customer Service team.

North Lanarkshire – Benefits and Financial Solutions teams - generic team covering other services so couldn't provide FTE.

Perth & Kinross - 2 FTE in the Parking Services team.

Renfrewshire – Customer Services Senior Advisors - generic team covering other services so couldn't provide FTE estimate.

South Ayrshire - between 2 and 4 FTE in the Community Care admin team.

West Lothian – 2.2 FTE the Benefits and Financial Support Team along with the Anti-Poverty Service.

(Note: this excludes IMA staff)

Manually entering paper applications into each Local Authority's respective systems can lead to inefficiencies and delays due to the need for data transcription and double keying. This increases the risk of errors, omissions and interpretation in applications.

However, West Lothian has implemented a more efficient process for handling paper applications. These applications are routed to a central Administration Team, where they are scanned and uploaded to W360. This reduces the reliance on manual data entry from paper to digital formats. Additionally, applicants have the option to scan applications and documents directly to West Lothian through a dedicated Blue Badge email address.

While paper applications are still accepted, the preferred alternative is for applicants to use the GOV.UK Online application system developed by the Department for Transport. This digital platform offers a consistent and accessible route for applying for a Blue Badge across the UK. Local Authorities such as Highland, South Ayrshire, East Lothian, West Lothian, North Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire actively promote online applications where possible to streamline the process.

In contrast, Perth & Kinross Council take a different approach by actively encouraging paper applications. They proactively send paper applications to all Blue Badge holders several months prior to renewal, increasing the administrative burden associated with paper-based processing including the direct cost of printing and posting applications.

All Local Authorities accept applications through the GOV.UK Online application system, which offers the advantage of potentially eliminating the need for manual entry into the Local Authority's CRM system. However, there are disparities in the Local Authorities that have adopted integration between council CRMs and the GOV.UK Department for Transport system.

Some Local Authorities, such as Perth & Kinross, West Lothian, North Lanarkshire and East Lothian, have established API connections between their CRM systems

and DfT to automate the transfer of application data. In contrast, others like South Ayrshire and Renfrewshire still rely on manual data entry methods. This discrepancy prolongs processing times and increases the risk of discrepancies between systems. It is noteworthy that integrating with certain systems can incur costs; for example, Northgate charges Local Authorities approximately £2000 annually for DfT integration.

However, the GOV.UK Online application system is not without its shortcomings. Local Authorities have observed a decline in the quality of evidence provided upfront since the introduction of the online application route. Additionally, the system has not been adapted to accommodate applicants eligible based on “cognitive impairments” or “risk in traffic,” posing challenges for certain applicants.

Eligibility Assessments:

Eligibility assessments represent a critical juncture in the Blue Badge application process. While certain aspects of eligibility criteria are standardised across all Local Authorities, variations exist in the assessment criteria, procedures, and decision-making protocols across Local Authorities, introducing inconsistencies and inequities in eligibility determinations by different Local Authorities across Scotland.

In many Local Authorities, eligibility assessments are categorised into three main pathways: automatic approval, desk-based assessments, and in-person assessments.

Automatic Approval

Applicants who meet specific criteria outlined by the Department for Transport may qualify for automatic approval, streamlining the application process and expediting badge issuance.

Desk-Based Assessment

For applicants needing further evaluation, the next step is a desk-based assessment. Depending on the Local Authority, these assessments are carried out either by the council’s administration team or by qualified medical personnel known as Independent Mobility Assessors (IMAs).

In East Lothian, desk-based assessments are mainly conducted by the Blue Badge Administration Team rather than IMAs. This team also handles applications from applicants already in receipt of a Blue Badge but who have been flagged as ‘no further assessment needed’ as they would not be expected to improve and therefore do not need reassessed. Similarly, in Perth & Kinross, the Parking Services administration team conducts desk-based assessments, while in West Lothian, it’s the Benefit and Financial Support Team.

Applications falling under the Terminal Illness or SRTI (Special Rules for Terminal Illness) category prompt collaboration with some Local Authorities' Macmillan Team. In instances where applicants have an established relationship with the Macmillan Team, the Blue Badge Administration Team assumes responsibility for conducting these desk-based assessments and they are processed as a priority.

In South Ayrshire and Renfrewshire, all desk-based assessments are consistently conducted by IMAs. (IMAs are trained and qualified originally as occupational therapists or physiotherapists, therefore some Local Authorities refer to them as such, instead of IMAs).

Our study, focused on 8 out of the 32 Scottish Local Authorities, found each council has the flexibility to decide how to assess eligibility during desk-based assessments. Each department may also have access to different systems that can provide extra evidence to support applications, like Searchlight (DWP's system for accessing customer information) and Social Security Scotland (SSS) data. Some also use various NHS systems to avoid back-and-forth with customers asking for information.

When more information is needed directly from the applicant, it's usually requested via email. However, this process involves manually typing emails to ask for information or evidence. Once the information is received, either by email or in person, it's attached to the original application, which takes more time to process.

Given our limited scope, it is important to note that there will be further variations in how desk-based assessments are carried out across the broader landscape of Local Authorities in Scotland. Whilst each Local Authority's assessment procedures are similar, the lack of an entirely consistent approach across Scotland undermines the fairness of eligibility decisions and sows doubt in the application process.

Further IMA Assessment

In certain instances, applicants may require further assessment by an IMA beyond the desk-based assessment to confirm their eligibility. Administration teams and IMAs can have access to different systems that may be able to confirm eligibility. Admin teams provide their IMAs with all the information that has already been gathered to proceed with a further assessment. There are many ways in which Local Authorities perform this data transfer, some more secure than others. Local Authorities like Perth & Kinross, West Lothian and Renfrewshire grant their IMAs access to their CRM system to view their application and any information that has been provided. Uniquely, East Lothian use Objective Connect for secure file transfer and alternatively, South Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire and Highland email application information between admins and IMAs.

Payment Process:

The payment process for Blue Badge applications varies in terms of timing, methods, and requirements across Local Authorities, reflecting differences in financial management practices and procedural preferences. When the applicant submits their application through the GOV.UK Department for Transport system some Local Authorities, like Clackmannanshire, Aberdeen City, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian and East Renfrewshire take payment for the Blue Badge using a Gov Pay module as the application is submitted. However, South Ayrshire, for example, request payment using their own methods and systems as soon as the application is received. Other Local Authorities, such as Perth & Kinross, Renfrewshire, Highland, North Lanarkshire and West Lothian don't request payment until the application is approved. They will email the customer to request payment online, over the phone, or to visit a council office in person. Neither Renfrewshire nor West Lothian accept payment using cash, however Perth & Kinross will accept cash.

The availability of various payment methods, including card, cheque, and cash, reflects Local Authorities' efforts to cater to the diverse financial circumstances, preferences of applicants and accessibility needs. However, a balance should be struck to bring consistency to the process and reduce the administration cost in requesting, waiting for, chasing and processing payments.

Ordering and Receiving the Badge:

After approval of the Blue Badge application, all Scottish Local Authorities utilise the GOV.UK Department for Transport system for badge ordering, leveraging centralised platforms to streamline and facilitate badge production and delivery.

As mentioned previously, each council employs its own Case Management System (CMS) for processing Blue Badge applications, with and without integration with the GOV.UK Department for Transport system. Notably, Perth & Kinross, West Lothian, and East Lothian have invested in integrations that enable them to approve badge applications directly within their own systems, triggering automatic badge orders through communication with the Department for Transport (DfT).

South Ayrshire, Highland and Renfrewshire have not pursued integration with the GOV.UK Department for Transport system, necessitating a manual transition from their internal systems to the DfT platform for badge approval and ordering. This operational divergence likely extends to other Scottish Local Authorities. Local Authorities opting for manual transitions between platforms will inevitably take longer and cost more.

Badge production is centralised at a facility in England and the delivery process utilises Royal Mail for badge distribution directly to applicants. This

standardisation in badge manufacturing and delivery ensures consistency in badge quality and compliance with national standards, mitigating variations in production methods and timelines across Local Authorities.

Applicant Updates and Reminders:

Providing applicants with timely updates and reminders throughout the application process is crucial for maintaining transparency and ensuring a positive applicant experience. While some Local Authorities, like Renfrewshire, proactively communicate with applicants by providing status updates and notifications via email, others settle for the most basic email updates from the DfT system or reply when applicants initiate contact. North Lanarkshire advises the customer when their application has been referred for further assessment.

The availability of reminder services for expiring badges, varies among Local Authorities, with some, like Perth & Kinross, issuing personalised reminders and paper application forms via postal mail to prompt applicants to reapply before their badges expire. All other councils interviewed, once again, relied on the basic email reminders from the DfT system. The absence of standardised reminder systems across all Local Authorities may result in inconsistencies in renewal rates and compliance with application deadlines.

The different ways Local Authorities handle applications adds to the challenges both they and applicants face. Councils struggle with complicated administrative processes, while applicants find it hard to get clear information about their applications. Differences in how they communicate and remind people can mean that some applicants have inconsistent experiences and levels of satisfaction. This can be especially true for people who need extra help or advice during the application process. They often don't know if their application is moving forward or if they need to do more, as they don't receive regular updates. This lack of clear communication can make applicants frustrated, anxious and questioning how fair the process is. As a result, many applicants end up reaching out to their local elected representatives for help.

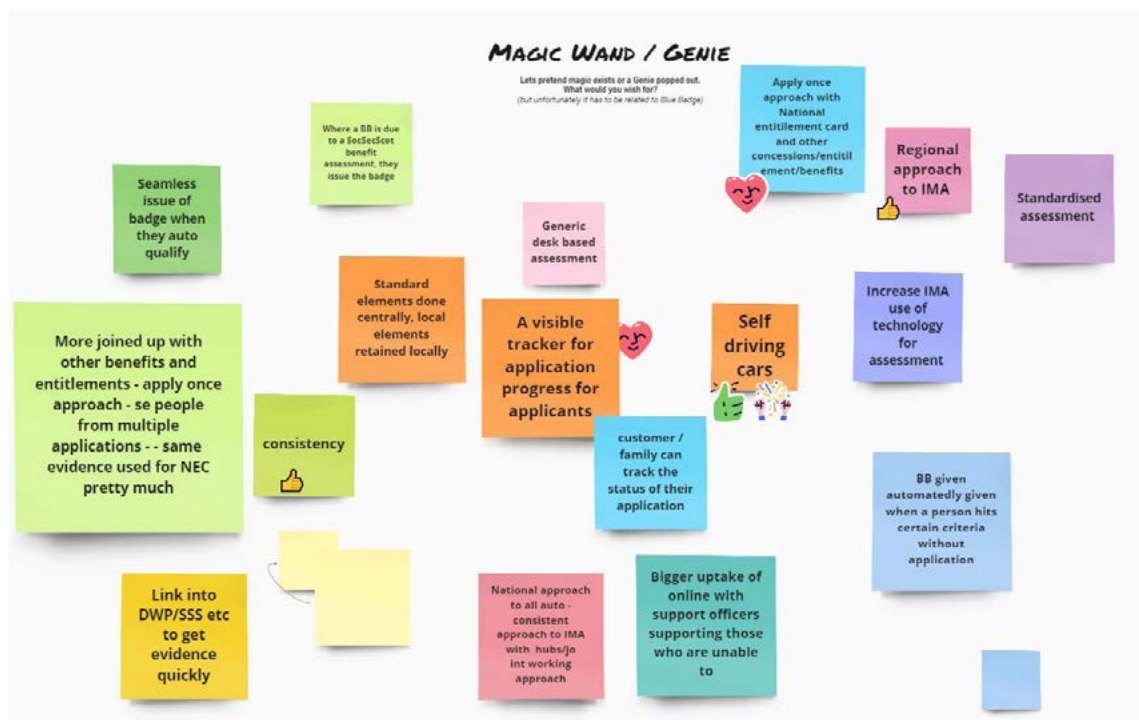
The lack of consistency can especially affect vulnerable people, like those who struggle with reading or understanding information, those who don't speak English well, or those with problems understanding things due to their health. The inconsistent help and support available for these groups can make it even harder for them to get the support they need during the application process.



6.0 Ideation Session

Our desk research, statistical analysis and process review provided us with a good baseline understanding of the current approach to delivering the blue badge application service in a selected number of varied local authorities. To feed into the potential shape of a shared national service, an Ideation session using Miro (a collaborative website that lets participants write & stick post-its to a digital whiteboard) was organised as part of our second Show & Tell session. To spark some creativity amongst participants, we started with a joint “Magic wand” exercise, followed by a more structured “Stop, Start, Continue” exercise providing each council with their own individual space.

In the Magic Wand exercise participants were asked “If magic exists and you have a Magic Wand to wish for anything you want related to Blue Badges, what would you wish for?”. A screenshot of the results is attached below:



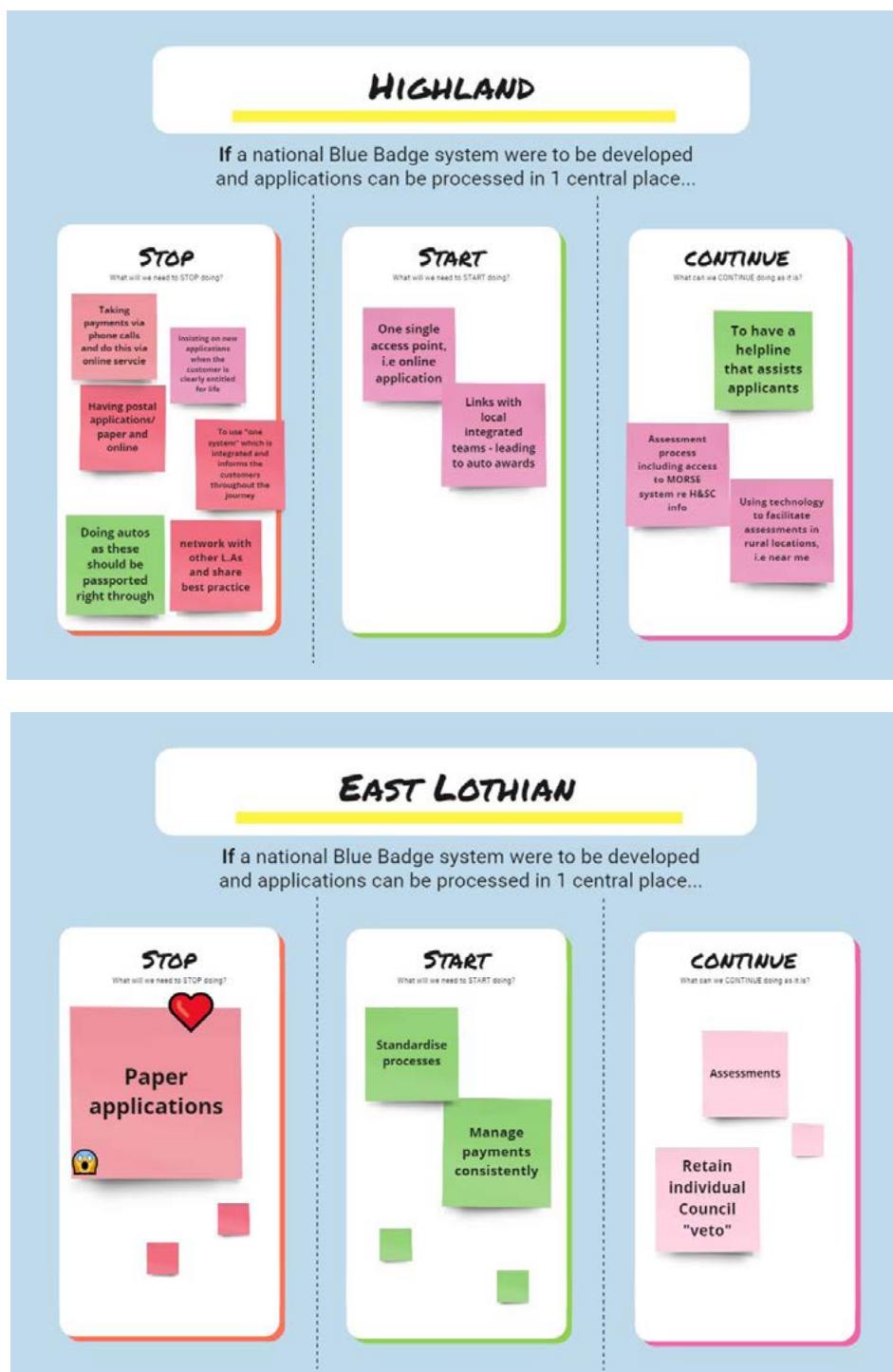
We made a point to emphasise that there are no bad ideas in this space. This sparked some great out-the-box thinking, like the wish for self-driving cars, which would remove the need for Blue Badges altogether as the cars could drop users at the entrance of where they need to be. Some more practical suggestions, include:

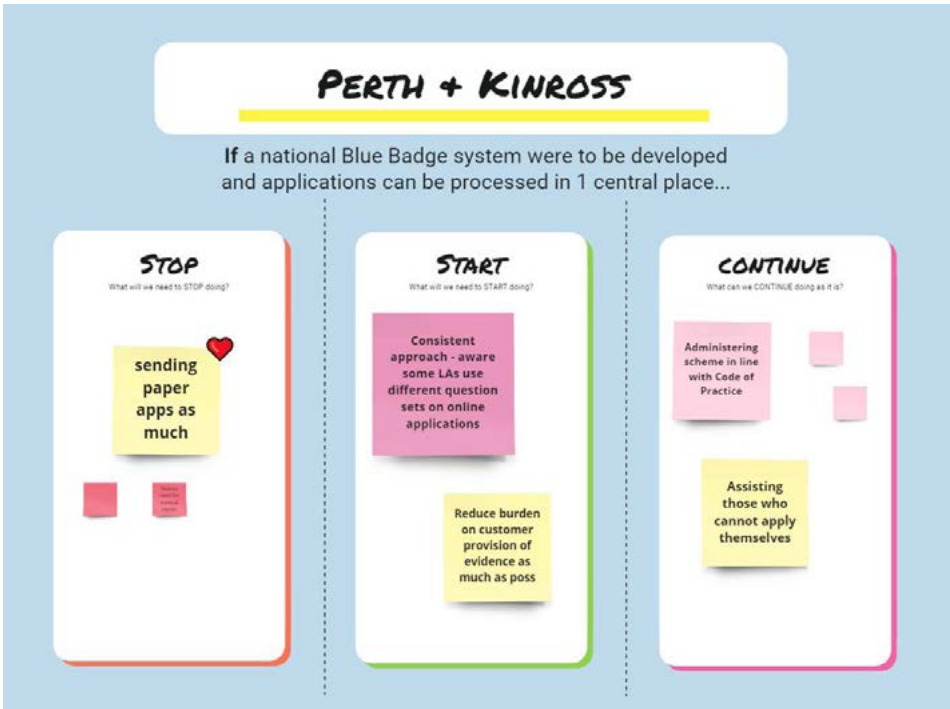
- A tracker for applicants to check the progress of their application
- Proactively issue Blue Badges when a user is in receipt of an applicable Social Security benefit

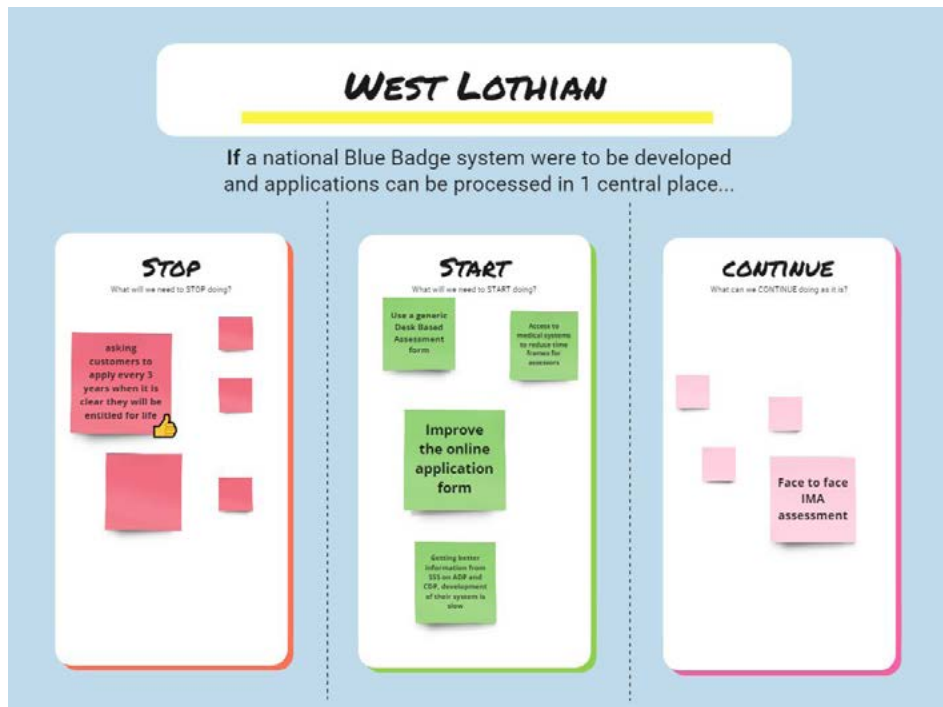
■ A national platform with standardised desk-assessment criteria

Participants could then use stickers and emojis to react to ideas they liked or thought were interesting.

Following this was the “*Stop, Start, Continue*” exercise, providing a more structured approach to brainstorming and providing feedback. In this exercise participants were asked “*If a national Blue Badge system were to be developed and applications can be processed in 1 central place... What will we need to STOP doing?, What will we need to START doing? and What can we CONTINUE doing as it is?*”. The outputs from the 5 participating councils are shown below:







Some notable inputs:

Highland suggest we need to STOP insisting on new applications from holders that are eligible for life.

Perth & Kinross suggest we need to START reducing the burden for the provision of evidence on the customer as much as possible.

Renfrewshire suggest we need to CONTINUE keeping applicants up to date throughout the process. This is interesting because Renfrewshire are one of the few councils who do provide regular updates to the applicants as the application progresses, many don't. So this is also something that should START in other councils.



**Disabled
badge
holders
only**

7.0 Proposed Options

As a result of the discovery project, we have identified 4 potential options to consider.

Option 1 – Do nothing

Leave the process untouched.

Benefits of this approach:

- Nothing to build, and nothing to change

Key factors to consider:

- Postcode lottery of processing times, assessment scoring and varying replacement costs (for lost/stolen cards) would continue.
- There won't be scope to realise efficiencies/savings through collaboration

Option 2 – Make improvements to current processes

We have identified good practice across several Local Authorities which could be replicated, resulting in improvements to different stages in the application process. Some examples:

Accessing Information and Initiating the Application:

■ Improve wording on council websites

Information on Scottish council websites relating to Blue Badges is very inconsistent. Some websites take the customer on a confusing user journey (for example saying a link will take them to the Scottish Government or Transport Scotland website, but it's taking them to the GOV.UK site). The wording is very inconsistent, and at times very limited. Some examples:

- Inverclyde Council – if you search for Blue Badge on the council website, you're taken to a page called "Services you can access without a full assessment" last updated in 2019 and you have to search onscreen to find an application which you need to download. No information about eligibility is available. The Word document is 29 pages long and from April 2015, so it hasn't been updated with the newer versions, provided by Transport Scotland which are available on other council websites eg. Fife Council.
- Not all Local Authorities have updated their website content to update Blue Badge holders about the Low Emission Zone Exemption System
- Some council websites don't mention it costs £20 eg. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Not all Local Authorities mention how to request a replacement when a Blue Badge has been lost or stolen.

■ Improve GOV.UK application process

Currently the GOV.UK application process does not cater for a "Risk in Traffic" Blue Badge application, forcing the user to request / download and print an application form which will need to be manually entered into the council's system.

Processing Applications:

■ Better use of system integration with GOV.UK platform

Some Local Authorities (like Perth & Kinross, West Lothian and East Lothian) have invested in integration to their back office system, which prevents manual entry between systems, and reduces staff admin time. If other Local Authorities took this same approach, this would reduce the risk of data entry issues, as well as

speed up processing time, which could potentially reduce the processing time for applications.

Eligibility Assessments:

■ Using more admin staff to assist with desk assessments

Perth & Kinross, North Lanarkshire, West Lothian and East Lothian Local Authorities have an admin team which can conduct desk assessments which in other Local Authorities are done entirely by the IMA team. If admin teams were provided with access to other systems, this would cut down on applications to be sent for assessment, and potentially speed up the processing time for applications requiring face to face assessments.

■ Consistent scoring criteria

Currently Local Authorities can use their own scoring criteria to assess discretionary applications, resulting in a postcode lottery as to whether a Blue Badge is approved or rejected. Standardising this approach would cut down on this issue.

■ Improve access to existing systems to conduct desk assessments

Access to back office or external systems is far from consistent across the Local Authorities we interviewed. If all Blue Badge administration teams had the same access, this would reduce the number of applications being assigned to the IMA teams which is a bottle neck in most council areas.

Payment Process:

■ Take payment online at time of application

If payment was requested at the time of application for online applications, this could potentially speed up the process time as it would prevent an additional administrative task (and time required) to contact the applicant and take payment, prior to the Blue Badge being requested and printed.

Ordering and Receiving the Badge:

■ Better use of system integration with GOV.UK platform

If all Local Authorities paid for API integration with the GOV.UK platform it would save time and effort for the admin staff. Any paper applications are manually entered into a council's CRM (eg. Granicus) for processing. However, when that application has been approved, the staff then need to rekey that same data into the GOV.UK platform to process and approve the printing of the Blue Badge.

Applicant Updates and Reminders:

- Better tracking options for applications

Using the GOV.UK application process, the applicant is left not knowing what is happening with their application as they're unable to adequately track their application, unless they email / call their local council team. If a tracking option was added to GOV.UK it would cut down on phone calls, emails and visits to council offices to ask for a progress update.

Benefits of this approach:

- No major upfront investment required for a new national system.
- Incremental improvements resulting in no major overhaul of the current service.
- Minor improvements to the customer journey.

Key Factors to consider:

- Individual local authority investment costs eg. DfT integration, resourcing required for website improvements and update reminder & tracking costs.
- Service would still be inconsistent across Scotland, due to the variations in administrative systems, how resources are allocated, and preferences within procedures.

Option 3 – Build a national administration portal for the Improvement Service to process Scottish applications centrally

We could look at the feasibility of building a national administration portal to handle all Scottish applications centrally, while keeping the same application flow on GOV.UK for applicants to use. The Improvement Service would provide the staff for the administration portal, similar to getyournec.scot.

The GOV.UK service has been operational for several years. Certain Local Authorities have proactively invested in annual integration packages, approximately costing £2000 per year per council, to synchronise GOV.UK with their individual council CRM systems, facilitating application flow. Nevertheless, several Local Authorities have reported a lack of integration, resulting in significant manual data entry into multiple systems.

For applicants, the application process would remain largely unchanged. However, by creating a single national administrative platform (e.g. bluebadge.scot admin portal), we'd only require API development for one system to facilitate seamless integration with the GOV.UK platform. This approach eliminates the need for individual council integrations, resulting in a small annual financial saving for those councils who are currently integrating with the gov.uk platform.

Accessing Information and Initiating the Application:

Customers apply through GOV.UK and make payment during the application process. Upon submission, they receive an email confirming receipt of their application, including a reference number and a URL for tracking its progress. Shortly after, the application is accessible in the bluebadge.scot admin portal for assessment by the central administration team.

Processing Applications:

In cases where documentation is incomplete, the central team can conduct basic desk assessments, potentially leveraging access to other systems for verification. If necessary, the team may reach out to the applicant via email to request additional information.

Automatically entitled applications would undergo swift processing by the central administration team. Upon approval within the admin portal, an API call is initiated to the GOV.UK service, prompting an email to be sent to the customer confirming the approval of their application. Conversely, if the application is rejected within the admin portal, another API call is made to the GOV.UK service, triggering an email to the applicant informing them of the rejection. This email includes contact

details for requesting a review of their application if needed.

Eligibility Assessments:

Applications necessitating in-person or IMA assessment would be allocated to the respective IMA teams within each council. The bluebadge.scot admin portal would feature a central inbox for all applications, along with individual access for council IMAs. Consequently, when an application requires further assessment, the assigned IMA receives an email notification, prompting them to securely access the application and its supporting information within the admin portal. This streamlined process eliminates the need for disparate methods currently utilised across Local Authorities.

Once the IMA completes their assessment, they can approve or reject the application directly within the bluebadge.scot admin portal. Subsequently, an API call is initiated to the GOV.UK service, triggering the dispatch of an email confirming the application's approval or rejection.

Payment Process:

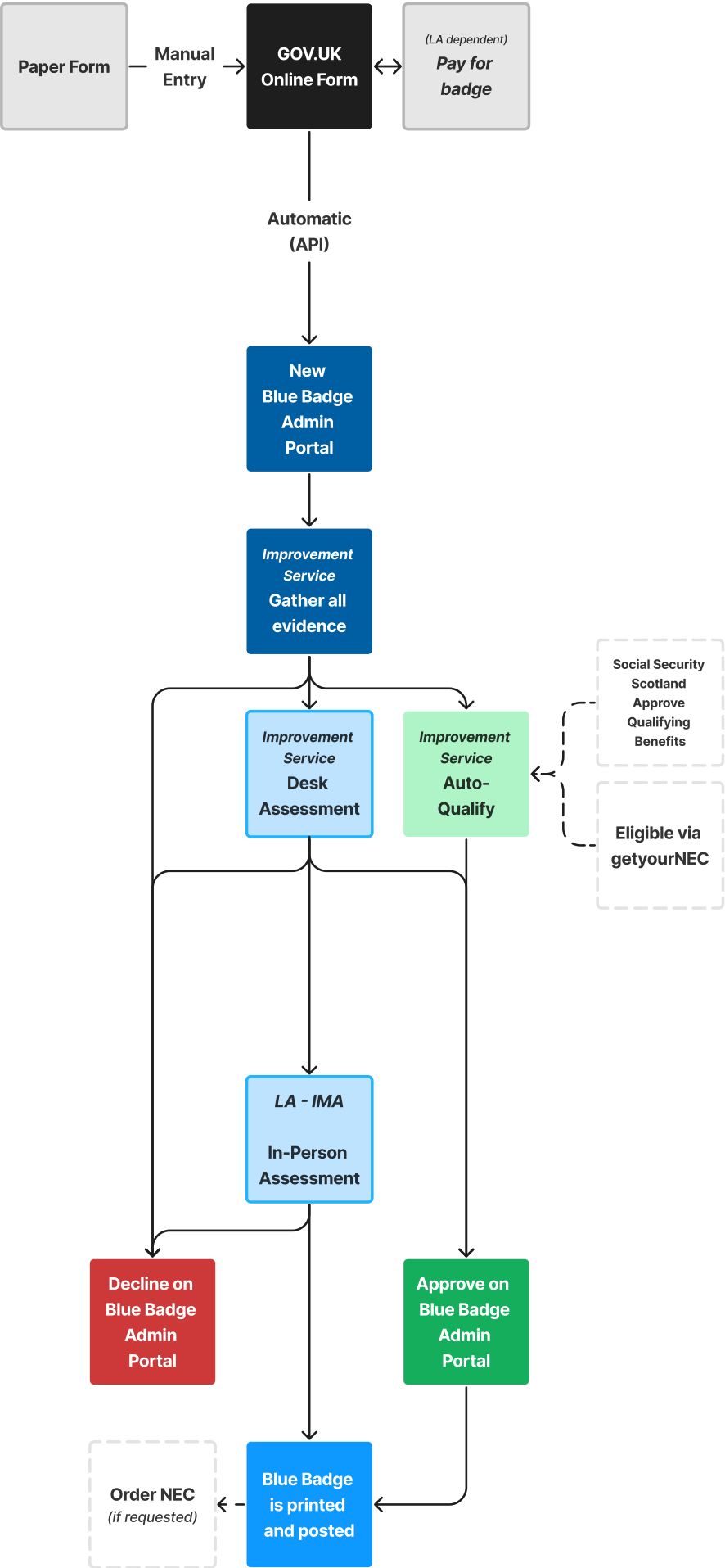
By requesting payment at the time of application, we would cut down on administrative time chasing payment before the Blue Badge is printed. Payment would be taken via Gov Pay online, and any refunds would be handled by the existing payment platform.

Ordering and Receiving the Badge:

Either the central admin team or the IMA assessor could approve or reject the application. We would be able to build in specific rejection reasons that would be sent back to the applicant. By enabling the IMA assessor to approve or reject applications, this would remove the extra administrative burden on the central admin team. It's worth noting we could build in the mechanism where the IMA needs to refer the application back to the admin team to clarify any details/proof of entitlement.

Applicant Updates and Reminders:

Upon application submission, the applicant would receive a reference number along with the URL of the bluebadge.scot admin portal. Here, a user-friendly "Track Application" feature could be implemented for applicants to access. Applicants would input their email address, reference number, and applicant name to access a simple status overview of their application's progress. This interface would provide clear insights into the application's current stage and offer guidance on what to anticipate next, including estimated timelines.



Benefits of this approach:

- **Centralised Processing:** By consolidating all applications under one central team, we eliminate the “postcode lottery” effect, ensuring uniform processing times and assessment criteria across Scotland.
- **Standardised Costs:** Adopting a national platform standardises the costs associated with lost or stolen Blue Badges, mitigating discrepancies that currently exist across different regions of Scotland. (for example, Clackmannanshire Council charge £20, Edinburgh £10, Angus Council £4.60)
- **Enhanced IMA Access:** Providing IMA teams with access to the same administrative platform ensures secure and efficient handling of applications. They can seamlessly review, approve, or reject applications, promoting consistency and expediting the assessment process.
- **Improved Applicant Experience:** With a user-friendly “Track Application” feature, applicants can effortlessly monitor the status of their application. This reduces the need for frequent enquiries to council helpdesks, leading to a more streamlined and convenient experience for applicants. Additionally, we could explore the possibility of integrating an AI chatbot to assist applicants throughout the application process.

By addressing these key areas, our approach not only enhances efficiency and consistency but also significantly improves the overall experience for both applicants and administrative staff.

Key factors to consider:

- **Time Constraints:** Setting up access to other systems for the central team to conduct desk assessments may require a significant amount of time and resources. It’s crucial to assess the feasibility and potential delays associated with this process.
- **Limitations with the design of the GOV.UK application flow.** Local Authorities commented that some fields are non-mandatory which causes them issues when processing applications.

Option 4 – Build a bespoke Scottish platform for Blue Badges eg. bluebadge.scot

All online applications for a Blue Badge could be seamlessly managed through a newly established platform tailored specifically for Scotland, such as bluebadge.scot. This would replace the GOV.UK application process for Scottish applicants. The Improvement Service would provide the staff for the administration portal, similar to getyournec.scot.

Accessing Information and Initiating the Application:

Visitors to council websites, Transport Scotland, or GOV.UK would be directed to apply online via bluebadge.scot, where online payment would be securely processed at the time of application.

The revamped online application flow would address the shortcomings identified in the current GOV.UK platform. We would ensure that all fields are correctly designated as mandatory, as well as incorporate provisions to accommodate “risk in traffic” applications, providing a more comprehensive and user-friendly experience.

As we also provide getyournec.scot we could explore the feasibility of adding an extra step to the Blue Badge application. If the customer is approved for a Blue Badge, we could also ask them if they want a disabled or disabled +1 National Entitlement Card (if they don’t have one already). Using that same application, we could request a National Entitlement Card to be sent to them directly, saving them from another application.

Upon submission of their application, applicants would promptly receive an email confirmation acknowledging receipt and outlining how they can conveniently track the progress of their application online. By logging back into bluebadge.scot, they can stay informed every step of the way.

Processing Applications:

All applications for Scotland would be handled centrally by one admin team. In cases where documentation is incomplete, our central team would have the capability to conduct simple desk assessments, potentially leveraging access to other systems for verification. If additional information is required from the applicant, we would promptly notify them, inviting them to revisit their online application and provide the necessary updates. Our team would also have access to other systems, enabling them to reduce the risk of fraudulent applications.

For applicants encountering persistent challenges in completing the online application, we could explore the option of implementing a referral process

within the platform. This would involve referring the application to the applicant's local council team, granting them access to the online application for further assistance. Once finalised, the application could be referred back to the central administration team for processing. We could also incorporate the option of a council employee logging into the platform to assist an applicant with their application.

This streamlined approach ensures that applicants receive the support they need to successfully complete their applications while maintaining efficiency in the processing workflow.

Furthermore, bluebadge.scot could incorporate a helpdesk query feature, catering to both council and applicant inquiries. This addition aims to streamline communication channels, reducing the volume of phone calls and emails directed at Local Authorities, thus enhancing overall efficiency.

Additionally, we could explore the possibility of integrating an AI chatbot to assist applicants throughout the application process.

Ordering and Receiving the Badge:

Automatically entitled applications will be swiftly processed by our central administration team. Upon approval, our system will promptly send a message either directly to the Blue Badge printing bureau or via the GOV.UK platform, triggering the printing of the Blue Badge. This seamless coordination ensures that eligible applicants receive their Blue Badges in a timely manner.

Eligibility Assessments:

Applications necessitating in-person or IMA assessment will be routed to the respective IMA teams within each council. The bluebadge.scot admin portal will feature a centralised inbox for all applications, with individual council access granted to IMAs. In the event of further assessment requirements, IMAs will receive email notifications prompting them to securely sign into the admin portal, accessing the application and supporting information seamlessly gathered.

To ensure consistency in assessment, a standardised questionnaire will be integrated into the platform, facilitating uniform scoring practices across Scotland. Following assessment completion, IMAs can directly approve or reject applications within the bluebadge.scot admin portal, streamlining the process. Instead of referring applications back to the central administration team, IMAs will have the authority to approve or reject applications themselves, providing specific reasons for rejection if necessary. This approach significantly accelerates the processing timeline, enhancing efficiency across the board.

Applicant Updates and Reminders:

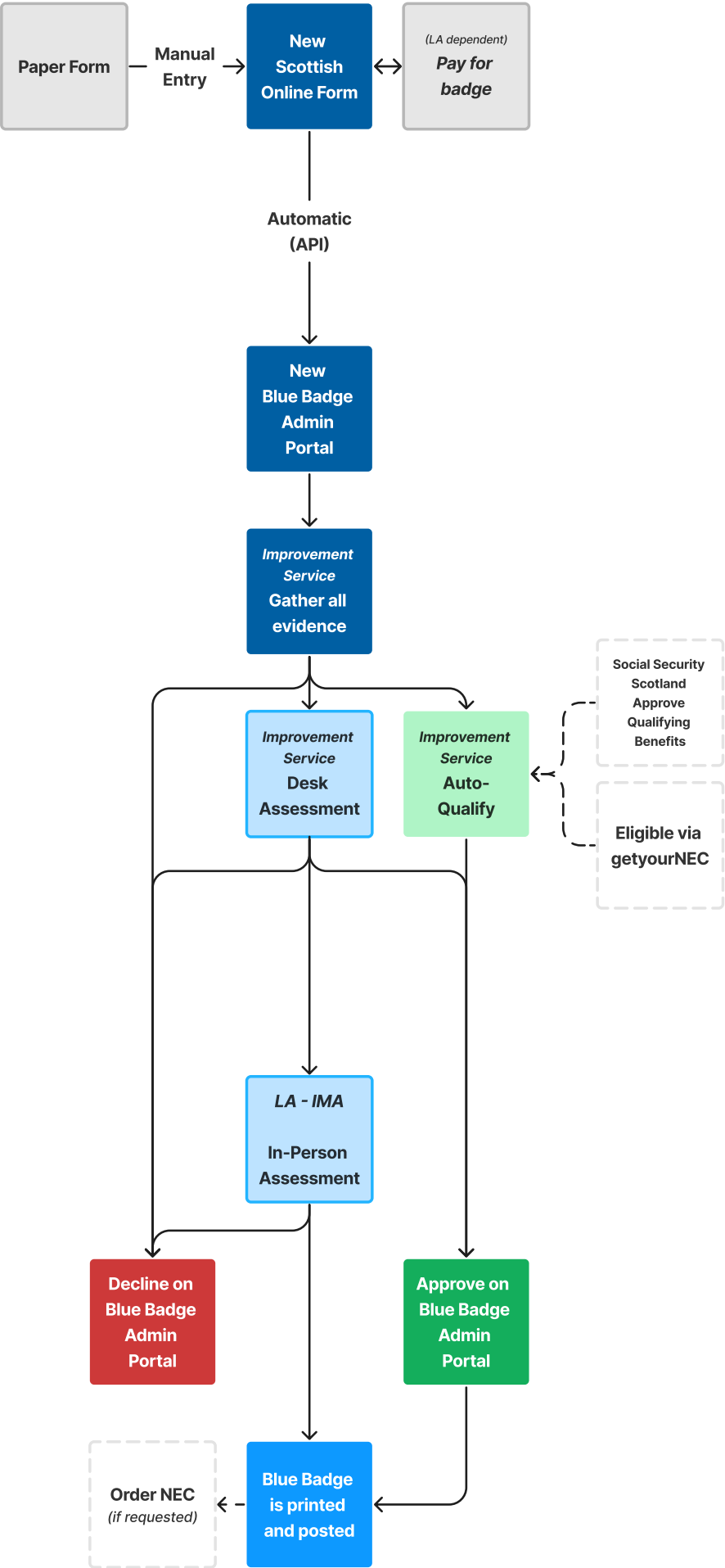
Bluebadge.scot would be built by the same team responsible for mygovscot myaccount, Data Hub, getyournec.scot etc. Therefore we could reuse some of the assets already available. An applicant would sign in using their mygovscot myaccount. We could pull through their credentials to the online application saving them time and ensuring better quality data. If they have already verified their identity on mygovscot myaccount, we could reuse those

With secure sign into bluebadge.scot we could then design a dashboard where the customer could track the progress of their Blue Badge application, reducing the emails and calls to council offices.

Payment Process:

By requesting online payment at the time of application submission, it will cut down on administrative time at the point of application approval. If the application is to be rejected, the refund could be handled swiftly by the GOV.UK Pay platform.

As the platform would provide a national approach to Blue Badge applications, the fees would be standardised, removing the postcode lottery of different fees for new or lost/stolen Blue Badges. Currently each council can set their own Blue Badge fees up to a maximum of £20 per Blue Badge.



Benefits of this approach:

- **Streamlined Application Process:** Eligible applicants could potentially receive a disabled or disabled +1 National Entitlement Card (NEC) alongside their Blue Badge application, eliminating the need for a separate application process and saving time. Similarly if we could offer eligible disabled NEC applicants a Blue Badge during their getyourneccard.scot application flow, if we also handled Blue Badge administration.
- **Convenient Sign-In Process:** Applicants could sign in with their mygov.scot myaccount, utilising their proof of identity status to expedite the application process. This streamlined sign-in process allows applicants to save draft applications and track their submissions conveniently.
- **Re-use of Existing Assets:** Leveraging mygov.scot myaccount for customer authentication promises a significant improvement in data quality, potentially tapping into pre-verified information. Furthermore, integration with platforms like the Data Hub holds the potential to mitigate fraudulent activities, including the misuse of existing Blue Badges.
- **Enhanced Security Measures:** Using existing assets from getyourneccard.scot enables online verification of identification and identity, reducing the risk of fraudulent applications and ensuring the integrity of the process.
- **Accessible Online Helpdesk:** Applicants would have access to an online helpdesk for assistance during the application process. Additionally, they can opt for referral to their council if they encounter difficulties applying online, ensuring comprehensive support.
- **Inclusion of “Risk in Traffic” Applications:** By offering a standard application for “Risk in Traffic” cases on a Scottish platform, we ensure equitable access to this service, which is currently limited to paper applications.
- **Uniform Processing:** Centralising all applications under one team eliminates the “postcode lottery” effect, ensuring consistent processing times and assessment criteria across Scotland. This addresses the current variation in processing times, which can range from 3 weeks to 12 weeks.
- **Enhanced IMA Access:** IMA teams have secure access to the same administrative platform, enabling efficient review and approval/rejection of applications, fostering consistency and expediting the process.
- **Efficient Replacement Process:** The system retains applicant details, facilitating a quicker process for requesting replacement Blue Badges if lost or stolen. Additionally, it standardises the fee for replacement Blue Badges, preventing discrepancies across Local Authorities.

Some factors to take into consideration with Option 4:

- **Time Constraints:** Setting up access to other systems for the central team to conduct desk assessments may require a significant amount of time and resources. It's crucial to assess the feasibility and potential delays associated with this process.
- **Printing Arrangements:** It's essential to determine whether we will continue linking with the GOV.UK system to request the printing of Blue Badges or establish a separate arrangement with the Blue Badge supplier. Evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of each option is necessary to ensure a seamless printing process and timely delivery of Blue Badges to applicants.

Implementing a bespoke national platform like bluebadge.scot entails both initial setup costs and ongoing monthly expenses. The initial setup phase involves developing the software, constructing servers, and conducting rigorous security and vulnerability testing. Subsequently, recurring monthly costs include expenses for maintaining the central administration team, providing helpdesk support, acquiring domain licenses and certificates, and establishing disaster recovery servers, among others.

Estimates from various Local Authorities suggest that processing each Blue Badge application ranges from £18.55 to £35. To determine a fair allocation of fixed and recurring costs, several models can be considered. For instance, costs could be evenly distributed across all 32 Local Authorities or allocated on a sliding scale based on population size.



8.0 Suggestion for Possible Future Development

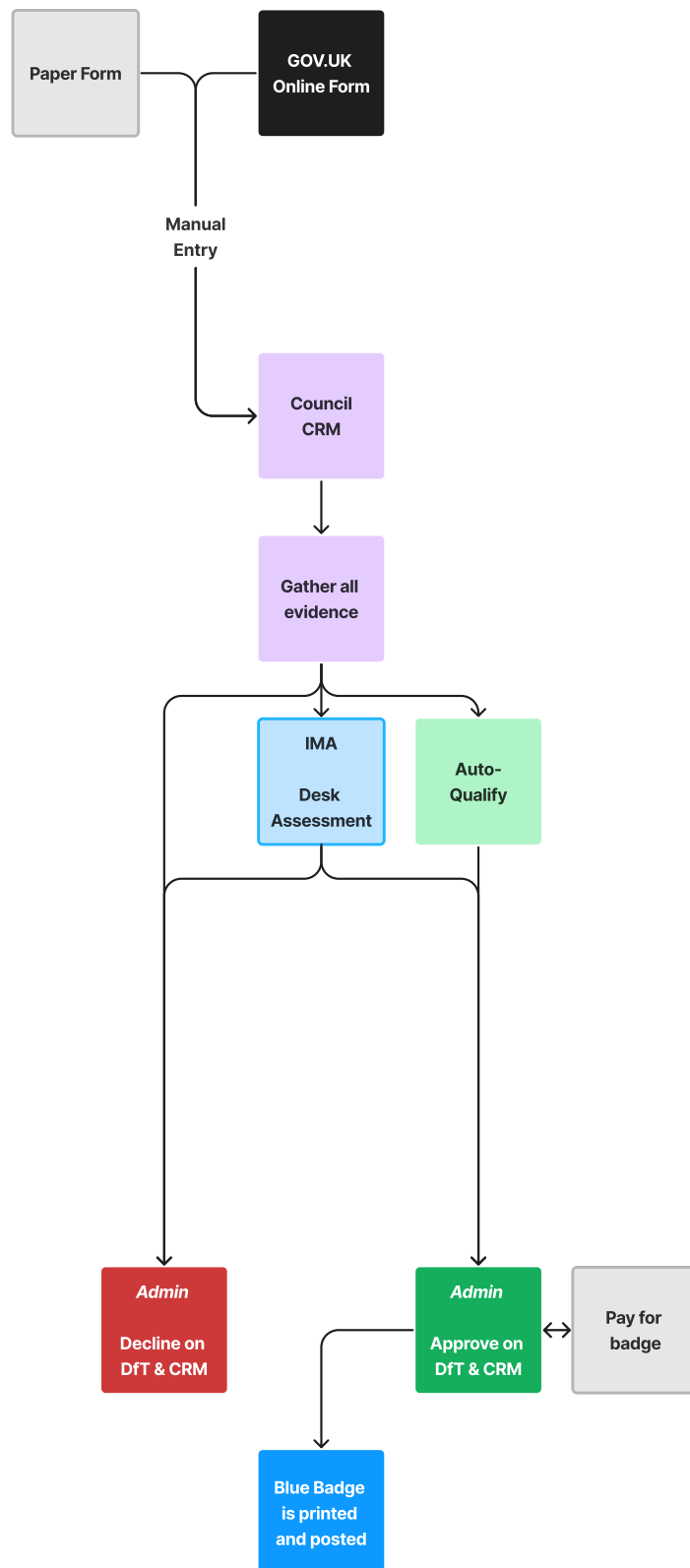
The variations in assessment processes among Local Authorities can impact administrative costs and availability of resources, particularly in Local Authorities where specialised teams or 3rd parties are involved in assessment. The utilisation of 32 dedicated admin teams separate to 32 assessment teams may incur additional expenses related to staffing, training, and contributes to higher operational costs for Local Authorities. These costly variations emphasise the importance of standardising or centralising assessment protocols and systems, and optimising resource utilisation to enhance efficiency and minimise financial burdens on Local Authorities.

Our recommendation would be to undertake a full feasibility study on Option 4. Developing a national shared service for Blue Badges would enable Local Authorities to achieve savings, efficiencies, and improved standardised citizen services that avoid a “postcode lottery” depending on where they reside in Scotland. The feasibility study will also include engagement with COSLA and its policy teams, Transport Scotland and other key stakeholders to garner support, endorsement and determine whether legislation and or policy changes may be required to fully implement option 4 as recommended.

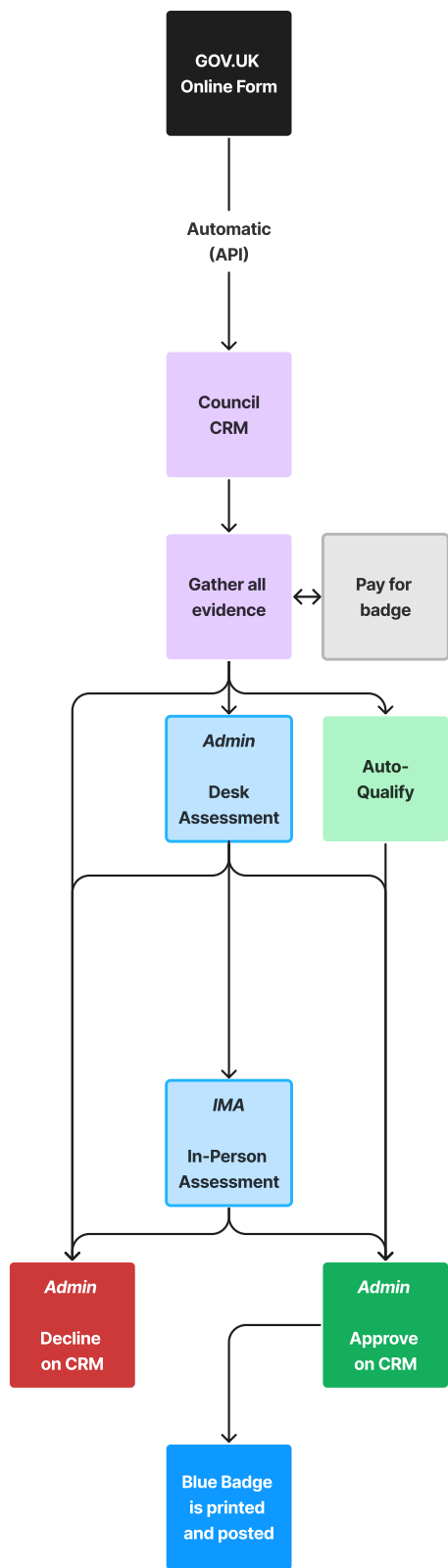


9.0 Appendix A – Process maps for each council interviewed

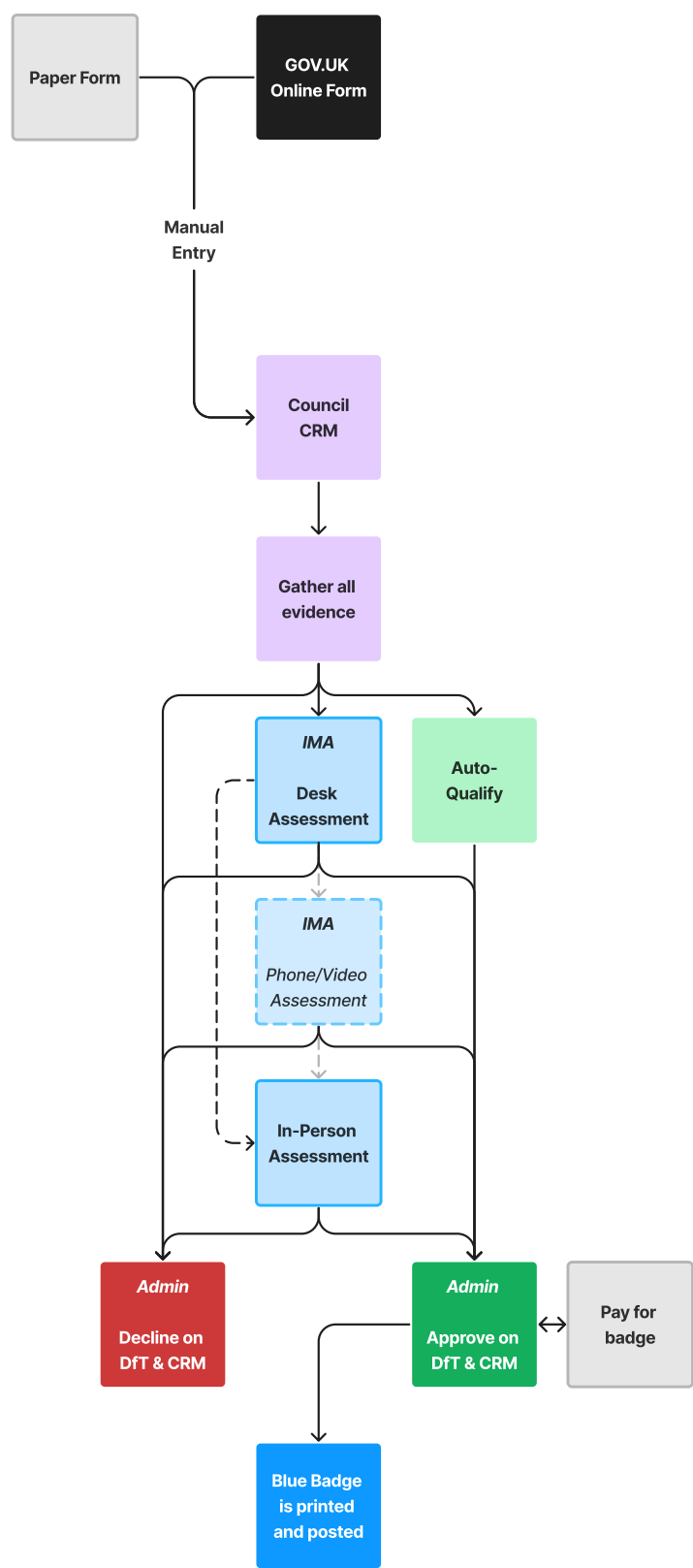
East Dunbartonshire Blue Badge Process Map



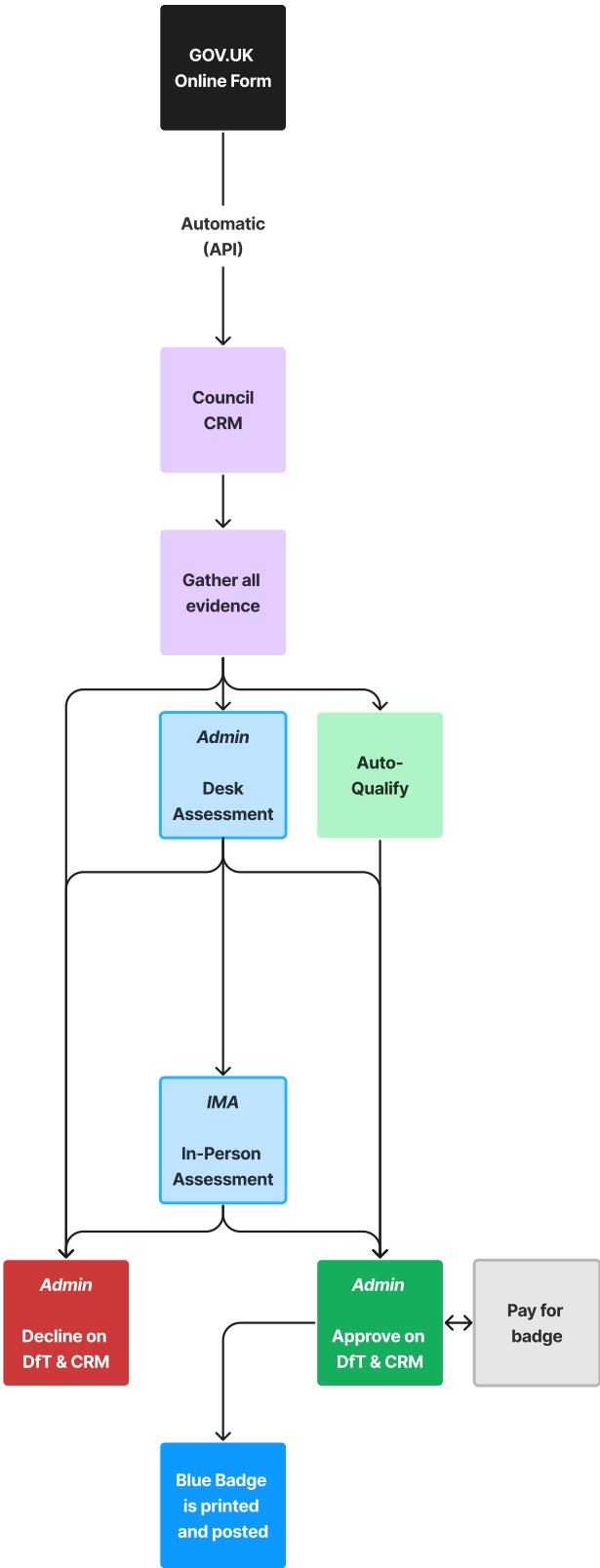
East Lothian Blue Badge Process Map



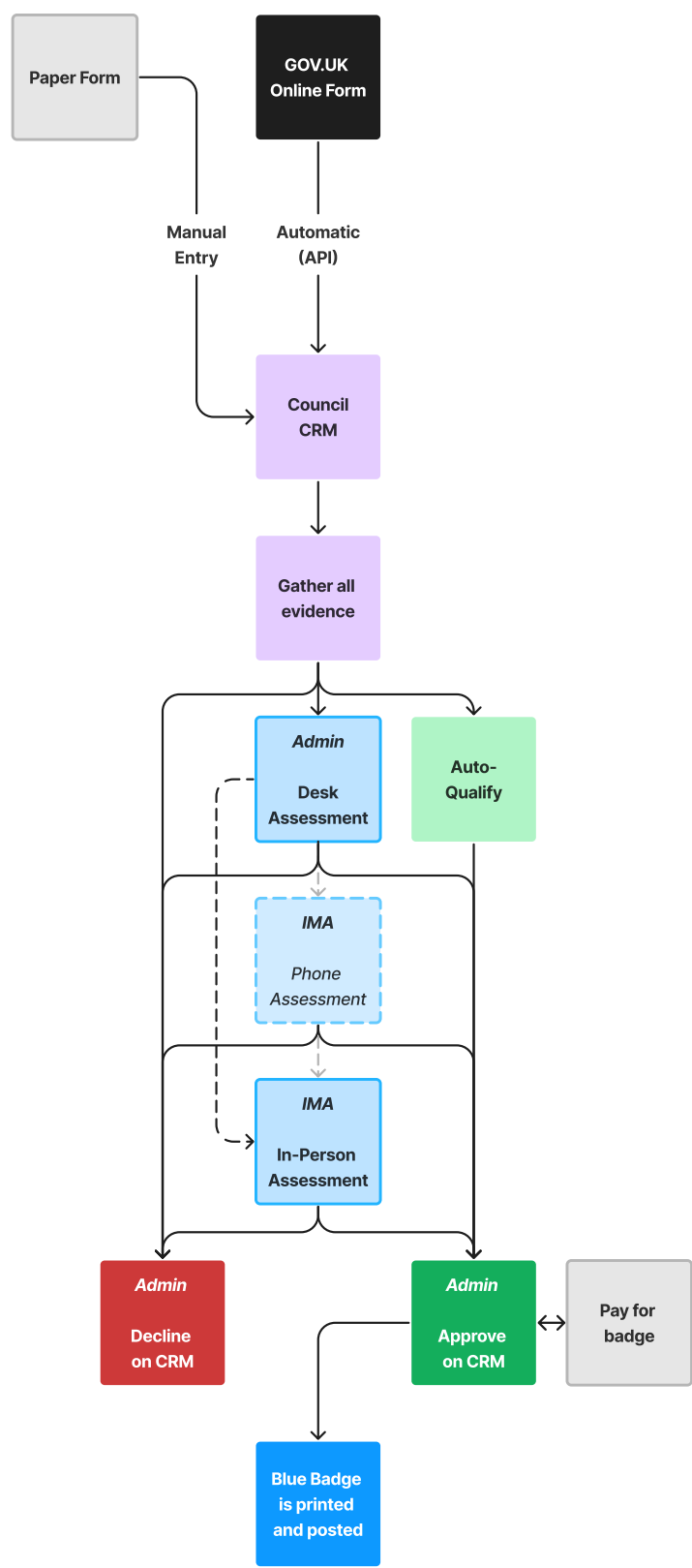
Highland Blue Badge Process Map



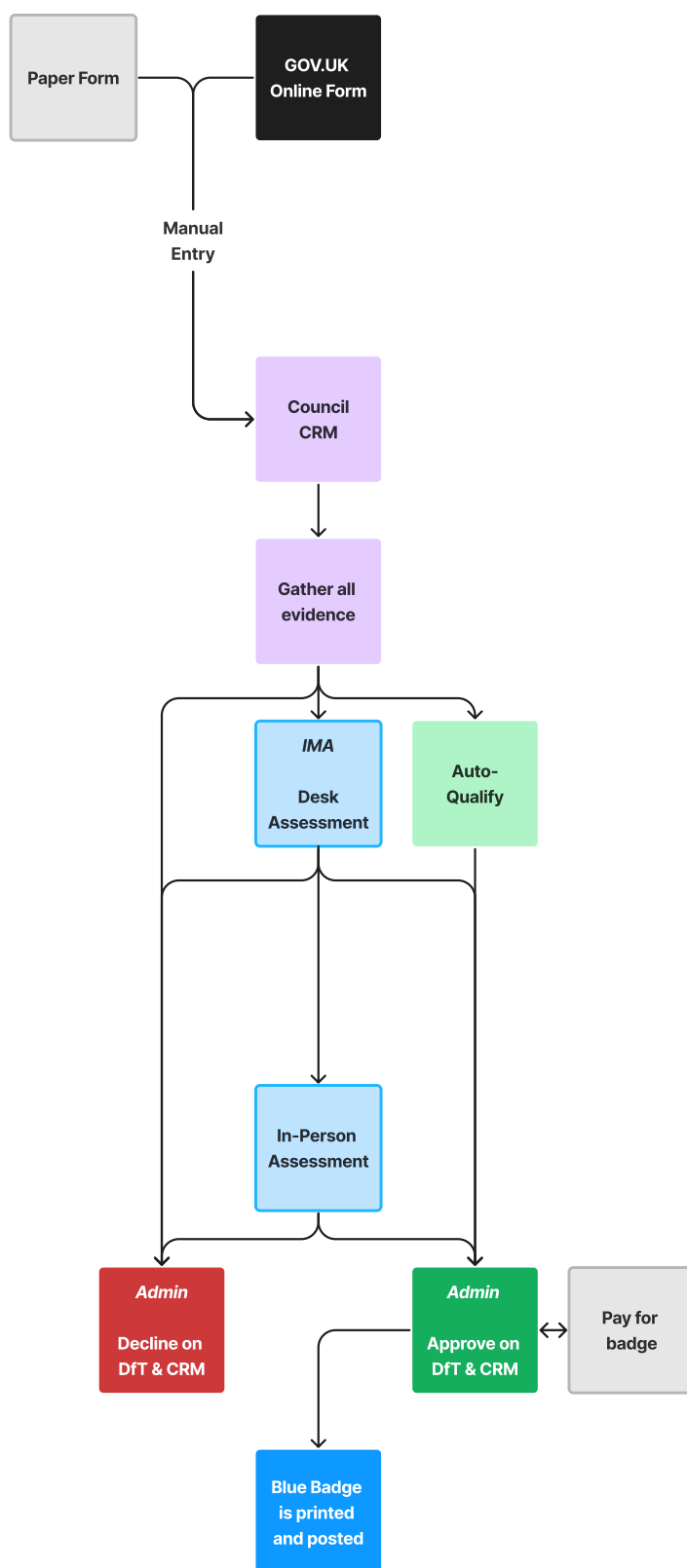
North Lanarkshire Blue Badge Process Map



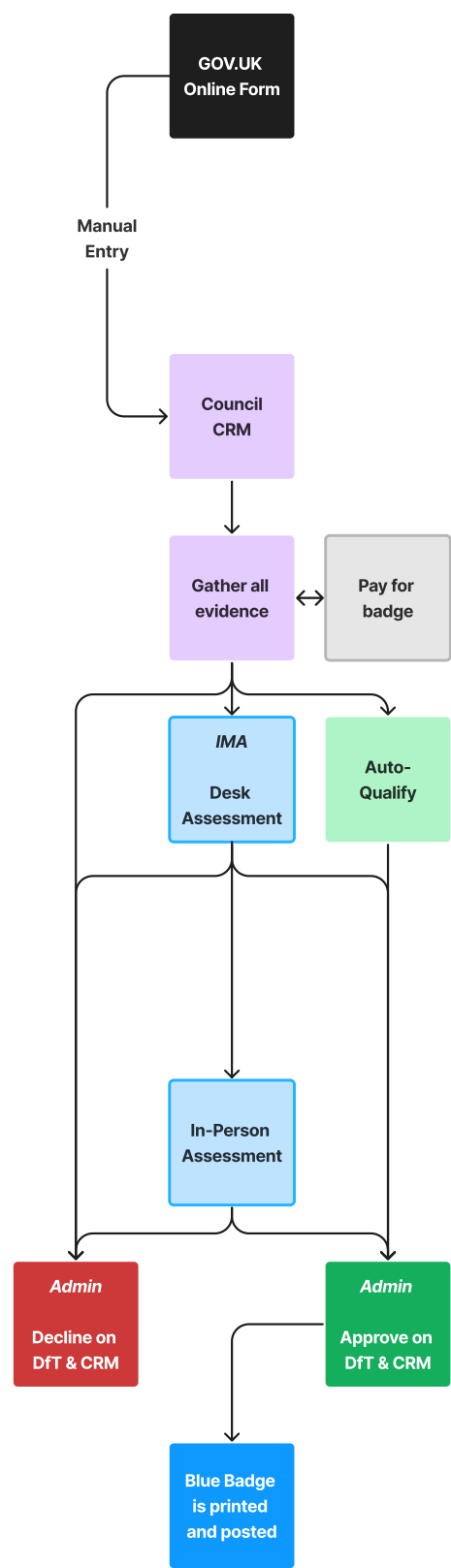
Perth and Kinross Blue Badge Process Map



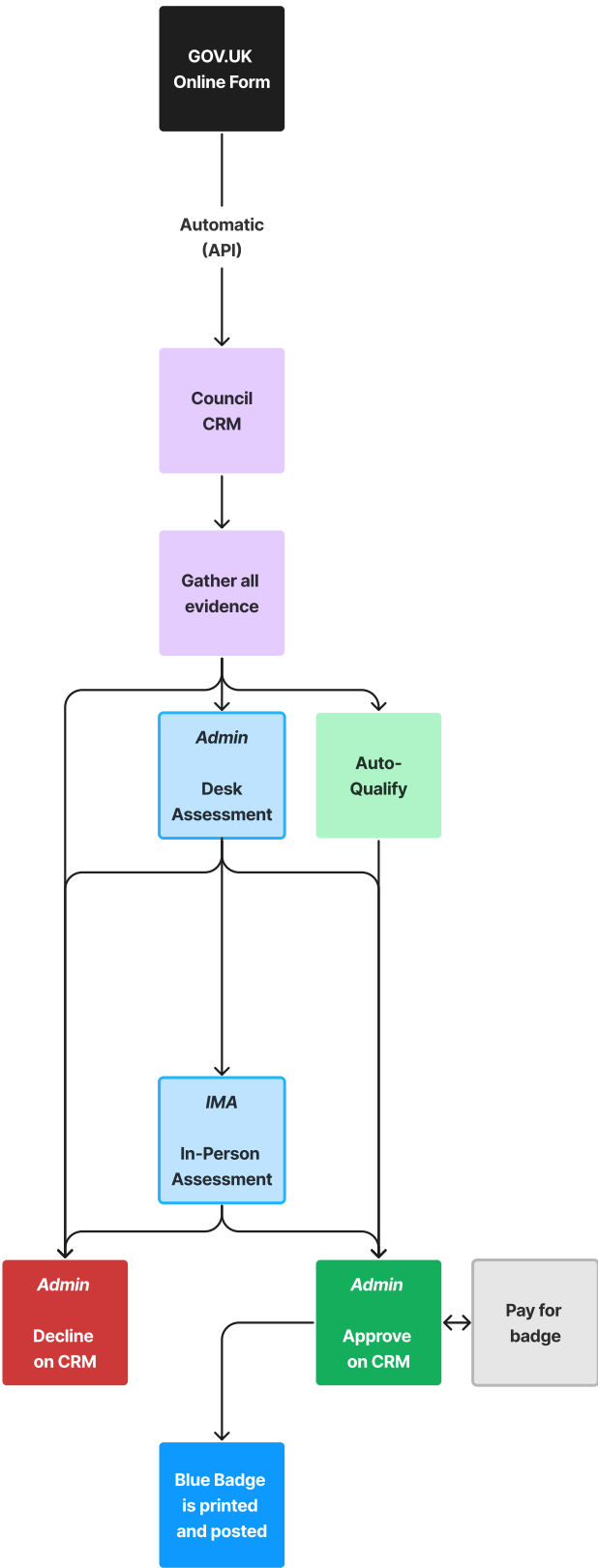
Renfrewshire Blue Badge Process Map



South Ayrshire Blue Badge Process Map



West Lothian Blue Badge Process Map



May 2024

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