

P-06-1380 Make Blue badge Applications Lifelong for individuals who have a lifelong diagnosis - Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee, 3 June 2024

Good morning

Thank you for your email

Feedback from our members is that Ken is repeating the same information as his predecessor, and not listening to the reasons why the petitions was drawn

Please see response below to Ken Skates

As my predecessor said in previous correspondence, blue badges are valid for three years. This length of award is set out in legislation and is common across the UK. However, applicants who will permanently meet the eligibility criteria can be awarded a badge on a 'not for reassessment' basis, which means that when re-applying in three years' time they will not need to provide any additional medical evidence to support their application, only proof of identity and residency. These are reasonable and proportionate requirements on applicants and necessary to prevent fraud and misuse.

As stated previously, we agree that implementing robust procedures to prevent misuse and fraud is essential for the integrity of any system. However, it's important that these measures are designed with sensitivity and precision to ensure that they do not unfairly impact individuals with lifelong conditions. Such individuals require support and understanding, not scrutiny that may add to their challenges. A balanced approach that protects resources while respecting the rights and needs of all individuals is crucial for a fair and just system.

Clarity in language is also crucial, especially in the application processes. If a term such as 'not for reassessment' effectively means a 'life award', it should be stated explicitly to avoid confusion. For individuals with lifelong conditions, it's important that the application process is streamlined to reflect the permanency of their situation. It should be clearly communicated that individuals with lifelong conditions are not required to complete a full application form, a separate, simplified application form for identification purposes could significantly ease the burden on applicants, ensuring that they provide only the necessary information. This would also improve the efficiency of the application process.

Regarding the training of desk-based assessors, this is a matter for local authorities

which have the statutory duty to administer the Blue Badge scheme in Wales. The Welsh Government does not ordinarily keep records on the training and qualifications of local authority staff.

Previously Lee waters stated that officials held a training workshop in 2020. If you do not keep records where has this data come from?

The administration of Blue Badges is a responsibility that requires a comprehensive understanding of various disabilities which includes severe cognitive impairments. It is concerning to hear that desk-based assessors, many lack training in this area. Disability and Equality **Awareness** training is not enough. Appropriate training is crucial to ensure that assessors can make informed decisions when issuing Blue Badges. Previously we have raised a suggestion of centralising the system which could lead to consistency across Wales. The Welsh Government needs to ensure that **every** local authority provides equitable and suitable services to individuals with disabilities, regardless of their location.

There is no statutory appeals process against a decision made by a local authority on a blue badge application. The Welsh Government does not have the legal power to intervene in the assessment of individual cases. Our guidance to local authorities recommends they have a clear policy on how they will review blue badge decisions should they be challenged by an applicant. Applicants who are unhappy about the way the process was conducted should be made aware of the local authority's standard complaints procedure, in the same way that any other user of the local authority's services would be informed of their right to complain.

The Blue Badge scheme provides a vital service for those with mobility issues and severe cognitive impairments, ensuring easier access to parking spaces. However, concerns have been raised about the need for an appeal process, given the lengthy application procedure and decisions made by assessors who may not have expertise in disabilities. It's important that the criteria for eligibility, which includes the consideration of severe cognitive impairments, are applied consistently and fairly.

There is an assumption that if you don't need a wheelchair, you haven't got a disability.

Is there sufficient awareness of severe cognitive impairment?

What is being done to raise the profile of this?

Lee Waters stated previously, 'eligibility for the Blue Badge Scheme is based on mobility and not on specific medical conditions', this shows the need for the current process to be reviewed considering conditions that come under Severe Cognitive Impairment.

As noted in previous correspondence, over the last 20 years the Blue Badge scheme has been subject to several reviews and as a result we have made changes in conjunction with stakeholders. We are committed to ensuring that the Blue Badge scheme remains robust and fair, and that the process of obtaining a badge is as efficient as possible.

As noted in previous correspondence

"Lee Waters says 'We remain committed to ensuring that disabled people who experience the greatest barriers to mobility can use the Blue Badge scheme for on-street parking concessions and that the process of obtaining a badge is as efficient, effective and stress-free as possible'.

"There are so many holes in the current process and too many inconsistencies for it to be efficient or effective and it is this that is costing the taxpayer, and the current process is certainly not stress free.

Also please look at the benefits a blue badge brings to an individual or family and not look at it as it's a privilege to have one

Please see the information previously submitted supporting this petition

Many thanks