

Introduction

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's Inquiry into the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales: Eligibility and Implementation.

The practical implementation and consistency of the Blue Badge Scheme across Wales, including assessments, fees and enforcement.

1. Since April 2018, the Age Cymru Information and Advice Line has received 90 enquiries about eligibility, applying for, and using Blue Badges. Many of these enquirers are not eligible for an automatic qualification for a Blue Badge but are eligible for a discretionary qualification.
2. Enquirers have told us that some local authorities are being extremely strict in some cases, in their application of the discretionary criteria, especially in relation to the distance people are able to walk. Several people have told us that they have been turned down for a Blue Badge even though they are unable to walk the distance specified in the guidance (50 yards, or half the length of a football pitch).
3. A major problem is the lack of consistency in the way that individual Local Authority officers apply the criteria. Some officers apply a reasonable interpretation of the guidelines, while others take what seems to us to be a very harsh approach. This is particularly true in the case of people with mental health

issues, eg, where someone with dementia has been discharged by their consultant as nothing more can be done to improve their condition, without proof of their impairment; a letter from their GP is not necessarily sufficient proof for the officer making the decision.

4. A Local Age Cymru Partner highlights that there is a lack of support for people in making an application for a Blue Badge. Given the strict application of criteria, and a lack of consistency in the application of discretionary criteria, we believe that more support is needed to help people that are applying for a Blue Badge.
5. We believe that more support for applicants, more consistency, and more compassion should be introduced into the application of the Blue Badge scheme in Wales.

We hope that these comments are useful and would be happy to provide further information if requested.