

Mr John Griffiths AM
Chair
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Mr Griffiths

Re: Blue Badge Scheme Inquiry

We would like to extend our thanks to the Committee and yourself for welcoming us to give evidence to the inquiry into the blue badge scheme in Wales. We listened carefully to the Minister's evidence to the Committee and felt it would be appropriate to respond to some of the issues raised.

Appeals Process

During the Minister's evidence to the Committee¹, he touched upon the issue of an appeals process for blue badge scheme applicants.

"I'd be really interested to see any evidence that would suggest or lead us to conclude that the independent appeals process within any of the local authorities is not operating properly, fairly or independently. I would be really interested to see... because I would consider whether we need an additional form of appeals process to be established. And it's also worth noting, I didn't say earlier, that in certain circumstances individuals can appeal to Welsh Government as well."

We warmly welcome the Minister's support for an appeals process in principle, however from our extensive experience, there is not one currently in practice. The Minister's statement does not fully reflect the current state of play and it presupposes that people who fail in their application for a blue badge are able to appeal to their local government, and that the Welsh Government has a final appeal role. We would welcome such a process, however, sadly this is not the current situation.

The Welsh Government's public information concerning the scheme, "Who is Eligible for a Blue Badge"² outlines in clear terms that:

"The local authority's decision on eligibility is final. There is no appeals process. However, if additional evidence is available then an applicant may request that the local authority reconsiders their application."

The Welsh Government has no power to intervene in the decision-making process if an application is rejected." (pg 8)

¹ From the 01:23:57 mark; we have attempted to capture it verbatim, above, but defer to the official committee transcript once that becomes available.

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2017-09/who-is-eligible-for-a-blue-badge.pdf>

We feel this is something that will require further clarification as the Minister's comments did not align with the current process that is in place. We would support positive steps to introduce some form of independent appeal process.

We would welcome a move by the Committee to liaise with the Minister and ask for a clarification on the issues surrounding any appeals process for blue badge scheme applicants, and whether his comments can be interpreted as support for a Wales blue badge scheme appeals process in practice?

Access to the Blue Badge for people with cancer

Tenovus Cancer Care and Macmillan Cancer Support both stressed the need for consistency of application for the current guidance in a way that promotes the effective assessment process for cancer patients. Macmillan also suggested a "deep dive" audit into local authority areas to identify good practice that informs adjustments to the guidance for a more consistent pan-Wales approach. Additional evidence, provided by our service teams, covering areas of good practice has been submitted by our organisations.

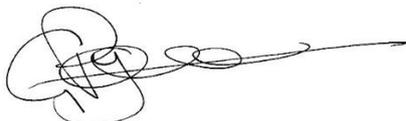
There are already rules that allow people affected by cancer to access both permanent and temporary badges dependent on their situation. It is worth noting that people who are considered to have a terminal illness are in most cases provided with a full blue badge.

Tenovus Cancer Care suggested in their evidence to the Committee that, given the complex comorbidities associated with cancer and with its treatment a general eligibility could be considered to all cancer patients upon diagnosis.

People undergoing cancer treatment can face significant mobility and well-being challenges, for example chronic fatigue, a weakened immune system and pain. We know from the Macmillan/ Welsh Government Cancer Patient Experience Survey, only 48% of respondents were offered benefits advice through the course of their treatment³. Individuals receiving benefits advice from a professional advisor from a third sector organisation will examine the need for a blue badge and support the application process. For those not receiving advice it is a concern that, despite being eligible they may not be aware of their entitlement. Both organisation continue to promote our advice services and hope to increase the number of people affected by cancer who receive appropriate information and support.

We trust you find this supplementary information useful and these issues demonstrate the difficulties faced by people who need accurate information concerning a scheme that, if they qualify, will have a significant positive benefit to their well-being.

Yours sincerely,



Greg Pycroft
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Macmillan Cancer Support



Martin Fidler Jones
Policy Officer
Tenovus Cancer Care

³ Picker, Macmillan Cancer Support, (2017) Wales Cancer Patient Experience Survey.