



John Griffiths AM
Chair
Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

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Dear John

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the blue badge scheme. Please find below the further information you requested in your letter of 8 May.

Further information on the prevalence of abuse in the blue badge scheme in Wales, including details of National Fraud Authority data that indicated 20 per cent of blue badges are being misused across the UK.

National Fraud Initiative - England

The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) is a data matching exercise conducted by the UK Government Cabinet Office to assist in the prevention and detection of fraud. Data for the NFI is provided by some 1,200 participating organisations from the public and private sectors including government departments. The NFI 2018 Report can be found at-

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/737146/National-Fraud-Initiative-Report-2018.pdf

The NFI 2018 report published by the UK Government Cabinet Office relates to England and states that as a result of the NFI, 31,223 blue badges have been revoked or withdrawn. A value of £18M was placed on this.

As at 31 March 2017 there were 2.38 million Blue badges in England, 887,000 of these were issued between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. Fraudsters exploit the Blue Badge scheme by forging badges and stealing badges from cars. Abuse also occurs when badges remain in use, or are renewed by someone, after a badge holder has died. In England, there were a total of 1,131 individuals prosecuted in 2016/17. The majority of prosecutions (98%) in England were targeted at a non-badge holder using another persons' badge.

During this reporting period, the number of blue badges cancelled significantly increased to 31,223 from 23,063 in 2014/15. The estimated value of blue badges cancelled between reporting periods has also therefore increased from £13.2 million to £18 million, an increase of 36%.

National Fraud Authority

The National Fraud Authority (NFA) estimates that 20 per cent of badges are abused. Across the UK, the NFA estimate that there were around half a million Blue Badges misused, resulting in losses of £46 million a year.

BBC

Evidence from research undertaken by the BBC showed that motorists were fined 14,000 times in 2017/18 for abusing, disabled parking spaces across Wales. The penalty notices were for on-street and dedicated car park bays. These figures have remained fairly constant over four years.

Details on local authorities' engagement with the Welsh Government's training workshops and toolkit for blue badge assessments.

In 2017 good practice workshops were held to help Local Authorities with their role. The assessment workshops were supported by staff from the Independent Advisory Service, and were attended by 17 out of 22 local authorities. The non attending local authorities were Blaenau Gwent, Newport, Caerphilly, Ceredigion and the Vale of Glamorgan. In 2018 a refresher workshop was offered to Local Authorities with the Independent Advisory Service, however only one Local Authority expressed an interest but later cancelled. Welsh Government provided enforcement workshops in 2017 to promote good practice found in other parts of the UK. The workshops were led by enforcement officers from Portsmouth and 15 of the 22 local authorities attended. The non attending local authorities were Ceredigion, Merthyr Tydfil, Newport, Pembrokeshire, Swansea, Torfaen and Vale of Glamorgan.

Details on the proportion of system abuse that can be eradicated by the cleansing of invalid badges.

National Fraud Initiative - Wales

A report was produced by the Auditor General for Wales which can be found at-

<https://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/national-fraud-initiative-english.pdf>

The key messages in relation to Blue Badges are:

- Review of the NFI matches has led to 1,690 blue badges and 28,584 concessionary travel passes being cancelled
- The NFI matches blue badges and concessionary travel permits to deceased persons' records. The match is designed to identify badges and permits which are potentially still in circulation after the death of the registered owner. Blue Badge records are also matched to identify cases where blue-badge holders have been issued with badges by more than one local authority.
- Blue badges provide a range of parking concessions and are a lifeline for people with severe mobility problems. However, it is essential that the badges are cancelled when the holder dies. Failure to do so can lead to badges being used by those who have no entitlement.

- It is a criminal offence to display a blue badge for the purposes of evading parking charges or to obtain preferential parking when the car driver or passenger is not the legitimate owner of the badge. This does not stop fraudsters targeting the scheme, and blue badges may be sold for considerable sums of money. The fraud not only results in a loss of parking revenues for the local authority, but it also means that parking spaces may be denied to genuine blue-badge holders.
- This year, the match has led to the cancellation of 1,690 blue badges across Wales, compared to 1,044 in the previous NFI exercise. Once the badges have been cancelled, it is possible for local authorities to check whether the cancelled badges are being fraudulently displayed.
- The estimated cost of fraud per badge is approximately £576.

Blue Badge Digital Services

The Blue Badge Digital Services (BBDS) provide the on-line application process, manage the manufacture and delivery of badges, as well as keeping the national data base for badges. BBDS commenced management of the service in February this year and are developing processes to cleanse the database to help prevent fraud.

Whether the two thirds of local authorities who you say are using an independent appeals process have used this route to determine the outcome of a blue badge application or settle appeals against blue badge decisions.

Neither the primary or secondary legislation set out the requirement for an appeals process on the basis of the determination of eligibility being challenged.

It is expected that local authorities put in place their own system to review cases where the applicant has not been issued a badge and wishes to challenge the decision. From information received this is usually in the form of a review by a team manager. In addition, all local authorities have in place complaint procedures.

Some local authority have asked whether they can refer cases where the applicant is challenging the decision to the Independent Assessment Service (IAS) to make a determination as this service is paid for by the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government has never declined these requests. However not all local authorities use the IAS. Formal records have not been kept in these circumstances.

Whether the Welsh Government has any role in resolving appeals made by individuals who have had their claim for a blue badge refused, and if so, under what circumstances would this be exercised.

The Disabled Persons (Badges for Motor Vehicles) (Wales) Regulations 2000 (as amended) sets out the limited appeals allowed to Welsh Government, in cases;

- Regulation 8 - the 'Grounds for refusal to issue a badge' where the local authority refuses to issue a badge because misuse of the scheme by the applicant has led to a conviction or
- Regulation 9 - 'Return of badge to issuing authority' because the person has been asked to return their badge due to misuse leading to a conviction.

Papur 4 – Llywodraeth Cymru

Paper 4 – Welsh Government

The Welsh Government have not received an appeal under either of these regulations in the past 10 years.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken', written in a cursive style.

Ken Skates AC/AM

Gweinidog dros yr Economi a Thrafnidiaeth

Minister for Economy and Transport