

Ymchwiliad i Gynllun y Bathodyn Glas yng Nghymru: Cymhwysra a Gweithredu

Inquiry into the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales: Eligibility and Implementation

Ymateb gan: Cyngor ar Bopeth Merthyr Tudful

Response from: Citizens Advice Merthyr

In response to your email, I have listed the following problems with Blue Badges, as experienced by our clients:

The Blue Badge application process has become extremely difficult for our clients since the rules changed in 2015. The application process has become more strict and it would seem a lot more people are being refused this entitlement. We have had an increase of clients refused on the basis that they do not fit the scoring criteria – however, they are never told what that scoring criteria is. Clients therefore cannot adequately answer the questions on the application form or appeal a negative decision. This leaves our clients (and our advisers) feeling agitated and frustrated. There is a lack of support for these clients from the Local Authority and definitely a lack of information.

We are having clients who have had a blue badge for many years and when it comes to reapplying, they are being refused based on the new criteria.

However, this criteria hasn't been released for us to know how it's affecting the client's claim.

Clients are being told by the Local Authority that the application requires medical evidence from someone higher than a GP level to support the claim. This can be extremely difficult as so many clients do not have input from anyone higher than a GP. For example, one client had severe arthritis which impinged on their mobility to a large extent, however, the only thing that could assist her was pain relief. Therefore, her health conditions were managed by her GP, because a consultant would have no further input. This then leaves people in this situation in a position where they cannot get evidence from a health care professional, apart from their GP, through no fault of their own. However, it still remains that their health conditions mean that they cannot get out of their car door without having extra space to fully open the door and they cannot mobilise more than 50 meters to get to the

place that they need to get to. So they're completely restricted. The medical evidence criteria needs to change to become more adaptable to all health conditions.

We have had clients who's application has been refused, and so they have requested a face to face assessment to further clarify their issues. The LA have stated that the F2F assessment wouldn't be refused, but without further medical evidence, the assessment is unlikely to change the decision. There is a huge reliance on medical evidence and clients then get put off from requesting an assessment because of this.

Medical evidence is not always the most sufficient evidence in cases like this. What we have found is that a medical professional can confirm the health conditions but that some practical evidence is needed too. For example – letters from family/friends to confirm just how difficult someone finds it to walk from the car parked in Tesco, to the front doors. Someone to explain the pain that someone is in. To explain that they struggle daily just to get out of bed in the morning, or to get out of their chair at night. It is those practical things which add substance to a claim.

There is also a huge issue in our area in relation to the consistency of medical evidence. Some practices are extremely helpful, and others not so much. This is an issue that should be taken into account when applications become reliant on medical evidence.

We've spoken to clients who are no longer able to do what they used to because they have lost their blue badge entitlement. A client told me that they no longer go shopping with their wife because they cannot get out of the car in the smaller parking spaces provided in shopping centres. They become confined to the four walls in their house and their family member or friend have to do things for them. They lose their independence and one client has reported feeling lonely and isolated.

The application process is different in each Local Authority. When the outcome for each client is the same, it becomes difficult to understand why the process is different. Maybe Welsh Government should consider standardising the application across the whole of Wales?

We would also ask that the Committee consider any cost implications on each Local Authority to issue blue badges. There seems a huge reluctance when issuing them, and yet the cost implications would seem relatively low?

I hope this assists the Committee in their investigation into this particular issue. Please let us know if we can be of any other assistance.