

Monday 11th November 2019

Dear Cllr Carter

Blue Badge parking scheme

Further to your question at the Council meeting on Wednesday 30th October regarding Blue Badge applications from people with hidden disabilities, I trust you will find the information below helpful.

1. Background information

Following an independent review of the Blue Badge parking scheme commissioned by the Department for transport (DfT), a number of legislative changes to the regulations that govern the scheme came into force with on 30th August 2019.

The key changes introduced by the DfT included the:

- refining of the wording of scheme eligibility criteria to clarify that people who experience non-physical ('hidden') disabilities that result in very considerable difficulty whilst walking should be considered eligible to receive a Blue Badge;
- inclusion of possible approaches that local authorities may wish to consider using when considering the eligibility of applicants who experience non-physical ('hidden') disabilities to receive a Blue Badge.
- Change to terminology whereby an individual's eligibility for a Blue Badge will be considered in terms of being 'eligible without further assessment' (previously known as 'automatic') or 'eligible subject to further assessment' (previously known as 'discretionary').

As a result of these regulatory changes local authorities were required to update their administrative procedures; as advised in the Member Briefing email sent to elected members on 23rd August 2019.

This email also included a link for members to access more detailed information. A copy of this document accompanies this response.

2. Application Process

The DfT holds local authorities responsible for ensuring that a Blue Badge award is only granted to applicants who satisfy one or more of the eligibility criteria set out in the legislation that governs the scheme; regardless of whether someone has a physical or non-physical (hidden) disability.

As such, local authorities were provided with a 'model' application form reflective of the changes to the Blue Badge eligibility criteria. The questions an applicant is initially asked quickly identifies whether or not they are 'eligible without further

assessment' (previously known as automatic), 'eligible subject to further assessment' (previously known as discretionary) or 'not eligible.'

In terms of the information someone with a hidden disability would need to provide, this will vary dependent on the responses the applicants gives regarding their individual situation, the health conditions they describe, the impact this has on their ability complete a journey, and the type of benefits they are in receipt of.

The attachment I referred to previously that accompanied the Member Briefing dated 23rd August 2019 provides an overview of the supporting evidence an applicant would be required to provided dependent on the criteria they meet.

For example, as stated by the DfT, one of the qualifying 'eligible without further assessment' criteria' includes:

- people who are in receipt of the mobility component of PIP and who have obtained 10 points specifically for Descriptor E under the "planning and following journeys" activity, on the grounds that they are unable to undertake any journey because it would cause them overwhelming psychological distress.

Applicants who do not meet the DfT 'eligible without further assessment' criteria may be considered to be 'eligible subject to further assessment.'

Legislation requires that local authorities must obtain certification from an appropriate expert assessor if they are unable to make a clear and robust decision on eligibility using cross-checking or desk-based assessment.

In such cases, applicants are advised of the need for further evidence. Applicants are provided with a Professional Interest Questionnaire (provided to Local Authorities by the DfT) and this must be completed by the professional involved in their diagnosis, care or ongoing treatment (not a GP).

It is the applicant's responsibility to provide the evidence required which may take time if this involves them asking other organisations for information.

In summary, the reason someone applies for a Blue Badge is personal to each applicant and their responses to the questions asked in the application form will determine (based on the DfT criteria) the type of evidence and type of information required.

If there is a specific case you would like to discuss in more detail, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Helen Barker