



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref

Julie Meese
Community, Engagement and Participation Officer
Conwy and Denbighshire

Julie Meese julie@standnw.org

04 February 2025

Dear Julie

Petition – P-06-1380 “Make blue badge applications lifelong for individuals who have a lifelong diagnosis.”

Thank you for your emails to me and my officials; this letter is a response to all the correspondence you have submitted to the Welsh Government. I am also grateful for the time you have given to meeting my officials, most recently on 7 January 2025 with Caroline Thomas MS, Chair of the Petitions Committee. I enclose the notes of that meeting for your reference.

I appreciate you sharing your experiences and explaining why you feel it is important to offer lifelong Blue Badges for individuals with lifelong diagnoses. While I understand your perspective, Blue Badge eligibility is determined by mobility needs rather than medical diagnoses, as mobility can vary even among those with similar conditions. With the limited resources of the Welsh Government, I cannot pursue legislation to make Blue Badges lifelong. Additionally, it is important to protect the scheme's fairness and effectiveness.

Local authorities administering the scheme currently have the discretion to determine if an applicant's impairment is unlikely to improve. In such cases, they can streamline the application process through the “Not for Reassessment” (NfR) route. This allows applicants to renew their badge by simply providing proof of identity, residency, and an up-to-date photograph.

I acknowledge that the NfR route does not always work smoothly for applicants. To address this, my officials will continue collaborating with local authorities to enhance the guidance and streamline the process. We will explore with local authorities the potential for a voluntary Code of Practice to set out more clearly the service that applicants can expect. For those unable to use the online Blue Badge Digital System, we will work with local authorities to ensure alternative systems are in place to provide additional support. The Welsh Government will also maintain funding for the Independent Advisory Service in Wales to assist local authorities with assessments and to provide ongoing training for assessors.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Additionally, I will review the recommendations from the upcoming Blue Badge Research Project and take forward any necessary improvements.

The eligibility criteria for a blue badge has been subject to many reviews, reports and consultations and regulations since 2002.

An Inquiry was held by the Senedd's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee in 2019 on the 'Blue Badge Scheme in Wales: Eligibility and Implementation'. The published responses can be found here:

[Written Statement by the Welsh Government to the report by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on Blue Badge Scheme in Wales: Eligibility and Implementation](#)

[Welsh Government response to the report by the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee on the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales: Eligibility and Implementation](#)

Officials have undertaken considerable work to date following the Inquiry. There are currently two recommendations which are still being progressed linked to the blue badge research project. These recommendations relate to a review of the eligibility criteria for a blue badge considering whether there are further conditions which should automatically qualify a person to receive a blue badge, whether the process for undertaking further assessment is robust enough to respond to the various needs of those who apply, and whether the needs of those who receive a cancer diagnosis are adequately met. The second recommendation relates to Welsh Government updating its guidance to local authorities to ensure that the current arrangement of expediting applications by those with a terminal diagnosis becomes mandatory.

Regarding the other issues you raised, we recognise that many railway stations are not fully accessible and that bus facilities for disabled people could be improved. While rail infrastructure and bus layout regulations are reserved to the UK Government, the Welsh Government continues to work with the rail and bus industries to improve accessibility. For rail infrastructure we own, such as the Core Valley Lines, we are delivering step-free access at nearly every station.

I understand your concerns regarding Blue Badge parking being replaced with EV spaces, the allocation of spaces in car parks, and arrangements for events. These issues have been raised with the local authorities, and I share your desire for a solution that ensures accessibility for all. As the local parking authority, they are best placed to address these matters, and I would encourage you to continue the discussion with them to ensure your points are fully considered.

You mentioned that Active Travel schemes could disadvantage disabled drivers by limiting parking close to shops for those in wheelchairs. The example you provided, regarding a proposed scheme in Colwyn Bay, has been noted, and I have asked officials to raise your concerns with Conwy Council to ensure they are carefully considered.

Finally, my officials have had the opportunity to meet with you and your petitioners, listen to your views, and carefully consider the shared lived experiences. At this stage, I don't believe there is a need for further meetings regarding your petition, but please know that your concerns have been fully noted and valued. I have asked my officials to contact you again once we have had the opportunity to work with local authorities to establish clearer timescales for the next steps described above.

I am copying this letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip, the Chair of the Petitions Committee, Gareth Davies MS, Janet Finch-Saunders MS, Llyr Gruffydd MS, Mark Isherwood MS, Darren Millar MS, and Jack Sargeant MS.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Skates', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Ken Skates AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Drafnidiaeth a Gogledd Cymru
Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales

Notes of virtual meeting with petitioners STAND North Wales – 7/1/25.

Blue Badge petition – P06 - 1380

Date: Tuesday, 7 January 2025 @10am

Present

Julie Meese, Community, Engagement and Participation Officer - Conwy and Denbighshire (JM)

2 Petitioners with lived experience Kirsty and Nige

Caroline Thomas MS, Chair Petitions Committee (CT)

Chris Warner, Deputy Director – Transport Strategy & Policy (CW)

Ian Bradfield (IB)

Sue Blunt (SB)

Lorraine Walsh (LW)

Purpose

To update the petitioners following discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales on 3 December, following a meeting with the petitioners who shared their lived experiences on 4 November.

CW confirmed discussions had been held with the CS and the team had shared the lived experiences with him and the key points of the petition.

CW reported that the CS was keen to make a difference to applicants for blue badges but had decided not to make legislative changes to the badge duration. There are risk factors and resource issues involved. However, he would like the Blue Badge Scheme to work well and as it should. He acknowledges there is still scope to improve the service and consistency of the scheme across local authorities and improvements with Not for Reassessments (NfR) under the further assessment eligibility criteria. Applicants with the greatest need who may need further support to apply/re-apply for a badge should be supported. The CS would like policy leads to continue to work with local authorities to encourage consistency and share best practice. One way is possibly developing a code of practice and ask all local authorities in Wales to sign up to this.

JM responded and other petitioners individually stating they were disappointed with this outcome and the length of time it had taken to date but they were grateful CW had updated the CS.

CW advised the next steps would be for the CS to write to the petitioners to confirm his decision and send a copy to the Petitions Committee.

CT said this was a social justice issue which she had also raised with Jane Hutt MS, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip. She observed that blue

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badge applicants were struggling, and she disagreed with the process. The NfR needed strengthening and local authorities needed to be more helpful. She was concerned NfR was not applied to PIP based applicants. CT said she had helped an applicant who because they could not find the letter of diagnosis asked their GP and it has resulted in a £30 charge for information. CT also commented LAs are too strict and should be more lenient. NfR should be used more often.

SB explained the eligibility criteria for a blue badge. “Without further assessment” (automatic) eligibility is based on higher awards of certain benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). These recipients would have already undergone a thorough assessment with the DWP. People who have a severe sight impairment or who are registered blind with appropriate certification also are eligible under the automatic route.

“Further assessment” (discretionary) eligibility is available under “mobility and cognitive” criteria. This further assessment is to ensure it remains robust and consistent. This captures people who are over the age of two years old and fall within one or more certain descriptors:

- “Has a permanent and substantial impairment which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking.
- Drives a vehicle regularly and has a impairment in both arms and is unable to operate or has considerable difficulty in operating all or some types of parking equipment.
- Holds an SR (special rules) 1 form (DWP).”

There are additional descriptors for children under the age of three years old, relating to needing to be near a vehicle for treatment for that condition to be given in that vehicle or to take them to a place where such treatment can be given. Or a child on account of that condition must always be accompanied by bulky medical equipment which can not be carried around without difficulty with the child.

SB confirmed that the cognitive eligibility criteria apply to people who have difficulty planning and following a familiar journey to such an extent that they need constant supervision. Examples included autism, Alzheimer’s or dementia, stroke, learning disabilities, mental health and head injuries. The eligibility was still based on mobility but lots of things would be considered including not being aware of danger. It was also noted that the blue badge is based on mobility and not on medical conditions. Many people are diagnosed with medical conditions but not to the extent that it always affects their mobility in life and often some medical conditions would need to progress to make someone’s mobility reach the stage when they would be eligible for a blue badge.

SB acknowledged that some applicants may need further help and support if they are unable to apply online or unable to ask family or friends to support them. The team will work with local authorities to explore further assistance that may be required especially where some are struggling.

JM shared disappointment and asked for timescales on local authorities signing up to a code of practice and updates on actions and timeframes.

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Other petitioner Nige – shared his disappointment and concerns and frustrations of those applying for a badge. He raised financial savings with applications and consistency with systems processing these. He was pleased car park spaces had been raised and often existing spaces were eroding and not maintained.

Petitioner KH restated her concerns on the scheme and when having to re-apply and her experience of a delay in PIP reassessment and the worry of possibly not having a blue badge to use daily.

CW referred to other concerns and experiences raised previously by some of the petitioners on parking and commented that these were a matter for local authorities. This has been shared with local authorities. Other matters and concerns raised on accessibility with rail and buses are a matter for UK Government as many of the concerns raised were not devolved matters for Ministers in Wales.

SB commented that many of the concerns shared have been previously raised by stakeholders and people with lived experience in the Disability Rights Taskforce group which had several workstreams, one being transport.

CW concluded the meeting by saying he will update the CS following the meeting and request the CS to write to JM main petitioner confirming his decision. However, he emphasised the CS was keen to improve things and make a difference and very much welcomed and valued the feedback shared from those with lived experiences.