

Blue Badges: How and why has the Welsh Government extended the scheme?

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This is the third in a series of blog articles discussing the Blue Badge scheme. Tuesday's blog explained the assessment and eligibility criteria, and yesterday's blog described the application and appeals process.

The Blue Badge scheme provides a national arrangement of parking concessions for disabled people, and runs throughout the UK.

Extending eligibility to those with cognitive impairments

In June 2014, the then Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, Edwina Hart, announced that the [Blue Badge eligibility criteria would be extended](#) to include people with cognitive impairments.



In May 2013, the Minister commissioned an Expert Review Group to consider the Blue Badge scheme in Wales, with a particular focus on extending the eligibility criteria to include people with cognitive impairments. This group made a number of recommendations to the Welsh Government, including that it should:

- Amend regulations to extend the current eligibility criteria to include people with cognitive impairments, who are unable to travel safely and independently;
- Recruit seven Blue Badge Ambassadors, one for each Local Health Board, to assess badge applications for people with cognitive impairments and provide independent advice across Wales to enhance consistency of decision-making; and



- Introduce a dedicated application form for people applying under the discretionary cognitive impairment or safety criteria, with a focus on using plain and simple language.

In September 2013, the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport agreed to take forward the Expert Review Group's recommendations.

A consultation exercise was undertaken from October 2013 to January 2014 to seek views on:

- Including cognitive impairments under the eligibility criteria;
- Appointing Blue Badge Ambassadors based within Local Health Boards to assess applications under the cognitive impairment criteria; and
- Improving enforcement and investigation in cases of abuse of the scheme.

The regulations extending the eligibility criteria came into force in December 2014, along with new guidance for local authorities.

Introducing temporary badges

In May 2015, the then Minister for Economy, Science and Transport commissioned and established the Blue Badge Task and Finish Group to review the administration of the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales. The Group's report made 13 recommendations, including:

- The Welsh Government should consider providing a temporary badges system where qualifying conditions are likely to last at least 12 months.

The Welsh Government responded by either accepting, or accepting in principle, all recommendations.

On 1 October 2016, the [Blue Badge scheme in Wales was extended](#) to include those experiencing temporary but substantial injuries or illness. Under the extended scheme Blue Badges are issued for one year to people who are **'unable to walk or have considerable difficulty walking by reason of a temporary but substantial disability which is expected to last for a period of at least 12 months'**. When the period of issue expires, the badge holder will be able to reapply for a temporary or permanent badge as they require. Examples of a temporary but substantial disability may include:



- A person recovering from complex leg fractures sometimes managed with external fixators for periods of well over a year;
- A person recovering from stroke or head injury that has impacted on their mobility;
- A person recovering from spinal trauma which impacts their mobility;
- A person with a serious illness where the treatment may be debilitating, for example, treatment for cancer; and
- A person with severe functional leg impairments who is awaiting or who has undergone joint replacement (e.g. unilateral or bilateral hip, knee etc).

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