

P-06-1380 Make Blue badge Applications Lifelong for individuals who have a lifelong diagnosis - Petitioners to Committee, 23rd January 2024

Good afternoon

We are writing to give feedback on the reply received from Lee Waters MS regarding the Blue badge 'Life Award'. We learned about the 'Life Award' shortly before our petition came to an end. Please see attached

We appreciate the feedback on this matter. However, we are concerned that Lee Waters reply has revealed some gaps and inconsistencies in the information we have received. We too have been looking into the life award blue badge scheme, which we only learned about in the final days of our petition. We have also consulted with many of our families and none of them had been informed that such a scheme existed.

Through the FOI Act 2000, we requested from 6 Local Authorities in North Wales the following information

1. Are you aware that there is an option for lifelong blue badges?
2. How many individuals have been awarded lifelong blue badges? If so, could you provide us with a breakdown for the last 5 years?
3. What qualifications or training do desk-based assessors have in health, ALN or disability

The responses confirmed what we said in our previous letter, that some local authorities were either unaware of the life award or had a different understanding of what it meant. Please see attached.

Further points

- The 'Lifetime award' does not apply if the route you apply is PIP/DLA based, many apply through this route
- The majority of the counties in North Wales haven't issued any life awards, except if they have gone through Independent Assessor (IAS) (We are waiting for further information from Gwynedd)
- Desk-based assessors do not hold any qualifications in Health, ALN or Disabilities, Parents from our STAND for Change groups have raised a serious concern about the lack of qualifications of desk-based assessors. They believe that anyone who makes such a decision about Health/ALN/Disabilities should have relevant expertise in those areas. Otherwise, how can they ensure a fair and accurate assessment?
- *According to the guidance, the local authority must conduct a thorough assessment based on the evidence from healthcare professionals, such as reports, letters (not appointment letters), summaries and assessments by relevant healthcare professionals involved in an applicant's care.*

- We understand the need to maintain the scheme's integrity and avoid misuse, but we are concerned about the excessive focus on preventing fraud over the benefits of a blue badge and reasons why someone would apply. We question how making people reapply every three years reduces fraud. We suggest that updating information could be done less frequently, for example every 5 or 10 years, like a driving licence. The software already exists. We question Lee Waters statement saying the requirement of renewing 3 years is to monitor applications eligibility? The scheme needs to have an understanding of what a lifelong disability means, their needs are not going to improve, and therefore should not have to face the stress of renewing their badges. This would also reduce costs and workloads for the Local Authorities.
- The application process can also be a barrier, they are long and intrusive. For users that are required to update their information, a better alternative would include providing a different form that only asks for the information that is needed, instead of requiring them to fill out the entire form again.
- On all Local Authorities websites, it states that there is no appeal process, this can cause people to feel helpless and confused when they don't agree with decisions made.
- We have found that there are variations of the IAS process, some stating that it is an appeal process and others stating it is part of the application process.

There is a need to ensure consistency and quality in the services provided by all counties. Local Authorities should also provide clear and accessible information on their websites which includes a much needed Appeal process.

Our petition is to change the way blue badges are awarded to people who need them for life. We would like the opportunity to meet with the Petitions Committee and Lee Waters, to explain our reasons and answer any questions you may have. We hope you will consider our request and give us a chance to share our views.

We understand that the Petition is under consideration with the Petitions Committee, do you have any update on this.

Many thanks

Julie Meese

Community, Engagement and Participation Officer - Conwy and Denbighshire