

BB 13

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 Rhondda Cynon Taf

Response from: Citizens Advice Rhondda Cynon Taf

We are a member of National Citizens Advice who are based in Rhondda Cynon Taff.

We fight for a fairer and more just society empowering people by giving them a voice and supports them to improve their quality of life. We achieve this by providing free, independent, impartial, and confidential advice to people across Rhondda Cynon Taff to help them overcome their problems. We specialise in debt and welfare benefits and also deliver general advice from our offices in Pontypridd and Mountain Ash and from another 25 venues across the borough.

We undertake evidence based campaigning to improve policies and practices that negatively affect people's lives. During 2017/18, we supported over 13000 people, addressing over 65000 different issues locally.

Many of our beneficiaries are vulnerable and/or are from the most disadvantaged communities in RCT, whereby 67% of clients have a long term health condition or disability, and face difficulties such as claiming benefits, employment, housing, managing money and debt.

Terms of reference

The Committee's terms of reference for its inquiry are to consider:

- The impact of extending the eligibility criteria for a Blue Badge in Wales, and
 - whether further extensions to the criteria are needed;
- The practical implementation and consistency of the Blue Badge scheme across
 - Wales, including assessments, fees and enforcement,
- The support and information that is available to Blue Badge applicants in Wales

The following are two case studies that we have had in recent months where individuals who had previously qualified for the Blue Badge scheme have been refused. We have seen nearly 100 people with issues relating to the blue badge scheme in the last year. The examples below show how two of our clients with severe health issues have had their blue badge application turned down by Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC and the impact this will have on their lives.

Case Study 1

A 77 year old male has had a blue badge for 12 years as he has limited mobility due to osteoarthritis and has heart problems which means he gets very short of breath when walking short distances and cannot walk further than 30 metres if he is carrying shopping. The client relies on his car to attend appointments and to do his weekly shopping, this allows him to maintain his independence. Travel by train or bus is not an option for the client, he needs to be close to the shops or the venue for his appointment to avoid a long walk, which would result in moderate to extreme pain due to his arthritis and breathlessness because of his heart condition.

The client attended our drop in service asking for help to challenge a decision by the Local Authority to not renew his blue badge. The client had already applied to Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC under the discretionary eligibility rules, but had been turned down. When the client asked if he could challenge the decision he was informed by the Local Authority that he would need to complete a form for the Independent Advisory Service if he would like a reconsideration. The client needed an appointment with one of our advisers to complete the form as he was not confident to complete it himself.

Case Study 2

A 66 year old female who has numerous health problems including bowel incontinence, heart disease, asthma and arthritis. Previously the client had

been automatically entitled to a blue badge due to receiving the high mobility component of DLA. The client's latest award moved this to standard mobility which meant she had lost that automatic entitlement. The client applied for a blue badge and received a letter refusing her renewal claim, though the letter gave no reason for the refusal. This refusal will mean the client is virtually housebound and entirely reliant on others to perform everyday tasks.