

# **Blue Badge Reform Programme - Frequently Asked Questions**

## **Reform**

### **Q: Why is the scheme being reformed?**

- Few changes have been made to the Blue Badge scheme in England since it was established in the 1970s. It needs to be reformed to reduce current problems, deal with future challenges and help ensure that disabled people have fair and equal access to the benefits the concession offers regardless of where they live.
- Current problems include high levels of abuse and misuse of badges, increasing demand for badges and pressures to extend eligibility, inconsistent administration and assessment and inefficient service delivery by some local authorities.

### **Q: What measures are you delivering in the reform programme?**

- The programme consists of a number of complementary projects that, when implemented together, will help local authorities to improve operational efficiency, reduce public sector costs and improve customer services. They will also help to prevent abuse of the scheme.
- The main measures are to:
  - Implement a new badge design that is harder to copy, forge and alter. This includes changing arrangements for printing, personalising and distributing badges to prevent fraud from happening in the first place;
  - Amend primary and secondary legislation to provide improved powers for local authorities to tackle abuse and fraud;
  - Transfer control of eligibility assessment funding from the NHS to local authorities;
  - Amend legislation to require wider use of independent mobility assessments to determine eligibility, including where previously that assessment was carried out by a GP;
  - Extend eligibility to more disabled children under the age of 3 with specific medical conditions;
  - Provide continuous automatic entitlement to a badge to specific severely disabled service personnel and veterans;
  - Establish with local authorities a service improvement project that will deliver operational efficiency savings, help to reduce and prevent abuse and improve customer services. The project will also deliver an on-line application facility and should result in faster, more automatic renewals for people whose circumstances do not change between renewal periods;
  - Raise the maximum fee for a badge that local authorities can charge from £2 to £10;
  - Enable disabled Armed Forces personnel and their families posted overseas on UK bases to apply for a badge;

- Issue new good practice guidance to local authorities to help them make improvements in scheme administration and eligibility assessment

**Q: Why is it taking so long? Reforms were promised 2 years ago, but nothing has changed.**

- In 2008, the previous Government set out a high-level strategy to reform the scheme within five years. Our reforms will substantially be delivered within a year.
- The first changes will be delivered as early as April this year.

## **Ensuring Fair Allocation of Badges**

**Q: Why are you requiring wider use of independent mobility assessments?**

- Independent health professionals such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists are often best placed to assess eligibility due to their professional knowledge of mobility.
- Some applicants may find that they are refused a badge on renewal if their original eligibility assessment was less robust than that undertaken by an independent health professional. This is not because of a change to the groups of disabled people who are eligible for a badge, but because of a more robust assessment of that eligibility.

**Q: Who will pay for mobility assessments?**

- From April 2011, we are transferring control of existing funds for eligibility assessments from the NHS to local authorities to support the use of independent mobility assessments.

**Q: Will this money be ring-fenced for Blue Badge administration?**

- No. The Coalition Government has made clear that it wants to provide greater financial autonomy to local authorities.

**Q: What changes are you planning to the scheme's eligibility criteria?**

- We're closing an existing gap in eligibility by extending the benefit to more disabled children, under the age of three, with specific medical conditions. Once these children reach the age of three they will be able to apply for a badge under the other categories of eligibility.
- We're ensuring that severely disabled service personnel and veterans are not disadvantaged by giving continuous automatic entitlement to a badge to those who receive specific tariffs of the new Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and have a permanent mobility-related disability. This will make it easier and quicker for eligible service personnel and veterans to get a badge and will reduce unnecessary assessment.
- We intend to amend primary legislation to remove the residency requirement for disabled Armed Forces personnel and their families who are

posted overseas on UK bases. These people are currently unable to apply for a badge.

- We've commissioned independent research to look at the impacts on existing holders and local authorities of extending eligibility to people with a severe temporary mobility impairment, lasting at least one year. We'll make a decision on this later in the year.

**Q: What extensions to eligibility are *not* included in reforms?**

- We have no plans to extend eligibility to any other groups of disabled people. With over 2.5 million badges already on issue, it is important that we ensure the scheme remains sustainable in the long term and protects preferential parking facilities for those who most need them.
- Moving forward, we've taken the decision to focus the scheme on helping those individuals with the most severe mobility problems and the greatest accessibility needs.

**Q: Will you be updating your guidance for local authorities?**

- Yes. Good practice, web-based, non statutory guidance will be issued in spring 2011. It will support the implementation of other measures in the reform programme and will be updated to reflect these other measures as they are delivered.
- The guidance will cover all aspects of the Blue Badge scheme including applications, assessments and enforcement principles.

## **Delivering Efficiency Savings and Improving Customer Services**

**Q: What does the common service improvement project involve?**

- We have been working closely with local authorities to develop a new way of printing badges and delivering common services.
- The common service improvement project will offer:
  - secure printing, supply and distribution of badges;
  - a common store of key information on badges and badge holders to enable verification checks to be made quickly and easily, either from a PC or possibly via smart phones or similar technology;
  - a web-based management information system for local authorities;
  - a standard on-line application form.

## **Improved and Effective Prevention of Abuse and Enforcement**

**Q: What changes are you making to the badges?**

- The badge will be harder to copy and to forge and the physical security features of the badge will be enhanced, with the use of new technologies and printing techniques.

- A single supplier will be contracted to print and distribute badges; to improve security in production, distribution and supply; to reduce production costs; and to help local authorities realise efficiency savings.

**Q: What changes are you making to enforcement powers?**

- We plan to introduce new or amended powers for local authorities to tackle abuse and fraud. In particular to:
  - extend the grounds available to local authorities to refuse to issue and to withdraw badges
  - provide local authorities with a power to cancel badges that have been lost, stolen, have expired, or have been withdrawn for mis-use
  - provide local authority authorised officers with a power to recover, on-the-spot, badges that have been cancelled or misused
  - amend existing legislation to clarify wrongful use of a badge and the powers to inspect badges
  - new powers will give local authorities the ability to undertake more effective enforcement activity should they wish to do so
  - changes will result in the greater availability of parking spaces, protecting the scheme for genuine badge holders who have the most need.

## **The Badge Fee**

**Q: What changes are you making to the fee?**

- Under current legislation, local authorities can charge a badge fee of up to £2 for those whose applications are successful. This fee is payable on issue of a badge (not on application) and has not changed since 1983.
- The legislation will be changed so that local authorities can charge successful applicants up to a maximum of £10. It will still be for local authorities to decide the fee that will be payable locally.