

## Blue Badge Information Dorset

### **Blue Badge background:**

The Blue Badge is for on-street parking and is owned by the Department for Transport (DfT), but guidance is provided to local authorities to administer it on their behalf. The guidance is underpinned by several pieces of legislation, which defines categoric elements, like the cost of the badge and the issue period; however, much of the guidance is left for the individual authority to interpret. This has created very different ways of delivering the service from one authority to another. The only consistency is for applicants who automatically qualify for a badge because of the benefit reward they receive (e.g. DLA at the higher rate of mobility, or PIP with 8 points or more for the moving around component of the mobility sections etc.)

### **The central issue:**

Non-physical or 'hidden' conditions were never specifically covered in the guidance; instead it used broad references to 'trouble with walking'. This meant that some authorities interpreted this literally, deciding that Blue Badges were only for those who physically couldn't walk, whereas others (like Dorset) decided that that 'trouble with walking' extends to the mental capacity to walk safely near traffic.

### **What's changing?**

The DfT's recognised the confusion and on 30 August 2019, new legislation will come into force. The guidance document has already been updated and we're redesigning the application process based on this. The new guidance officially acknowledges eligibility for people that are a danger to themselves and others whilst near traffic, but it also extends to people who experience 'very considerable psychological distress' whilst in open/public spaces.

### **How will this affect disabled parking?**

We recognise that the current process for applying for a badge is not as robust as other authorities, and there is a likelihood that there are a number of people who hold a badge that are not strictly eligible. Unless we can make the process for determining eligibility more robust, there is a concern that the number of badge-holders will increase to the point where local provisions for the disabled will become entirely insufficient, and general traffic management will be affected with increased numbers parking on double-yellow lines. Therefore, we want to enhance the application process, to make it robust enough to ensure that only those eligible for a badge get one, without making it overly cumbersome for anyone applying.

### **How will this affect the application process?**

For many people, not a lot will change. People will still be able to apply over the phone and online, either on behalf of themselves or someone else, and for those that are automatically eligible (people with certain levels of PIP, DLA etc.), the process will be virtually the same as it is now. However, for people who are not automatically eligible, there will now be more detailed questions, a section to enter healthcare professional and specialist support details, and most notably, an expectation to provide documents to support their application. There is nothing specific we request, but suggest that it could be a diagnosis

letter, a care plan, medication/treatments documents, or a patient summary; basically we invite anything that helps evidence the answers provided in the assessment.

**Who did you discuss the changes with?**

Much of the process decisions were determined by the guidance provided by the DfT and their 'model application form'; however we've engaged with Occupational Therapists, Community Mental Health Teams, Councillors and disabled access groups to gain valuable insight, which has helped sculpt the new process; we're also entering into a period of testing, which will no doubt influence further changes. Also, even though an Equality Impact Assessment was completed by the DfT, we have completed one locally to ensure that all relevant points affecting the residents of Dorset have been considered.

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