



Holl Aelodau'r Cynulliad

15 Gorffennaf 2015

Annwyl Aelod

Ymhellach i'r datganiad i'r Cyfarfod Llawn dyddiedig 28 Ebrill, ysgrifennaf i ddarparu diweddariad ar gynnydd Grŵp Gorchwyl a Gorffen y Bathodyn Glas.

Yr ydwyf wedi comisiynu'r Grŵp i ddarparu argymhellion ar sut i adolygu'r cynllun yng Nghymru i sicrhau bod y rhai hynny sydd mewn angen yn medru cael budd o'r gwasanaeth.

Mae gwaith y Grŵp yn mynd ymlaen yn ddi-oed ac 'rydwyf yn ddiolchgar i'r Grŵp ac i'r Cadeirydd Val Lloyd. Tra bydd y Grŵp yn cyflwyno eu argymhellion terfynol i mi yn yr hydref, atodaf yr adroddiad interim er gwybodaeth.

*Edwina Hart*

Dear Minister

## **Interim Report - Blue Badge Task & Finish Group**

I am writing to provide you with an interim report on the work of the Blue Badge Task and Finish group that you convened on the 14 May.

Firstly I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the opportunity to chair the group and to review such an interesting and challenging area. This is an area of work that is of vital importance to people who are eligible for a Blue Badge to promote the quality of their lives. I am delighted to be able to focus on users who quite rightly should be central in the review of this area.

The work of the group is progressing well, and I am indebted to the other members of the group; Wendy Ashton, Robert Lloyd Griffiths and Jonathan Morgan for their support and who bring a wealth of valuable experience and professional expertise commensurate with the remit you have set out. I would like to put on record my thanks for the insight and the valuable contribution members of the group are making to this process.

Minister you have asked us consider evidence including:

- Information concerning the current operation of the Blue Badge scheme in Wales and experience in the other devolved administrations of the United Kingdom.
- The current eligibility criteria for a Blue Badge.
- The views and experience of applicants and existing badge holders.
- Information and experience of local authorities, GPs, and the Assessment Service in application of the scheme.
- The views of other health care and legal professionals as is necessary

In order that the Group is to make recommendations on:

- Improvements to administering the Blue Badge Scheme in Wales
- Improvements to the Welsh Government Verification Toolkit
- The role of the Independent Advisory Service and thresholds for referral to the service under the discretionary eligibility criteria for a Blue Badge, and
- In making recommendation be mindful of any unintended consequences and potential impact on existing badge holders.

Since inception we have held six meetings and are approaching the work within three phases; the first phase focussed on scrutinising the current system, and has been completed. The group is now in the in processes of the taking evidence from key stakeholders. A third phase will focus on developing best practice recommendations to improve the scheme based on the evidence we have gathered in previous phases.

In our work to date we have collected evidence from a range of sources and have been particularly pleased with the ready engagement by some sectors including central service providers, user groups, health professionals and the police. This has included statistical data, narrative views, informed opinions and case studies. We have also considered evidence provided by Assembly Members.

It has been interesting to consider the statistical data which clearly shows that England and Scotland issue far fewer badges than Wales. We understand that both England and Scotland introduced consistent assessment processes that include independent medical assessments. In the past three years approximately 4.5% of the population in both England and Scotland were issued a badge compared to 6.8% in Wales.

While there will be some degree of correlation between Wales' industrial heritage and its historically higher rates of disability, we are keen to explore this further to ensure we understand fully the reasons for these differences in light of our recommendations. Further work is therefore envisaged by the group within the area during the third phase of our work

We are aware of the ageing population in Wales that will result in significant demographic changes over the next 20 to 30 years. As a consequence we are concerned to ensure that the Blue Badge scheme is not only fit for purpose but also future proofed as far as possible.

Additionally we are aware that value for money is essential when using public funds and have considered how to meet the needs of users in the most effective and efficient ways. As a result we have been considering models of how this can be done in Wales. This will require further information and we are considering how to utilise our valuable evidence sessions to accomplish this.

We are not yet in a position to make final recommendations as we are still collating evidence but there are some key areas emerging that need further consideration that may feature in our final report in October.

- We have received evidenced from a number of different sources including;
  - College of Occupational Therapists
  - Customer Focus Wales
  - Disability Wales
  - Disabled Motoring UK
  - GPC Cymru
  - Independent Advisory Service
  - Northgate Public Services
  - Police Liaison Unit
  - WLGA and local authorities

- We are concerned about the lack of consistency of approach in the application of the scheme across Wales which is supported by the evidence we have received. The group consider that consistent processes are essential to ensure that decisions on eligibility are the same across Wales to promote equality of access to the scheme and to prevent people being put at a disadvantage because of where they live.
- We have reviewed the Toolkit and guidance and consider there is evidence that while it has provided clarity to the scheme it appears it has not been applied consistently. It is likely we will make recommendations for improvements and greater clarity to the toolkit
- Evidence received to date shows that where appropriately trained health professionals are involved in the process they appear to be clearly of benefit in the assessment process in particular functional specialists such as occupational and physiotherapists We are also looking closely at the current and future role of GPs in the process.
- Evidence from several sources has indicated that while not fully utilised the presence of a single coherent advisory service, staffed with the appropriate skill mix has provided invaluable in supplementing local authority decision making.
- There may also be scope for introducing simplified processes for those cases where robust assessments have already identified people with the greatest mobility needs and it is likely that we will make recommendations in this area
- A key area on which we have received evidence is in regard to enforcement. We are exploring this area further to consider different approaches that could be employed to improve enforcement and any consequential impacts on the wide range of needs of Blue Badge holders. This includes private parking where engagement with operators may help promote enforcement.
- Our early consideration has identified that the Welsh government lacks legislative competence to address some of the issues that we have encountered, however we are likely to make recommendations in this respect to resolve inconsistency across Wales.
- An area that you might wish to take early action is the area of badges for people with significant but temporary impairments and how they may benefit from a Blue Badge and we will be making recommendations in this respect when we report in October.

We are now at the midway point of our review and recognise there is much evidence to consider. We are conscious that the Blue badge scheme provides a lifeline to disabled people in Wales and they are at the heart of our deliberations.

Yours sincerely

*W. Lloyd*