

News story: Review of Blue Badge fraud as scheme is extended to those with 'hidden disabilities'

- Blue Badge scheme to be extended to people who have less visible disabilities, making journeys more accessible
- this change to the scheme is the biggest in nearly 50 years with the extended criteria coming into force on 30 August 2019
- review also launched into Blue Badge fraud and ways of reducing misuse

People with hidden disabilities will soon be able to access Blue Badge parking permits, thanks to the rollout of [new guidance](#) today (June 15 2019).

For drivers or passengers with dementia, anxiety disorders or reduced mobility, the anticipation of travel difficulties such as finding a parking space can build on top of the stress of the journey itself.

The new guidance, which represents the biggest change to the scheme since the 1970s, will offer a lifeline to people who often find road travel difficult by providing better access to work and other amenities. It will also help combat loneliness by enabling them to stay connected to family and friends.

The expanded scheme coincides with the launch of a new task force to toughen up enforcement and help councils tackle fraudulent use of the badges.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

As a society we don't do enough for people with hidden disabilities.

I hope this change to Blue Badge guidance will make a real difference to people's lives.

At the end of 2018, the Local Government Association estimated that the theft of Blue Badges had risen by 45 percent in 12 months and increased six-fold since 2013.

The review will look at ensuring Blue Badges are used correctly and improving public understanding so that those with hidden disabilities can use the badges with confidence.

Minister for Disabled People Justin Tomlinson said:

It's unacceptable that people with hidden disabilities still face discrimination when using disabled facilities like parking spaces.

Extending the Blue Badge scheme is a watershed moment in ensuring those with hidden disabilities are able to travel with greater ease and live more independent lives.

To help councils with the expected increase in applications, the department has agreed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to provide £1.7 million in the first year of the programme.

The Department for Transport has been working with specialists to expand the eligibility criteria for the badges, which will now include people who cannot walk as part of a journey without considerable psychological distress or the risk of serious harm.

The Blue Badge scheme already means people with physical disabilities can park closer to their destination than other drivers, as they are less able to take public transport or walk longer distances.

The extension of these badges to those with less visible conditions was announced last summer following an 8 week consultation on widening the eligibility criteria. It is an important part of the government's drive for greater parity between physical and mental health.

Jane Harris, Director of External Affairs at the National Autistic Society, said:

The changes will make a huge difference to thousands of autistic people and their families across England – helping them to go out in the way many others take for granted.

Just leaving the house is incredibly difficult for many autistic people – and involves detailed preparation. Some autistic people have no concept of the dangers of the road while others are so anxious about plans going wrong, like not being able to find a parking space, that they don't go out at all. Having a Blue Badge will be life-changing and help many to reduce loneliness and isolation.

A task group will be set up with key organisations to gather ideas and evidence on how to improve the consistency of council enforcement to tackle fraud and misuse.

The review will also look at ensuring that there is greater public awareness of which groups are eligible for a badge, when it can and cannot be used, and how to surrender the badge when it is no longer needed, for example if the badge holder dies.

While the new criteria will give clear and consistent guidelines on Blue Badge eligibility for the whole of England, not everyone with non-physical disabilities will qualify for a badge. It will be up to the relevant local authority to decide if an applicant meets the eligibility criteria, as is

currently the case.

Last year, the government set out its plans to improve accessibility across all modes of transport in the [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#) which launched on 25 July 2018. The strategy aims to make the UK's transport network fully inclusive by 2030.