

Department of Transport

2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EE Telephone 2123414

Press Notice

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ORANGE BADGE SCHEME - PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

Kenneth Clarke, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport today announced proposals designed to eliminate abuse and improve the operation of the Orange Badge Scheme which grants parking concessions to disabled people.

In a written reply to a Parliamentary question from John Hannam MP (Exeter) Mr Clarke said:

"The Orange Badge Scheme is an extremely valuable aid to mobility for the disabled which allows certain exemptions from parking regulations for vehicles carrying disabled and blind people who would otherwise have great difficulty in making important visits by car. However the government has been concerned by evidence of growing abuse of the scheme and misuse of the badges by able-bodied people. This leads to unnecessary proliferation of the badges and traffic congestion for other motorists. Misuse also tends to bring the whole scheme into disrepute and puts at risk the sympathetic treatment and the benefits which disabled people should expect from it.

The Government has therefore already introduced a provision into the Disabled Persons Act 1981 which has just received Royal Assent, to make misuse of the Orange Badge by people who are not entitled to it, a specific and additional traffic offence with penalties. At the moment, misuse of the Orange Badge only gives rise to an ordinary parking offence.

"This measure is, however, only one element of a wider package of measures to reduce abuse and to improve the operation of the scheme generally. We propose to reduce abuse in the issue of badges by defining more clearly in Regulations the categories of people entitled to them. Badges would in future be available to recipients of Mobility Allowance, to the blind, to those using vehicles supplied by Government Departments or receiving grants towards their own vehicles, and to other people with a permanent and substantial disability which causes very considerable difficulty in walking, except for children under two years of age. This should simplify the task of issuing authorities and applicants because,

part from the last category, where we would expect medical advice to be sought in the more difficult cases, entitlement would be virtually automatic.

"We also propose, in new Regulations, to clarify the circumstances in which local authorities may refuse to issue a badge and emphasise their powers to require the return of a badge in the event of misuse. We also propose to alter the design of the badge, making the expiry date more prominent as an aid to enforcement, and to increase the discretionary fee for the issue of a badge from £1 to £2.

"At the same time local authorities would be provided with clear guidance about the issue of badges and about administration of the scheme generally. They would be asked to discontinue the issue of the "non-statutory" rear badges, which have been a source of complaint, and be encouraged to provide transparent adhesive containers to permit badges to be removed more easily from the windscreen when not in use. Applicants for badges would be issued with a new explanatory leaflet emphasising their obligations as well as privileges under the scheme.

"These proposals are the outcome of wide-ranging consultations with all the interested organisations, and with the All Party Disablement Group, and include a number of modifications to take account of their views, to the extent that it is possible to reach a consensus on such a sensitive matter. There are clearly conflicting interests. The problem has been to strike a fair balance between the needs of disabled people and those of other road users. We have also taken particular care to ensure that, in tackling problems of abuse, people with genuine mobility problems are not deprived of their entitlement to a badge.

"We believe that these proposals ought to achieve a wide measure of support, particularly amongst disabled people themselves. We are therefore glad to be able to announce them during the International Year of Disabled People. We shall be consulting interested bodies on the draft of the new Regulations very shortly, and we will take careful notice of their views before laying Regulations before the House.

NOTE TO EDITORS

The Orange Badge Scheme of parking concessions for the disabled operates under Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and Regulations made in accordance with that section.

