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User Perceptions of the Summary Blue Badge Guidance



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents findings from a series of focus groups carried out with adults living in Scotland who are eligible to take part in the Blue Badge parking scheme.

The research explored users' views and understanding of a proposed new 'ten top tips' document, developed by the Scottish Government's Blue Badge policy team. The new summary document is aimed at ensuring that Blue Badge users and their carers are aware of the most important terms and conditions that come with taking part in the scheme.

Background

The Disabled Persons' Parking Badge scheme is designed to assist people with disabilities and severe mobility problems to live independently. In Scotland, the Blue Badge scheme provides parking concessions to enable badge holders to park without charge or time limit in otherwise restricted on-street environments (including on-street parking meters, pay and display parking bays, and designated disabled parking bays), and to park on single and double yellow lines, provided it can be done safely and with attention to loading or other local parking restrictions.

Scheme membership is open to people who meet various eligibility requirements set in legislation. Badges are normally issued for a period of 3 years, after which time holders must re-apply.

All members of the Blue Badge scheme in Scotland are issued with a detailed guidance document at the same time that their badge is issued – *The Blue Badge scheme: rights and responsibilities in Scotland*.¹ Despite the guidance, research in Scotland and the UK has shown that the badge has historically been subject to misuse. It is against this backdrop that the draft 'ten top tips' guidance for using the Blue Badge was developed.

Research Aims

The aim of the work was to engage with a range of Blue Badge users and their carers to establish their understanding and other views of the new summary guidance document.

Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature and involved the recruitment and facilitation of a series of six focus groups, each comprising between four and ten members². Participants were recruited via national and local membership organisations and all sessions were held at accessible venues. All sessions took place in the daytime, on advice from those who convened the groups, and reimbursement of travel and support/care worker expenses was offered to assist volunteers taking part. All

¹ Available at: <http://www.bluebadgescotland.org/>

² Three individuals who expressed an interest in taking part, but who were unable to attend one of the organised focus groups, contributed by email/telephone.

respondents also received a small cash incentive to thank them for their time and participation.

All sessions were moderated by an independent researcher who had not been involved in developing the summary guidance document, and all groups lasted just under two hours.

Participant Profiles

A total of 42 adults took part in the research; 12 men and 30 women. They ranged in age from 22 to 65+ years, and had a range of disabilities (including physical and sensory impairments, as well as mild learning disabilities). The sample included wheelchair users, guide dog owners, adults who used walking aids, and adults who were able to walk short distances unaided.

The length of time that participants had held their badge varied from as little as one year to well over 40 years (the scheme requires badge holders to re-apply for a badge every 3 years).

The majority of those who took part had privately owned vehicles and reported that they used their badge as both a driver and passenger. The remaining participants reported that they used the badge as a passenger only, and were reliant mostly on either public transport or on others driving for them.

Overview of Findings

Existing Guidance

Overall, most of those who took part reported that the existing guidance on how to use a Blue Badge was comprehensive and easy to understand. While those who took part had reasonably good knowledge and understanding of the existing guidelines, most felt that awareness among the wider population of badge holders, and the general population *per se* was not good.

There was notable consensus that the main area that caused confusion for badge holders were the rules regarding where they could and could not park on-street. The issue appeared to be largely around when it was/was not acceptable to park on single and double yellow lines

Some people reported that they had inadvertently broken the rules of scheme membership in the past, but all reported that this had been a genuine mistake. In almost all cases, their contraventions had been due to confusion over where badge holders could park. Examples included parking on double yellow lines and causing loading obstructions or parking inappropriately in permit holder spaces.

Almost all of those who took part reported that they had witnessed first-hand other people abusing the Blue Badge scheme, the most commonly reported experience being use of blue badge parking bays by people without disabilities. Less common, but still reported by some participants were accounts of being approached and asked by neighbours, friends and work colleagues if they could borrow the badge for their own parking use. In these cases, all had been refused.

The New Summary Guidance

Overall, initial impressions of the new 'ten top tips' guidance document were positive. All said that it was easy to read and understand, and would be accessible for a wide range of badge holders.

The main criticism of the document as a whole was that it appeared to be a list of 'rules' rather than 'tips' and so should be titled as such. There was a shared sentiment that it was a privilege to hold a Blue Badge and that holders needed to know that it was their duty to behave responsibly. On this basis, it was felt that the wording could be strengthened throughout the document and marketed as a summary of 'roles and responsibilities' or 'rules' rather than 'tips'.

The tip that "no-one else should use your badge if you are not in the car with them", attracted significant discussion as it was felt that the full implications of this, and the boundaries of Blue Badge use were unclear and that this resulted in many people breaching the rules. Indeed, historically, people felt that this rule was the one breached most often and there was agreement that people running errands for Blue Badge holders, without them being present in the car for any part of the journey was something that still needed to be challenged and addressed among scheme members.

The rules around dropping off/picking up badge holders also generated much discussion. Some participants expressed strong views that drivers should never park and wait in a disabled bay, even if the badge holder was leaving the car only for a short time, or needed to return to the car in an easily accessible place. In contrast, others felt that flexibility was needed to enable badge holders to travel and reach destinations accessibly, and without the need to worry about where they would be dropped off or picked up. On the whole, participants felt that the tip that covered this point in the summary guidance was both contentious and slightly ambiguous.

There was strong support for all tips/rules in the document that stressed the penalties of misusing the badge, including guidance that, if badge holders let other people use their badge it could be taken away from them on the spot and that they might not be allowed to apply for another one. All those who took part felt that the wording of rules in this regard needed to be strong to stress the importance of breach.

Discussions in the groups suggest that there is confusion among badge holders with regards to how badges should be correctly displayed when parking, and greater clarity in the summary rules around this was welcomed.

Similarly, there appeared to be some confusion regarding how soon people should re-apply for a badge before their current badge expired, and improved/consistent guidance in this area, in both the new summary document and existing guidelines, was welcomed.

Most respondents welcomed the tip in the new summary document that reminded badge holders to contact the police in addition to the local authority, to formally record any loss/theft of the badge. It was suggested that the summary document

needed to explicitly explain why it was necessary to tell the police as this was something that not all badge holders might understand.

Many felt that the existing guidelines on where badge holders could and could not park were quite confusing, and suggested that it would be more helpful if the new summary guidance document was more explicit about where people could park. In the absence of being able to include specific details or images of signs showing where people could/could not park (which may be too lengthy for a summary document), participants felt that the tip should instead signpost readers back to the existing 'roles and responsibilities' guidelines for further information. That being said, concern was also raised over the clarity of this point provided in the main guidance document itself, especially on-street parking outwith Blue Badge bays.

Format and Presentation

Other than suggested changes to the wording of specific tips, the format and presentation of the new summary document was broadly supported, with only few suggested changes to its appearance. The alternative formats in which the document was made available (braille and audio files) were also seen as being suitable and appropriate, overall.

Use and Distribution

All those who took part said that they considered it would be appropriate for the new summary guidance document to be distributed by post, along with the Blue Badge, when next issued (i.e. on refresh). Most said that they would use it both initially as a reminder of the rules, and in the longer term, would keep it with their blue badge as a reference document which could also be shared with friends/carers/drivers.

Overall, the summary was seen as being more accessible than the existing 'rights and responsibilities' guidance, however, it seems that there are some opportunities to make sure that the two documents more closely mirror one another in content (especially with consistency of wording), so as to avoid mixed-messages and potential confusion.

Conclusions

The summary guidance was, in principle, welcomed by all those who took part in the research and, although several suggestions for changes were made to the draft document, all those who were consulted welcomed the idea of a quick reference reminder of their roles and responsibilities.

As a standalone tool, there was a feeling that the new summary guidance may not be hugely impactful on reducing instances of illegal and non-compliant use of the badge, and that wider public awareness raising activity was required to reach non-badge holders who continued to flout the rules.

That being said, all those who took part agreed that membership of the Blue Badge scheme was a privilege, and that any activity that attempted to improve compliance with the rules was welcomed to ensure that those who needed the scheme most continued to benefit from it.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 This report presents findings from a series of focus groups carried out with adults living in Scotland who are eligible to take part in the Blue Badge parking scheme.

1.2 The specific focus of the research was to explore users' views and understanding of a proposed new summary guidance document developed for Blue Badge users. The 'ten top tips' document, developed by the Scottish Government's Blue Badge policy team, is aimed at ensuring that Blue Badge users and their carers are aware of the most important terms and conditions that come with taking part in the scheme.

1.3 The work was commissioned by Transport Scotland and was carried out during August and September 2014.

The Research in Context

Policy context

1.4 The Disabled Persons' Parking Badge scheme was first introduced throughout the UK in 1971 and was originally known as the orange badge scheme. The scheme, which is mutually recognised throughout the European Union, is administered by local authorities, who are responsible for processing applications, assessing eligibility to take part in the scheme, and issuing badges. Badges are normally issued for a period of 3 years, after which time holders must re-apply.

1.5 The scheme is designed to assist people with disabilities and severe mobility problems to live independently and access social and recreational opportunities, either as a driver or a passenger, in the knowledge that they will be able to park near to venues. The badge holder must be present in the vehicle, irrespective of whether they are travelling as a driver or a passenger, in order for its use to be valid.

1.6 In Scotland, the Blue Badge scheme provides parking concessions to enable badge holders to park without charge or time limit in otherwise restricted on-street environments (including on-street parking meters, pay and display parking bays, and designated disabled parking bays), and to park on single and double yellow lines, provided it can be done safely and with attention to loading or other local parking restrictions.

1.7 Scheme membership is open to people who meet various eligibility requirements set in legislation³. Some adults automatically qualify for a badge, including those who receive the higher rate of the mobility component of the disability living allowance. Others can apply for a badge and must provide evidence that they either have a permanent and substantial disability which means that they are unable

³ Guidelines for applying for a Blue Badge, and eligibility criteria are set out in the document *Can I get a Blue Badge? A guide to applying for a Blue Badge for people in Scotland*, accessible at: <http://www.bluebadgescotland.org/>

to walk, or virtually unable to walk, or are temporarily unable to walk or virtually unable to walk because of a substantial disability which is likely to last for a period of least 12 months, but less than three years. At 31 March 2013, there were approximately 245,000 badges on issue in Scotland, and around 3000 of these were issued to organisations responsible for the care and transport of persons who would qualify for a Blue Badge.

1.8 In recent years, the Scottish Government has worked with the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government to reform and modernise the Blue Badge scheme, with the principle aim of creating a more consistent and unified scheme across the UK. In Scotland, there has also been a specific focus on trying to deter misuse of the Blue Badge through strengthening the current laws to allow for better enforcement of the scheme. As a result, the Disabled Persons' Parking Badges (Scotland) Bill was introduced in December 2012. The Bill, which was passed in August 2014, will provide additional powers to local authorities and the police to enforce the Blue Badge scheme in Scotland.

Wider research context

1.9 All members of the Blue Badge scheme in Scotland are issued with a detailed guidance document at the same time that their badge is issued – *The Blue Badge scheme: rights and responsibilities in Scotland*.⁴ The document provides guidance on a range of questions such as where users can and cannot park, what users need to check before parking, safe and responsible parking, how to display the badge, powers of others to inspect the badge, how to reapply for a badge, and what to do if badges are lost or stolen. It also provides a framework for compliance, setting out instances where use is inappropriate or illegal and detailing the fines for non-compliance with the rules.

1.10 Despite the guidance, research in Scotland and the UK has shown that the badge has historically been subject to misuse. In 2012, research with badge holders in Scotland carried out on behalf of Transport Scotland⁵, showed that over three quarters of respondents had 'regularly or sometimes' experienced misuse of the Blue Badge scheme. The most common non-compliance was use of disabled parking bays by non-badge holders. Although lending of the badge was not widely reported, separate research by Audit Scotland, also in 2012, showed that a large number of badges are used or renewed improperly by others after the death of the badge holder.

1.11 The proposal for the Disabled Persons' Parking Badges (Scotland) Bill was also accompanied by a consultation which showed that respondents felt strongly that there was a need to raise general awareness of the Blue Badge scheme and the rights and responsibilities of Blue Badge holders. Both individual respondents and organisations said that this was crucial, not only for those involved in enforcement of the scheme but also for Blue Badge holders themselves and the wider public.

⁴ Available at: <http://www.bluebadgescotland.org/>

⁵ ODS Consulting (2012) *The Use and Value of the Blue Badge Scheme*, Transport Scotland: Edinburgh

1.12 Whilst recognising that some misuse of the Blue Badge is intentional, anecdotal evidence also exists to suggest that some misuse occurs inadvertently as a result of members' misunderstanding of the rules of Blue Badge use. Additional and more succinct information on key messages of using the Blue Badge which can be easily understood and used by badge holders or those driving badge holders may, therefore, reduce instances of non-compliance.

1.13 It is against this backdrop that the draft 'ten top tips' guidance for using the Blue Badge was developed, a copy of which can be found in Appendix A. The document summarises the existing guidance, and was designed to be issued to badge holders in addition to the main 'rights and responsibilities' document (rather than instead of it) at the same time as their badge is issued.

Research Aims

1.14 The aim of this work was to engage with a range of Blue Badge users and their carers to establish their understanding and other views of the new summary guidance document (the 'ten top tips').

1.15 The research also sought to test whether Blue Badge users viewed the summary document as being fit for purpose, insofar as it made clear to holders the rights and responsibilities of holding and using their badge, to try and reduce the number of instances of illegal or non-compliant use of Blue Badges in Scotland.

1.16 Importantly, the research focussed on users' *understanding* of the 'ten top tips' leaflet rather than users' *agreement* with the guidance.

Methodology

1.17 The research was qualitative in nature and primarily involved the recruitment and facilitation of a series of six focus groups, each comprising between four and ten members. Participants were recruited via national and local membership organisations, following introductory email and telephone invitations. Summary information about the research was provided to organisations in order that it could be shared with their members and open invitations to take part were extended.

1.18 To maximise opportunities to take part, all sessions were held at accessible venues which, in most cases, were the offices of the organisations via which members had been recruited to take part. All sessions took place in the daytime, on advice from those who convened the groups, and reimbursement of travel and support/care worker expenses was offered to assist volunteers taking part. All respondents also received a small cash incentive to thank them for their time and participation.

1.19 All sessions were moderated by an independent researcher who had not been involved in developing the summary guidance document, and all groups lasted just under two hours. A topic guide was developed which explored: badge tenure and usage of the Blue Badge, perceptions and understanding of the current guidance for the scheme, close scrutiny of each of the new 'ten top tips', as well as general perceptions of the layout, format and presentation of the new document, and its likely use by badge holders if put into circulation.

1.20 All sessions were digitally sound recorded with respondents' permission, and later transcribed for analysis purposes. Qualitative data were analysed thematically in relation to each of the component parts of the new summary document. Responses were also clustered by respondent profiles (age, gender and disability/eligibility status) and, where appropriate, analytical commentary on any differences in understanding of the leaflet by group was extracted. Once all substantive data had been extracted from the recordings, all other extraneous comments of interest (and relevance) were analysed separately.

Access and ethical issues

1.21 As some of the respondents had severe physical impairments, visual impairments and/or mild learning difficulties, a number of access and ethical issues applied to the research. This included the need to ensure physical accessibility of all sites used for moderating the groups, and assisting with the costs of personal support so as not to prevent any adults who wanted to take part from joining in.

1.22 The only participant materials used in the focus groups were copies of the new guidance document. This was provided in a standard A5 sized laminated card format, as well as in large print, audio, and braille copies, in order to meet the varying preferences and needs of those taking part.

1.23 Although the primary method of data collection was via focus groups, anyone who expressed an interest and willingness to take part in the research but who could not or did not want to attend an organised group was invited to do so either by way of a one-to-one interview (either face-to-face or by telephone) or to provide feedback via email. In three cases, for practical reasons, participants opted to take up this offer, with one person taking part in a telephone interview, and two providing email responses to a series of set questions. Data from these three participants were collated with the focus group data for analysis purposes.

Research Caveats

1.24 In convening the groups, the researchers attempted to reach as broad a range of badge holders as possible, based on their eligibility status. That being said, the small scale nature of the work, and the timescales for its completion meant that the final sample for the work was constrained. Specifically, the research did not manage to engage with parents/carers of children who qualify for Blue Badges. Although the work did reach badge holders from a wide age range and with varying scheme membership tenure (discussed in Chapter Two), the research did not attract any young badge holders aged 21 or below.

1.25 Non English speakers were also not contacted as part of this research, as it was felt that a separate, targeted research project would be more suitable for reaching this demographic, i.e. one that allowed for mini-groups or one-to-one feedback from badge holders in different language groups.

1.26 Whilst badge holders living and travelling in both rural and urban areas may have differing travel and transport needs and experiences, it was not considered that geography should be one of the main sampling criteria for the work. Given that the main focus of the study was on *understanding* of the 'ten top tips document', and not

on personal experience of using the Blue Badge, it was considered that sampling to this level would be unwarranted and, instead, any discussions relating to geography were confined to those that occurred naturally within the groups.

1.27 In addition to sample constraints, it is important to note at the outset that some of those who took part reported that they had previously taken part in other research or campaigns around Blue Badge use, design, compliance, etc. This may have been as a result of the recruitment approach used. Some of those who contributed, therefore, may have had higher levels of awareness of the rights and responsibilities of Blue Badge scheme membership than the overall population of badge holders. Again, given that the main purpose of the groups was to discuss understanding of the new guidance, rather than awareness and understanding of the scheme *per se*, this was not considered to confound the research findings to any notable degree.

1.28 Finally, although the topic guide was carefully designed to focus participants' discussions on *understanding* of the document, there was inevitably some wider discussion around agreement with the schemes rules and also some discussion of what respondents perceived as 'accepted' and 'acceptable' practice. Some of this discussion has been included in the report to provide context for participants' views, where appropriate.

1.29 With these caveats in mind, the remainder of this report presents the findings from the work.

2. BADGE HOLDER CHARACTERISTICS & USE OF THE BLUE BADGE

Badge Holder Demographics

2.1 A total of 42 adults took part in the research; 12 men and 30 women. They ranged in age from 22 to 65+ years, and had a range of disabilities (including physical and sensory impairments, as well as mild learning disabilities). The sample included wheelchair users, guide dog owners, adults who used walking aids and adults who were able to walk short distances unaided.

2.2 The sample included both employed and unemployed adults, as well as retired badge holders.

2.3 All of those who took part were resident in Scotland, with most living either in the central belt or south Aberdeenshire. While some participants reported that they lived alone, most lived either with their parents or partners. In several cases, participants reported that others living in their household were also Blue Badge holders which meant that they were able to comment on vicarious experiences of Blue Badge scheme membership, as well as their own.

Badge Tenure

2.4 The length of time that participants had held their badge varied from as little as one year to well over 40 years (the scheme requires badge holders to re-apply for a badge every 3 years). Some respondents reported that they had been members of the orange badge scheme which preceded the Blue Badge scheme, and so were able to reflect on changes to scheme membership and guidance over time.

2.5 Two of those who took part were not current badge holders. One had previously held a badge and the other took part in anticipation that they would be applying for a badge in the near future, due to failing health. Two other respondents also reported that their badges would shortly expire and that they did not intend to apply for a badge again in the future.

Badge Usage

2.6 The majority of those who took part had privately owned vehicles and reported that they used their badge as both a driver and passenger. The remaining participants reported that they used the badge as a passenger only, and were reliant mostly on either public transport or on others driving for them. Some blind and visually impaired participants, who reported that they now travelled only as a passenger, had experience of holding and using a badge as a driver historically, before their sight had deteriorated.

2.7 Four of the focus group participants were attending as personal carers/support workers who, although they did not hold badges themselves, were responsible for driving Blue Badge scheme members. This included driving, not only for the person with whom they attended the focus group session, but for other badge holders too.

2.8 Among drivers, most reported that they used their Blue Badge frequently; usually every day and multiple times a day. Non-drivers reported using the badge less frequently, and usually no more than once a week.

2.9 Although some of the participants did not use their badge regularly, all felt that it was essential that they still had the badge, in the event that family members/carers were able to (or needed to) drive them somewhere:

“I do use public transport a lot because I am very independent, but if there is a chance of a lift, maybe somewhere I don’t know very well, the Blue Badge is really handy.”

2.10 Badges were used for all types of journey, but mainly for recreation (shopping and holidays), travel for work and attending health related appointments or collecting prescriptions. Most of those who took part had used their badge not only in Scotland, but also in England and further afield.

Understanding of the Existing Blue Badge Guidance

2.11 Overall, most of those who took part reported that the existing guidance on how to use a Blue Badge was comprehensive and easy to understand. Some could recall receiving literature about how to use their Blue Badge at the time that it was issued, but commented that they no longer knew where the guidance was. Some of those with access to the internet said that they occasionally checked the web for information on where to park if they were unsure.

2.12 While those who took part had reasonably good knowledge and understanding of the existing guidelines, most felt that awareness among the wider population of badge holders, and the general population *per se* was not good:

“I think a lot of the stuff [rules], other badge holders probably don’t even know. ‘Cause, a lot of it has changed, and I think people just don’t know that.”

2.13 There was notable consensus that the main area that caused confusion for badge holders were the rules regarding where they could and could not park on-street:

“I’m never sure where I can and can’t park”.

“It just needs to be clearer, so that you know exactly where you can and can’t park. Because, the majority of the time, you can’t get a parking bay, and so you are having to use single or double yellow lines, and that can be confusing.”

2.14 More specifically, the issue appeared to be largely around the ability to park on single and double yellow lines, and in loading bays, compounded by whether there are double vertical lines on the kerb. This leads to uncertainty and confusion, and many people reported that they simply would never park on double yellow lines for fear that they had “*got the rules wrong.*”

2.15 Some participants explained that their preference was always to park in a designated disabled parking bay if available, and then in metered bays as a second choice. Only if these were unavailable would people park on single or double yellow lines. This was mainly because they felt unsure about whether it was or was not acceptable in most cases:

“There’s designated areas to park, and you can park where there’s metered areas that show the Blue Badge, and you don’t have to pay for that, but the other area is the ‘yellow lines’. That is never that clear. You can park as long as there are no loading restrictions, is that right?”

2.16 Most people were aware that there had been a number of legislative changes in recent years but, although they had read the guidance notes when they first received their badge, they had not read any refresher guidance or the guidance that was issued most recently (if there was any).

2.17 Overall, therefore, participants perceived that they had reasonable understanding of most rules of the scheme, but there were some operational issues and recent legislative changes that left people feeling unsure:

“I am aware that it is non-transferable, I shouldn’t give to anybody else to go to the shops, and that kind of thing. The rules that need clarification are the actual points of operation. I want to be able to park, but I can’t see, “Am I allowed to?””

Other General Comments on the Scheme

2.18 Many commented that the application process for Blue Badge scheme membership had become more complex over time and that the system was now very complicated and, in some cases, off-putting to potential applicants:

“The [application] process has become more complicated. The paperwork is a nightmare.”

“It can be quite intimidating for people. It’s actually how good you are at communicating your condition that determines if you get it, not how bad you are [in terms of disability]. If you are quite shy or find it quite difficult to communicate, you will miss out.”

2.19 Despite this, there was a general perception that more people now held badges than historically.

2.20 One of the biggest changes that people noted to the Blue Badge scheme was the introduction of a £20 administration charge for the badge⁶. People expressed particular concern in areas where local badges also existed alongside the national scheme, for example in Aberdeen, whereby people were paying twice to hold two badges which had overlapping utility.

⁶ Since 2007, local authorities have had the power to charge up to £20 for the administration of applications for a Blue Badge.

2.21 More generally, there was confusion for some participants around the other types and colours of badges that are issued locally, for example, the green badge in Aberdeen. Some of those who took part were unsure if this applied to disabled Blue Badge users or was something entirely different. Similarly, some were also confused by, and disliked the clock system used in England because the rules for parking are different.

Experiences and Perceptions of Blue Badge Compliance

Personal compliance

2.22 Some people reported that they had inadvertently broken the rules of scheme membership in the past, but all reported that this had been a genuine mistake.

2.23 In almost all cases, their contraventions had been due to confusion over where badge holders could park. Examples included parking on double yellow lines and causing loading obstructions or parking inappropriately in permit holder spaces. In these cases, people had received fines, which they generally paid since it was seen as being too arduous and time consuming to go through an appeal process:

“We didn’t appeal the ticket, we just paid it.”

2.24 Three other participants reported that they had unknowingly broken the rules by using an out of date badge. In one case, this was because the holder was blind and had not been alerted to the expiry by any of their carers/drivers or by the local authority.

2.25 Nobody self-reported inappropriately sharing their badge with others.

Compliance by others

2.26 Almost all of those who took part reported that they had witnessed first-hand other people abusing the Blue Badge scheme. The most commonly reported experience was use of Blue Badge parking bays by people who did not appear to have a disability or a Blue Badge. Several participants recalled personal and often confrontational experiences with non-badge holders who had been witnessed using Blue Badge spaces.

2.27 Less common, but still reported by some participants were accounts of being approached and asked by neighbours, friends and work colleagues if they could borrow the badge for their own parking use. In these cases, all had been refused.

2.28 While none of the groups expressed any sympathy for non-badge holders using Blue Badge bays, one area of potential confusion was highlighted in relation to private parking where holders had witnessed others using parking spaces marked as ‘disabled’ spaces, but not necessarily reserved for ‘Blue Badge’ holders:

“A lot of spaces are allocated to disabled drivers and not allocated to Blue Badge holders. So, more or less, anybody can use them even if they have a stick. And, you think, that doesn’t seem right. There are very few places that say that they are specifically for Blue Badge holders, and that’s a problem.”

2.29 This related mainly to off-street parking, for example, supermarket car parks where there was a feeling that anyone, regardless of the nature or severity of their disability, may use the spaces legitimately, without needing to hold a Blue Badge. This meant that people who were physically able to walk long distances were often using the spaces close to, or next to the shopping areas when it was perceived it was not necessary for them to do so. This may result from lack of clarity in the markings and signage used in some private parking areas.

2.30 Generally, people perceived that the levels of non-compliance with the Blue Badge rules, and general misuse of Blue Badge parking spaces had not decreased at all over time, and, if anything, had got worse in recent years. On this basis, all welcomed the principle of designing and issuing a 'ten top tips' summary of the rules to badge holders. There was some scepticism, however, about how well the idea would work since those who were committing illegal and inappropriate acts were perceived, more often than not, to be people other than the badge holders themselves.

3. UNDERSTANDING OF THE 'TEN TOP TIPS'

General Understanding and Initial Impressions

3.1 Overall, initial impressions of the new 'ten top tips' guidance document were broadly positive. All said that it was easy to read and understand, and would be accessible for a wide range of badge holders.

3.2 Others described the document as being “*quite basic*”, “*quite straightforward*”, “*perfectly clear*” and “*easy to digest*”. It was also clear to respondents that the document was designed to remind people how to use the Blue Badge appropriately, as well as to highlight the penalties of using it incorrectly.

3.3 The main criticism of the document as a whole was that it appeared to be a list of 'rules' rather than 'tips' and so should be titled as such. There was a shared sentiment that it was a privilege to hold a Blue Badge and that holders needed to know that it was their duty to behave responsibly. On this basis, it was felt that the wording could be strengthened throughout the document and marketed as a summary of 'roles and responsibilities' or 'rules' rather than 'tips'.

The 'Ten Top Tips' in Turn

Tip 1: Follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme.
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3.4 All those who took part said that the wording of this tip was unambiguous. A large number, however, also suggested that it could not really be considered as a 'tip' and, in its current wording, some felt that it was more suitable as a title or heading for the document, or could otherwise be removed.

3.5 It was generally agreed that a more important 'tip' would be to stress at the outset that it is the Blue Badge holders responsibility to make sure that they know and understood the rules of the Blue Badge scheme. Suggestions included changing the wording to:

*“You **must** follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme”; or*

*“It is your **responsibility** to follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme.”*

3.6 The latter of these suggestions was not supported by some of the sensory impaired adults, however, since they felt that their disabilities often meant that they were reliant on drivers/support workers to find suitable spaces and use their own judgement on the suitability of spaces, which the badge holders could not verify (for example, on double yellow lines without causing obstruction). Although they may be responsible, they may not be in a position to question drivers due to their visual impairments.

3.7 One group also mentioned that it would be useful to stress at the start that badge holders should ensure that they are familiar with the rules of the scheme, and so text could be included, such as either:

*“Make sure you **read** the rules of the Blue Badge scheme”; or*

*“Make sure you **know** the rules of the Blue Badge scheme”; or*

*“Make sure you **understand** the rules of the Blue Badge scheme.”*

Tip 2: Your Blue Badge belongs to you and only you can use it as a driver or passenger.

3.8 Most participants felt that this tip was also clear, and felt that this was an important rule to include in the document. All expressed that it was easy to identify that the tip was designed to prevent people from allowing friends, family members of others from inappropriately using the badge.

3.9 Some did suggest, however, that the tip could be strengthened, with bold type being used to highlight that “**you and only you**” can use it. This would help to remind people that the badge was an individual privilege and that the badge belonged to the individual and not the car. A suggestion was also made that the tip could be shortened to read:

“You and only you can use your Blue Badge as a driver or passenger.”

3.10 One issue that did emerge in relation to this tip was that, in some households, there may be more than one family member with a ‘Blue Badge’. Sometimes, people may inadvertently mix-up or use other family members’ badges, instead of their own, but their need for a space was still legitimate. Participants questioned if/how they would be penalised in such cases.

3.11 In two groups, participants also suggested that this tip could possibly be combined with Tip 3, as it essentially covered the same point.

Tip 3: No-one else should use your badge if you are not in the car with them.

3.12 This tip attracted significant discussion as it was felt that the full implications of this, and the boundaries of Blue Badge use were not presently clear in existing guidelines and that this resulted in many people breaching the rules:

“It’s easy enough to understand, but it’s amazing how many people don’t get it.”

3.13 Historically, people felt that this rule was the one breached most often and there was agreement that people running errands for Blue Badge holders, without them being present in the car for any part of the journey was something that still needed to be challenged:

“There was a big myth in the past, and it used to be the general understanding that, if you were getting messages [shopping] for somebody who was disabled, or you were going to the chemist to get a prescription for somebody who had a Blue Badge, that you could use

their badge. And I believe it still exists. A lot of people will use that as an excuse if they are caught.”

3.14 Some participants suggested that the tip could explicitly state that badges should not be used by anyone else “even if they are running an errand for you”. This may help to remove some of the uncertainty and dispel long-standing myths.

3.15 As with Tip 2, some respondents felt that the emphasis of this tip could be changed and that the words “**No-one else**” could be printed in bold text to emphasise the point. Others suggested that “You **must not allow** others to use your Blue Badge if you are not in the car with them” would also emphasise that it was the badge holders responsibility for ensuring that this did not occur.

3.16 The rules around dropping off/picking up badge holders in respect of this tip also generated much discussion. Examples were cited of cases where Blue Badge holders may need to be dropped off or picked up to attend personal appointments and needed to meet their driver in an accessible place. The tip, as written, suggested that the driver should not wait in a Blue Badge parking bay, and this would mean that people would have to phone or make other plans to be collected. This was a technicality that needed to be resolved and made clear to users, it was felt, as it was poorly understood and quite divisive. Indeed, during focus groups, some participants expressed strong views that drivers should never park and wait in a disabled bay, even if the badge holder was leaving the car only for a short time, or needed to return to the car in an easily accessible place:

“It is a badge for parking, not for waiting”.

3.17 In contrast, others felt that flexibility was needed to enable badge holders to travel and reach destinations accessibly, and without the need to worry about where they would be dropped off or picked up. It was also important, they said, that badge holders were allowed their independence and did not feel obliged to take drivers with them to personal appointments, just because they were not permitted to wait in the car alone. If resolved, it was suggested that the tip could be extended, with the wording added:

“...except in the cases of dropping off and picking up.”

3.18 On the whole, participants felt that this tip was both contentious and slightly ambiguous.

3.19 One final point raised was that this tip was the first time in the document that the word ‘car’ was used and it was suggested that here, and throughout the remainder of the document, it may be more accurate to replace this with the word ‘vehicle’. This was because some badge holders used vans (to accommodate wheelchairs), mobility vehicles and other types of transport (including hired shop mobility vans). Using the word ‘vehicle’ would encompass the full range of modes and avoid any confusion, although some did recognise that the word ‘vehicle’ may not be considered as ‘easy read’.

Tip 4: If you are not getting out of the car, you should not use your Blue Badge to get a parking space.

3.20 Many respondents said that abuse of this rule was one of the most common areas of non-compliance, and most respondents had encountered somebody wrongly engaging in this type of badge misuse:

“I see this quite regularly, people just stop outside the chemist and let the driver run into the chemist to get their tablets, etc.”

“I think it’s really common place that people [badge holders] just sit there’.

3.21 Some of those who took part admitted that they were not familiar with this rule and that they may have inadvertently broken it, as a result:

“I’ve been guilty of it. Somebody just popping in to get something for me, and I just do it without thinking.”

3.22 A small minority of respondents also said that they did not agree with this rule, especially if the person getting out of the car was running an errand for them/going to get something for them whilst they waited in the car. Most others, however, felt that this was unacceptable and agreed with the rule as prescribed:

“If you are a person with a disability, you need to get to as near to the place you are going as possible. And, you can’t do that because someone else has taken the space, and yet they are perfectly able to walk to and from a car. It’s infuriating. I think if you’re not getting out of the car, then it’s wrong to use the blue bay.”

3.23 One technicality that was recognised was if badge holders had no initial intention of leaving the car when parked, but then later changed their mind it would be easier for them to leave the car if it was parked in a disabled parking bay, than not. People felt that the document, could, therefore indicate:

“If you have no intention of leaving the car....”

3.24 It was recognised that this wording might, however, lead to the rule being abused and people claiming that they originally intended to leave the car, when they did not.

3.25 Other suggestions for changing the wording to this tip included strengthening the tone to indicate that you “must not” or “cannot” (rather than “should not”) use your badge in this way.

Tip 5: If you let other people use your badge it could be taken away from them on the spot. It could also be taken away from you and you might not be allowed to apply for another one.

3.26 Everyone consulted agreed strongly with this rule. Some people felt that the wording of this tip could be strengthened further to indicate that the badge “would be” (rather than “could be”) taken away, and that holders “would not” (rather than “might not”) be allowed to apply for another one:

3.27 Others suggested changing the wording by adding the following to the start of the tip:

*“You **must not** let other people use your badge.”*

3.28 Some participants suggested that this tip might also be better positioned alongside other tips regarding penalties for misuse (i.e. tip ten) and presented under a sub-heading of ‘penalties’. Indeed, one participant suggested that one side of the document could be dedicated exclusively to penalties in order to achieve the greatest impact in terms of deterring badge misuse.

3.29 Others suggested that this tip would be better positioned alongside, or merged with tip two, since both were aimed at reinforcing the point that badges were non-transferable. The two separate tips, as currently worded, were perceived by some to be repetitive.

3.30 Others questioned who had the power to take the Blue Badge away, and there was some level of confusion about whether only the police could do so, or if the local authority also had the right to request that cards be returned. Some also expressed confusion about whether only the police could inspect Blue Badges, or if this could also be undertaken by traffic wardens or parking attendants. Thus, whilst the tip itself seemed relatively unambiguous, understanding of the underlying rules in this respect were mixed.

3.31 It is worth noting that, in discussions around the wrongful transfer of badges, some respondents highlighted that some misuse of this nature may occur without the holders’ knowledge:

“The problem is that some of the people who are using these badges illegally, the owner of the badge doesn’t know. If they are frail and elderly, and the carer takes a badge, just to facilitate their shopping, the person loses out. If the badge is taken without their consent or their knowledge, it places them in a very vulnerable position.”

3.32 In these circumstances, it would not be fair to penalise the holder and so it was suggested that this may need to be incorporated into the tip, somehow. For example:

*“If you **knowingly** let other people use your badge....”; or*

*“If you are **aware** of other people using your badge....”*

3.33 Finally, while most agreed that the language and strength of tone for this tip needed to be strong, to assert the seriousness of misusing the badge in this way, respondents did also view that the rule needed to be better policed and followed through upon in order for it to impact on badge misuse (i.e. no good to make idle threats). It was also felt that it might be appropriate to say that badge holders might not be permitted to *hold* another badge in the future, rather than not being permitted to apply, since respondents felt that the necessary protocols and mechanisms for preventing people from *applying* would be difficult to put in place.

Tip 6: Make sure your badge is shown the right way up so your photo is face down and the number can be seen clearly.

3.34 Although the wording of this tip was considered generally clear and easy to understand, this was another area where people felt the existing guidelines were not clear:

“I’ve seen lots of badges displayed with the photograph up, or sideways – people do make that mistake. And then they get fined for doing it.”

3.35 Some people questioned the clarity of this tip and felt that the term “right way up” was not helpful if people did not know what the “right way” was. Some also questioned if the word “shown” was accurate, and suggested that “displayed” would be better (to show that the tip referred to displaying the badge when parked, and not showing the badge to police, traffic wardens, etc.). An alternative, therefore, might be:

“Make sure that you display your badge so the number is face up and the photo is face down.”

3.36 An alternative, shorter suggestion was to omit the words “Make sure that you”:

3.37 Other suggested changing to the wording included specifying that it was the ‘Blue Badge number’ (rather than just ‘number’).

3.38 This tip also generated much off-topic discussion around the design of the badge, which many suggested was poor since there was no way of securing or fixing badges to make sure they were displayed correctly:

“It’s slippy, it’s slidey, and it catches the wind when you open the door. The badge has been designed by someone who hasn’t had to use it.”

3.39 People suggested that, even if the tip were re-worded to include the text, “Make sure that your badge is secure”, there was no way of achieving this while still complying with the rules around how it should be displayed. This prompted discussions of the potential usefulness of wallets being issued with two pouches that would allow the Blue Badge and the summary guidance to be kept together. Others suggested that if the summary guidance could be pinned to the Blue Badge in some way, this would maximise its utility.

3.40 On another note, some suggested that they would prefer the picture to also be shown on front of the card to reduce the level of abuse; others however, were very resistant to this suggestion saying they would not like everyone to be able to see their picture. Some would have security concerns about this, and felt it would be an invasion of their privacy. A large number of other respondents simply did not understand the rationale behind showing badges face down, and suggested that this could be more clearly explained in the scheme guidance.

3.41 Various views were also expressed about whether the guidelines, in general, needed to be more explicit in terms of how the badge should be displayed, including possibly marking the Blue Badge 'top', 'bottom', 'front' and 'back'.

3.42 It was also suggested that it may be helpful to include a warning that badge holders may be given a fine (or parking ticket) if their badge was not displayed correctly, as this was something that several members had experienced either directly or vicariously.

3.43 Overall, participants felt that this tip was very important and should probably feature on the first page of the summary guidance. Just one group questioned the validity of including this tip at all, since the instructions on how to display the badge were already printed on the badge itself.

Tip 7: If your badge is damaged or about to run out, apply for a new badge as soon as you can. Your badge can be taken away from you if it is out of date.

3.44 All thought that this was clear and easily understood but several respondents suggested that the tip should include a timescale for renewal, for example:

"...apply for a new badge 'x' weeks before it is about to run out"; or

"Apply for a Blue Badge before it expires."

3.45 This was considered particularly important in areas where renewal information was not routinely received (some participants said that they received notification from their local authority that their badge was about to expire, and others said that they had never received any such notifications). Where notice was not received, people recalled experiences of their badge expiring and waiting for a period of several weeks before a new badge was issued:

"You don't get any reminders or anything and what they don't tell you is that it can take a bit longer to get a new one, in which case, you can't park [in a Blue Badge space] for a while."

3.46 Related to this, some blind participants who were braille users suggested that the expiry date should be marked on the badge in braille and this would help some visually impaired people to comply with the rule.

3.47 Others suggested that the tip needed to notify holders that, if they chose to renew their badge due to damage, they would be charged for this. This was a slightly contentious issue for some badge holders who explained that the badges issued in their local authority area were marked with felt-tipped pen, which faded

over time in the sun (when displayed in the car), and when they returned the badge to the local authority, they had been charged for a new one:

“That happened to me, and I asked if I could just write it in [the faded text]. They said, “no”, that was illegal and so I had to get it reissued... There was still two years to go on mine, and they didn’t backdate it. And, we can’t get them reissued locally now, and so the whole process takes quite a bit of time.”

3.48 Suggestions were also made that the tip could be divided into two separate tips. The first dealing with damage and expiry and stressing the need for holders to keep the badge in good order. The second detailing specifically that badges could be taken away if damaged, faded, defaced, or out of date. The latter of these could be included alongside other penalty ‘tips’ or guidance.

Tip 8: Keep your badge safe. If your badge is lost or stolen, tell the police and your local council.

3.49 Most respondents felt that this tip was useful, clear and easy to understand. In particular, people felt it was important to remind badge holders to contact the police in addition to the local authority, and to formally record the loss/theft.

3.50 The only suggestions were that it should explicitly explain why it was necessary to tell the police as this was something that not all badge holders might understand. Some people also questioned how you would go about cancelling a badge (through loss, death or simply not needing it any more), and felt that this was also something that was not widely known.

3.51 Some people suggested that signposting to specific telephone numbers might be useful, but recognised that this would probably not be possible in a document designed for national distribution.

3.52 Others suggested that this tip could be used to emphasise the seriousness of not looking after the badge properly, and suggested that it could include words such as:

*“It is **your responsibility** to keep your badge safe”; or*

*“...**you must** tell the police and your local council.”*

3.53 This may reiterate to people the privilege of holding a Blue Badge and the associated responsibility to protect it in the wider interest of others.

3.54 Again, some people suggested that this tip should let people know that they would be charged for a replacement badge if lost or stolen.

Tip 9: Check signs beside parking spaces to make sure that Blue Badge holders are allowed to park there.

3.55 The wording on the card was considered to be straightforward. That being said, many felt that the guidelines on where badge holders could and could not park were quite confusing, and suggested that it would be more helpful if the summary guidance document was more explicit about where people could park. Indeed, one group of respondents spent considerable time discussing how a more useful summary guidance document would be one which presented, visually and narratively, details of where people could park:

“If it is designed to be a quick reference, it should have a visual ‘quick reference’ guide of where you can park. That is what would be most useful for me.”

3.56 Another group discussed the usefulness of having a separate card similar in style to the new ‘ten top tips’, which showed only information relating to where people could and could not park. This would summarise the information from the existing ‘rights and responsibilities’ sections ‘Where you can park’, ‘Places you need to check before parking’ and ‘Places where you cannot park’. Again, people felt that this type of ‘guide to parking’ may be more useful to badge holders than the more general guidance.

3.57 In the absence of being able to include specific details or images of signs showing where people could/could not park (which may be too lengthy for a summary document), participants felt that the tip should instead signpost readers back to the existing ‘roles and responsibilities’ guidelines for further information. That being said, concern was also raised over the clarity of this point provided in the main guidance document itself, especially on-street parking outwith Blue Badge bays.

3.58 It was also suggested that, again, whilst the wording on the card was fine, the signs provided on-street were not always clear, often carrying exclusions, only applying at certain times of the day, or simply not being visible to badge holders when driving around looking for a space:

“You often have to park and get out to check the signs”.

“The sign never says, “As a Blue Badge holder, you can park here.” So, I’m not sure that checking the signs will work.”

3.59 One suggestion for changing the wording of this tip, therefore, was “*Check signs for parking restrictions*” and others suggested that it should read “*Check **parking** signs*” to be more explicit.

3.60 Finally, one focus group suggested that this tip should be included on the first page of the summary document as they felt it was hidden/lost in the draft document.

Tip 10: It is against the law to use a Blue Badge if you are not supposed to. Anyone who does this could be fined up to £1000.

3.61 Many participants felt that stronger wording was needed here i.e. rather than “could be fined” it should read “will be fined”. Many also felt that the expression “supposed to” should be changed to “permitted to” or “entitled to”. The words “against the law” and “fined up to £1000” could be put in bold text, it was suggested, to again stress the seriousness of breaching the rules.

3.62 This tip also prompted some discussion around whether the current penalties for using a badge when you are not supposed to were sufficiently harsh. Some felt that an on-the-spot fine would be more appropriate and others suggested that three penalty points being added to the driver’s license would be a more appropriate form of punishment for those caught illegally using a badge.

3.63 One group of respondents suggested that the tip could be misinterpreted by some that the badge holder would be fined, rather than the person illegally using the badge and felt this could be clarified.

3.64 Again, many respondents expressed that all penalty information should be kept together. Many also felt that penalty information should be presented in very strong terms and, again, it was suggested that this final tip could be presented either all in bold text, in red text, or highlighting the fine amount so that it was very clear how serious the penalties for abuse could be.

3.65 Overall, this tip was considered by many as being the one most likely to deter people from wrongly using the badge in the future.

Document Title

3.66 Most of those consulted suggested that the title of the document should be changed.

3.67 For many, this simply involved making the title shorter, for example, “Rules of the Blue Badge Scheme” or “A Quick Guide to your Blue Badge”. Others suggested that it should mirror the existing guidelines and be titled as “A summary of the Blue Badge Scheme: rights and responsibilities in Scotland”, although it was recognised that this was quite lengthy.

3.68 Some people suggested that the title should say “Some things you need to know about your Blue Badge”, rather than “What you need to know”, since the latter may be interpreted as meaning that the summary document was comprehensive and covered ‘everything’ that badge holders needed to know, which was not the case. An alternative that was suggested was “A few important rules about your Blue Badge.”

3.69 Others suggested that it should specifically mention Scotland, since the rules for the Blue Badge usage in England and elsewhere were different. For example, “Some things you need to know about using your Blue Badge in Scotland”:

“I know it’s got the Scottish Government logo on the back, but I also think it needs to state that it is for Scotland only in the title.”

3.70 Many felt that the title needed to be shorter to ensure that it fitted onto only one line of writing and that making the text larger, brighter or underlined would more clearly indicate that it was the front side of the card. One group discussed, however, that such changes may be problematic for those with dyslexia and, instead, it was suggested that perhaps a banner approach would be better, highlighting the title, helping to easily identify the front of the card, and avoiding issues for dyslexic readers.

Closing Information

3.71 During focus groups, the prototype cards used for discussion had only the Government logo on the bottom and the disabled person’s logo, with no text to indicate where to find out more or a web link. This was a printing error at source and the draft document should have included, at the end, an instruction for users: *“To find out more, go to www.bluebadgescotland.org”*.

3.72 All respondents felt that the inclusion of this information would be very useful, especially to get updated information should the rules/guidance change. That being said, several respondents also highlighted that they did not have internet access or were not computer literate and expressed frustration at the reliance on this medium among public bodies. It was suggested that a telephone number should also be provided.

3.73 Almost all of those who took part agreed that it was important to have the Blue Badge disabled logo printed on the guidance as well as the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland logos, to add to the authenticity and official appearance of the document. Most suggested that the Blue Badge symbol should, however, be included on the front of the document, rather than the reverse and some questioned the need for the Scottish Government logo to also have the Gaelic wording included.

3.74 A small minority felt that the picture of the disabled person in the wheelchair was out of date and no longer represented the current profile of disabled people. Others disagreed and felt that there needed to be some universal, well known and easily understood symbol/logo to make it clear what the document related to.

Other Observations and Suggested Improvements

3.75 Overall, participants seemed satisfied with the ordering and presentation of the tips (other than the specific points highlighted above). Some suggested that the points could be clustered together differently into themes, especially those relating to penalties. Many also felt that the guidance should have a focus more on penalties rather than general rule to ensure that it helped act as a real deterrent to misuse.

3.76 One group suggested that a ‘Top 5 Tips’ which combined and condensed some of the draft 10 tips would be easier to read.

Unnecessary Information

3.77 At the end of the draft document, a closing instruction is provided to users: *“It’s up to you to follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme.”*

3.78 Many of those consulted felt that this information was redundant and simply repeated tip one. Others pointed out that, not only did it repeat tip one, but it was worded slightly differently and that this inconsistency may cause confusion. Of the two sentences, people preferred tip one to the closing statement, as they considered that using the words “It’s up to you to follow...” may lead some people to believe that following the rules was optional. The instruction “Follow” was more direct.

3.79 A small minority suggested that the last comment: “It’s up to you to follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme” should be in bold text so as to stand out. Others still suggested that the final phrase should read, “It is **very important** that you to follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme’ or “It is **your responsibility** to follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme.”

3.80 As above, other information that people perceived was missing included advice regarding the need to pay to replace a lost, damaged or stolen badge, and a telephone number for further details.

Missing Information

3.81 In addition to the suggestions for additional text highlighted above, some respondents suggested that information should be included to direct badge holders to find out about local by-laws and also to advise them to check local arrangements if travelling beyond Scotland.

3.82 Adults who were blind and relied on the audio version of the guide suggested that it would have been helpful if each of the tips were numbered. This would make it clear to listeners where one tip finished, and another started. At present, it was not entirely clear, when listening to the recording, where each tip concluded. The issue of numbering each tip was also raised by other sighted participants, but, on reflection, many felt that adding numbers may indicate that the tips had been presented in order of importance (i.e. number one was the most important, and number ten the least).

3.83 One group also suggested that the ‘ten top tips’ may not be suitable for organisational card holders, or that an alternative and separately focussed guide may be needed for them.

4. FORMAT, DISTRIBUTION AND POTENTIAL USE OF THE NEW GUIDANCE

Overall Perceptions of the Guidance Format

4.1 In addition to the content of the new summary document, participants were asked to comment on the format of its presentation.

Font

4.2 This was considered to be legible and clear. One respondent indicated that Comic Sans, size 12 would be the most suitable for those with dyslexia.

Colour

4.3 Most felt this was fine. Again, however, the issue of appropriateness for dyslexic users was raised, suggesting that the best colour for the card was buff, or even a pale green would be more suitable than white. Others suggested that black text on yellow would be preferred by some and would also help to distinguish the document from other black and white paper based forms or leaflets. All agreed that the text should be printed in black ink.

Size of card

4.4 This was considered a positive feature of the document. All indicated it was the same size as the Blue Badge and would therefore fit within the wallet provided should they wish to store it there. Many also suggested this was more appropriate than putting the same information into a larger style paper printed leaflet which would get folded and/or lost.

Layout of text

4.5 Most felt that the bullet point approach was helpful and the paragraph spacing was also viewed as being appropriate, not too crowded or cluttered.

Card material

4.6 Many felt that the laminated nature of the card was a significant plus point. They felt it would last longer and not get “dog-eared” or damaged. One request was made, however, for a matt laminate finish to minimise glare when reading.

4.7 Only one group of participants explicitly asked if the document had been prepared in easy read, and this was asked because they felt that it did not seem to meet the easy read standards. One group also suggested that the document be reviewed by the Scottish Accessible Information Forum (SAIF) before being finalised.

Alternative Formats

4.8 During the focus groups, both the audio and braille formats of the document were also tested.

4.9 All thought that the audio file was sufficiently clear and slow enough, and the main comment was that numbers could be added to the tips to differentiate between the end of one tip and the start of another, or the use of some other form of divider (e.g. a ‘ping’).

4.10 One audio reliant user questioned the clarity of pronunciation at tip nine, and suggested that the word “signs” could be heard as “sides”. Another participant said that the final tip sounded as if it was two separate tips, due to the length of pause between the two sentences.

4.11 Some badge holders also suggested that the recording was, at present, quite monotone and that, if changes were made to the emphasis of some points in the top tips (for example, must not, will be, only you) these would need to be reflected in the audio too.

4.12 Four participants across two separate groups also tested the braille version of the guidance document. Again, all felt that it was clear and the only suggestion was to make the document available in double-lined braille for those who had this preference.

4.13 One respondent asked if the guidance, including the audio version, could be made available in other languages, including Gaelic and Polish. Another participant suggested that the guidance should also be produced in British Sign Language (BSL).

4.14 Three participants specifically questioned the usefulness of distributing the guidance document in laminated card format to all badge holders. One participant suggested that there would be merit in allowing people, when applying for a blue badge, to request the format in which they would prefer the guidance to be issued ‘at source’. This would avoid blind users being sent printed copies, and then having to request audio or braille copies at a later date. Others concurred with this view but felt the laminated card should also be issued as standard, along with the other requested formats because the card copy might be useful for carers/support workers or other family members/drivers, to act as a reference point, as well as the recipient themselves.

Distribution of the New Guidance Document

4.15 All those who took part said that they considered it would be appropriate for the new summary guidance document to be distributed by post, along with the Blue Badge, when next issued (i.e. on refresh). Most felt that a separate blanket mail-out was probably not cost-effective but also suggested that it would be helpful if those who had received a badge in the last 12 months could receive the document, to avoid them having to wait another 2 or more years to receive it (since the Blue Badge is issued for a three year period).

4.16 One group questioned if the final design and issue of the new guidance should be postponed until new regulations came into force as a result of the Bill, to avoid having to change and reissue the guidance in the short term. Participants were not clear if the new legislation would impact on any of the rules, but raised this as an option should there be any significant new developments that badge holders needed to be made aware of.

4.17 Some respondents suggested that the ‘launch’ of the document should be accompanied by wider marketing/awareness raising activities, either nationally (for example, through the radio) or via local membership organisations (on websites, in

newsletters, etc.) It was equally important for non-badge holders to know and understand the rules, they suggested, since this might deter people inappropriately asking to borrow or use Blue Badges for their own needs. It might also reach those who currently use spaces for no good reason.

4.18 People suggested that, when distributed, it would be important to include an accompanying covering letter that the summary guidance could be requested in other formats. Others suggested that the badge application should include questions regarding what format the guidance should be issued in. This would mean that copies were received automatically in the appropriate format, as well as in the standard format so that it could be shared with carers/family members, etc.

4.19 Finally, when issued with the badge, people suggested it might be useful to include a note advising badge holders to keep the 'tips' card with the Blue Badge as an easy reference tool. The covering letter should also be used as an opportunity to remind people that the Blue Badge rules may have changed recently, and thus to encourage them to familiarise themselves with the rules afresh.

Comparison of New and Existing Guidance

4.20 Overwhelmingly, respondents viewed the new style and format of the 'ten top tips' document as being significantly better than the existing guidelines, in terms of offering a quick reference guide. All respondents felt this did provide a useful summary.

4.21 That being said, some respondents who were very familiar with the existing guidance *The Blue Badge scheme: rights and responsibilities in Scotland* noted that there were some inconsistencies between the new guidance and that document. Examples included:

- Displaying the badge – the existing guidance stresses the need to display the badge on the dashboard or fascia panel and that “the front of the badge should face upwards, showing the wheelchair symbol”. This explanation is different from the summary, and may cause some confusion.
- Badge renewal – the existing guidance states that “you should apply for a new badge some weeks before it runs out”, while the summary says “as soon as possible”.
- Drop off and pick up – the existing guidance says that the badge can be used “if someone is collecting you or dropping you off”, whilst the guidance says that “No-one else should use your badge if you are not in the car with them.” This caused considerable confusion among participants, as discussed above, and was seen as a key inconsistency between the two documents.

4.22 Some participants also perceived that there was text in the main summary guidance document that was already fit-for-purpose and could have been taken in its entirety and added to the summary document instead of being reworded, again, for consistency. This included:

- Running errands – the existing guidance states “Do not allow other people to use the badge to do something on your behalf, such as shopping or collecting something for you, unless you are travelling with them.” This was a key message omitted from the summary, it was suggested and the wording in the existing guidelines was something that people felt would work well in the summary.
- Power to inspect – the existing guidance clearly sets out that “police officers, traffic wardens and parking attendants have the power to inspect the badge”, and this could be usefully included in the summary.
- Returning the badge – the existing guidance lists the conditions under which the badge should be returned and this would be helpful to include in the summary. The existing guidance also states clearly that “If you continue to display the badge when you no longer need it you may be fined up to £1000.” Again, this is worded differently from the summary, and could be copied directly from the main document.

4.23 It was suggested that greater similarity between the texts in the two documents was needed to avoid any confusion. Consistency would also make the rules clear and unambiguous. Indeed, overall, respondents perceived that there was a need to update the existing guidelines which were seen as too lengthy and unnecessarily complicated and also as not providing some of the guidance that people required (for example, not covering issues around badge usage for dropping off and picking up).

4.24 Many people could not remember receiving the ‘rights and responsibilities’ guidance and others could not remember where they had filed it. In its current format, it was suggested that the main guidance was not “hitting the mark.”

Potential Use of the New Guidance Document

4.25 Most indicated they would keep the card either with their Blue Badge or in the glove box in their car. Others said that they would ‘file it’ with the other guidance document that they already received. A small number also reported that they would ‘bin’ the document in its current format and would only use it as a quick reference guide if it contained more useful information on where exactly badge holders could and could not park.

4.26 One respondent stated that they would feel more confident in refusing any requests by others to use the badge by being able to show them the card with the rules. This was one use of the card that was not perhaps anticipated.

4.27 Non-drivers suggested that they did not use the same driver all the time, and so it was important that the document was available, at the same time as the badge, for their drivers to access. Others indicated that they would ask their partners, close

family members, carers, etc. to read the card when it was first received so that they were also aware of the rules.

4.28 It was also emphasised in a number of group discussions that the document was invaluable for carers/support workers and those who drive Blue Badge holders. Generally, views were expressed that copies should also be made available to care workers/support workers or organisational badge holders, because they would likely benefit a great deal from having a quick point of reference (since they may not drive/care for badge holders on a daily or regular basis). The refresher would be useful for them.

4.29 Overall, the idea of the document was seen as being good in principle, and fit for purpose, subject to the modifications discussed above. That being said, there was also reservation about whether those who were most likely to break the rules were also the least likely to read and use the document:

“There are people who have told lies to get the Blue Badge, and they are just not going to read it.”

5. DISCUSSION

Summary of Main Findings

5.1 The research engaged with a broad range of Blue Badge holders, and many were able to comment on experiences of holding a badge over a number of years, as well as on their perceptions of the rules governing the scheme and how they had changed over time.

5.2 Several suggestions were put forward for ways in which the summary guidance document could be changed to make it more accessible, more comprehensive and more effective in deterring abuse of the Blue Badge scheme by members. In addition to the specific suggestions made for changing the wording contained within the document, a number of more general observations were made, including:

- Adding clarity around the rules of letting others use the badge on holders behalf, especially dropping off, picking up and parking whilst badge holders remain in the car;
- Offering more detailed explanations of how badges should be displayed and who has the power to inspect;
- Making clear in the document any actions which may have associated costs to the badge holder, e.g. renewal of lost, stolen or damaged badges, or failing to display badges correctly;
- Strengthening the tone of the document throughout to make clear that it is the badge holders' *responsibility* to look after their badge and make sure that it is used appropriately; and
- Highlighting the penalties for misuse more clearly throughout.

5.3 The single biggest gap in the document was perceived to be more information about exactly where badge holders can and cannot park. This also appears to be the area of existing scheme membership which participants least understood and may be resulting in some people parking inappropriately by accident.

5.4 The overall appearance of the document was generally supported, and most of those who contributed to the research liked the size and format of the proposed document, subject to some minor editing to the text and layout.

5.5 Most felt that the title of the document could be changed to more accurately reflect that the summary includes 'roles and responsibilities' and applies specifically to Scotland. Respondents also urged a move away from referring to the summary as 'ten top tips' since they felt this did not accurately describe the content of the document.

5.6 Overall, the summary was seen as being more accessible than the existing 'rights and responsibilities' guidance, however, it seems that there are some opportunities to make sure that the two documents more closely mirror one another in content (especially with consistency of wording), so as to avoid mixed-messages and potential confusion.

5.7 The document would be useful for badge holders, it seems, but needs to be accompanied by wider activity to focus on both holders and non-badge holders who abuse the scheme or inappropriately use parking bays in order to reduce instances of illegal or non-compliant parking.

5.8 The main sentiment expressed was that a Blue Badge is a privilege and that abuse of the badge spoils it for those who need it most.

Findings by User Group

5.9 There were no notable differences in the views expressed between focus groups, and no notable differences in the views of male and female participants, or those of different ages or badge tenure.

5.10 Some differences in views between drivers and non-drivers were observed, with passengers stressing the need for the document to be issued to care workers/support workers directly in order to ensure that they fully understood the rules. Indeed, some of the drivers/carers who took part in the work demonstrated a lack of understanding of some of the existing rules, especially in relation to on-street parking. It seems that information targeted specifically at carers/support workers and those who drive for multiple different badge holders may be worthwhile.

5.11 Some issues unique to visually impaired badge holders were raised, including the need to offer, at the point of application, an opportunity for people to express which format of the guidance they would prefer. Allowing this to be indicated at source would remove the need for badge holders to request specific additional copies of the summary guidance in their preferred format at a later date, which is something that many would not do. Distributing the summary in this way would maximise its reach and impact.

Implications of Research Findings

5.12 Several actionable suggestions were made which can be easily accommodated into a redrafted version of the summary guidance. In addition, some of the suggestions made may be helpful in informing and making changes to the main 'rights and responsibilities' document to make sure that it too includes the information needed most by badge holders.

5.13 Although off topic, several participants also mentioned that the existing application process was unnecessarily complicated and challenging for many with learning and sensory impairments. Whilst participants agreed that the process needed to be rigorous, many felt that the balance had fallen too far towards 'keeping people out' of the scheme (who did not merit a badge) at the expense of making it off-putting to some of the most vulnerable. A review of the application process and documentation may assist in ensuring the application procedure is as accessible as possible to those who need the badge most.

5.14 Similarly, it seems that concerns around potentially receiving a parking ticket due to not understanding on-street guidelines may be limiting the parking choices made by some badge holders. Accepting that some misuse of the badge may continue inadvertently even after the summary document has been issued, it may be

worthwhile exploring with badge holders what could be done to make the parking ticket appeals process simpler. This is especially true for those with communication impairments, to assist them in cases where they or their carers have made genuine parking mistakes.

5.15 All those who took part felt that the summary guidance would help to remind them and others of the Blue Badge rules and of the fines and other consequences of breaking the rules. That said, several of those who took part suggested that 'knowing the rules' was not enough and that, in order to fully target inappropriate and fraudulent use of the badge, the scheme needed to be better policed with the penalties for misuse, damage to badges, and confiscation etc. all carried out.

Future Research and Other Activity

5.16 The research also highlighted some potential areas of future research to achieve a better understanding of badge holders' wider experiences in relation to the scheme.

5.17 Importantly, it seems that more research may be needed around where badge holders can and cannot park, to explore why this is something that continues to confuse many badge holders. The problem, it seems, is restricted to on-street parking and so exploring the perceptions of badge holders in relation to signage or other barriers may be needed. Some participants said that they simply avoided on-street parking unless they could not find designated blue bays or metered areas since they were uncomfortable parking on either single or double yellow lines, for fear of a fine. This anxiety of not knowing the rules may be seriously restricting the range of perceived parking options available to badge holders and thus restricting some people's wider social activity.

5.18 The draft tips reflect the most frequently observed instances of badge non-compliance, but it seems clear that some non-compliance results not from lack of *understanding*, but rather from lack of *agreement* with the rules. It is important to recognise that the project did not seek specifically to speak with badge holders who had direct or vicarious experience of being penalised for intentional non-compliance. Given that the purpose of the new 'ten top tips' is to increase awareness of the rules of the scheme in an effort to reduce the number of illegal or non-compliant uses of the Blue Badge, additional research with scheme members who self-report intentional non-compliance may help to ascertain if the new guidance would impact on their behaviours.

5.19 Finally, one group who took part in the research asked explicitly that the re-drafted summary be re-tested with users before its final issue. This, it was felt, would ensure that any changes made sufficiently addressed the concerns raised and would offer a 'belt and braces' approach to ensuring that the document was user friendly and fit for purpose.

Conclusions

5.20 The summary guidance was, in principle, welcomed by all those who took part in the research and, although several suggestions for changes were made to the

draft document, all those who were consulted welcomed the idea of a quick reference reminder of their roles and responsibilities.

5.21 As a standalone tool, there was a feeling that the new summary guidance may not be hugely impactful on reducing instances of illegal and non-compliant use of the badge, and that wider public awareness raising activity was required to reach non-badge holders who continued to flout the rules.

5.22 That being said, all those who took part agreed that membership of the Blue Badge scheme was a privilege, and that any activity that attempted to improve compliance with the rules was welcomed to ensure that those who needed the scheme most continued to benefit from it.

Appendix A – The Draft ‘Ten Top Tips’

What you need to know about your Blue Badge

- Follow the rules of the Blue Badge Scheme.
- Your blue badge belongs to you and only you can use it as a driver or passenger.
- No-one else should use your badge if you are not in the car with them.
- If you are not getting out of the car, you should not use your blue badge to get a parking space.
- If you let other people use your badge it could be taken away from them on the spot. It could also be taken away from you and you might not be allowed to apply for another one.

- Make sure your badge is shown the right way up so your photo is face down and the number can be seen clearly.
- If your badge is damaged or about to run out, apply for a new badge as soon as you can. Your badge can be taken away from you if it is out of date.
- Keep your badge safe. If your badge is lost or stolen, tell the police and your local council.
- Check signs beside parking spaces to make sure that blue badge holders are allowed to park there.
- It is against the law to use a blue badge if you are not supposed to. Anyone who does this could be fined up to £1000.

It's up to you to follow the rules of the Blue Badge scheme. To find out more, go to www.bluebadgescotland.org

Further copies of this document are available, on request, in audio and large print formats and in community languages (Urdu; Bengali; Gaelic; Hindi; Punjabi; Cantonese; Arabic; Polish).

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