

16. Where local authority officers are unable to decide whether an applicant meets the criteria, it may be necessary to seek independent medical evidence to inform their decision. Some local authorities will, of course, have their own medical advisers on whom to call. Others should where possible look to other sources than the applicant's GP. Other health professionals - for example, occupational therapists - may be better placed to provide appropriate advice. Where it is necessary to use a GP, the contact should be made direct by the authority, having secured the applicant's agreement and the GP should only be asked for answers to factual questions. They should not be asked for an opinion on whether someone meets the criteria.

## **The Seven Eligible Categories - section 146 of the Act (outside Greater London) and section 151(4) of the Act (Greater London)**

The seven categories of disabled person include any person who:-

### **"(a) is blind or partially sighted"**

17. "Blind" means having a high degree of vision loss i.e. seeing much less than is normal or perhaps nothing at all.

18. Blind people can register with their local council. For this to happen, a consultant ophthalmologist (eye specialist) must have completed a form and submitted it to the blind person's local social services department. In general terms a person can be registered as blind if they cannot see (with glasses, if worn) the top letter of the eye test chart (used by doctors and opticians) at a distance of 3 metres or less.

19. Some people who can read the top letter of an eye test chart at 3 metres, but not at 6 metres, may still be eligible for registration as blind if their field is also severely restricted. 'Only being able' to read the top letter at 3 metres is sometimes referred to as 3/60 vision: the person can see at 3 metres what a person with normal vision can see at 60 metres.

20. "Partial sight" is a less severe loss of vision. Partially sighted people can see more than someone who is blind, but less than a fully sighted person.

21. A person can be registered as partially sighted if they have a full field of vision but can only read the top letter of the eye test chart at a distance of 6 metres or less (with glasses, if worn). However, if they can read the next three lines down at the same distance, but the field of vision is either moderately or severely restricted, they may still qualify for registration.

22. The Department advises that permits should be issued to people whose sight is so impaired that they would be able to register as blind or partially sighted. For both blind and partially sighted people, however, registration is voluntary. It is recognised that local authorities are unlikely to have the expertise to assess applicants so, for the purposes of the travel concession local authorities may, where a person is not on the local authority blind and partially sighted register, require evidence that the applicant is registerable as blind or partially sighted from an eye specialist, for example, an optometrist.

### **"(b) is profoundly or severely deaf"**

23. Hearing loss is measured in decibels across the normal hearing spectrum, as dBHL (Hearing Level). People are generally regarded as having a severe hearing loss if it reaches 70-95 dBHL and a profound loss if it reaches 95+ dBHL. The Department advises that the statutory minimum should be made available to people in these categories.

24. There is no statutory registration system for deaf people. However, many will be registered on a voluntary basis with their local authority social services department. The register is open to people who have varying degrees of hearing loss, so in checking the register a local authority is advised to check that the applicant is profoundly or severely deaf.