

Blue badge cheat faces £750 bill after Counter Fraud Team prosecution

Kent County Council's Counter Fraud Team has secured its first prosecution as it cracks down on blue badge misuse in the county.

Laura Halford, of Watling Street, Dartford, appeared before magistrates where she admitted fraudulently using her grandmother's blue badge to park in disabled parking spaces.

The 31-year-old was convicted and must pay costs of £750 after pleading guilty to four counts of fraud.

Under the rules governing the blue badge scheme, it is a criminal offence for a badge-holder or anyone else to misuse the badge and doing so will probably result in a £1,000 fine, the confiscation and possible permanent loss of the badge.

The authority's civil enforcement officers issued her with a penalty charge notice after CCTV footage showed Halford parked in Buckhurst car park on January 2, 2018. Halford admitted false representation for the display of a blue badge and possession of an article for use in the course or connection of a fraud.

Paul Rock, Counter Fraud Manager, said: "The vast majority of Blue Badges in Kent are used correctly and where there is an allegation of misuse we will investigate."

"As a council, our focus is on correcting behaviour through education and working with district and borough councils to ensure compliance. We take blue badge fraud extremely seriously and there will be more prosecutions expected in the near future."

The day to day enforcement of the scheme in Kent is undertaken by district, borough and city council parking enforcement officers.

More serious allegations of misuse, such as suspected application fraud, forged or counterfeit badges and persistent misuse are referred to KCC's Counter Fraud Team to investigate. This team sits within internal audit and deals with all fraud and similar crimes affecting the council, including blue badge misuse.

In cases where there is strong evidence of misuse, the suspects are interviewed or if there is strong evidence of dishonesty, then KCC proceeds with a prosecution.

Parking in a disabled bay without displaying a blue disabled badge, just because it is conveniently close to a supermarket entrance, will also attract similar attention.

Since April 2018 the service has received more than 130 reports of misuse. In response. One has to realise that misusing a blue badge or falsely obtaining a blue badge is a criminal offence, for the unlawful user often obtains a "pecuniary advantage" by frequently obtaining parking for up to three hours or more in restricted areas where non blue badge holders would possibly incur a parking charge.

Once the fraudulent user is convicted of a disabled badge offence, it does not end there. If they fail to declare the conviction (which also includes a caution) when applying for car, house and many other insurances, then once more the applicant could commit a further criminal offence by obtaining insurance at a lower rate, than had they declared their criminal conviction.

The criminal conviction could also affect certain job applications or would have to be declared to their current bosses and often recent criminal offences can affect ones entry to certain countries in the Far East and the USA to name a few, creating a problem for holiday makers!

In order to help tackle abuse or blue badge fraud, residents who see a badge being misused are asked to inform KCC by reporting it online at the

[kent.gov.uk blue badge page](https://kent.gov.uk/blue-badge-page).

Geoffrey Lymer
Kent County Councillor
Dover West Ward