



Government  
Equalities Office

# **Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund**

**2012 to 2015**

**Report by:  
Government Equalities Office (“GEO”)  
And Digital Outreach Ltd (“Convey”)**

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## Introduction

1. The pilot Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund (“the Fund”), was launched in July 2012 to assess the provision of grants to disabled individuals who wanted to seek elected office. The grants were intended to help meet the additional disability-related support needs and costs disabled people could face in seeking elected office, so they could compete on “a level playing field” with other, non-disabled, candidates, thereby increasing the representation of disabled people in public life. This included, for example, the cost of providing transport support for mobility impaired candidates, or British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation for hearing impaired candidates during election campaigns. Funding was not available for costs which all candidates might expect to incur, e.g. normal campaigning costs, such as leaflet printing and distribution.

2. This report considers how the Fund worked, taking into account the linkages with the other measures to increase the representation of disabled people (see paragraphs 29-30 below).

# Background

## Strategic objective and evidence base

3. The concept of the Fund arose from recommendations in the 2010 cross-party **Speaker's Conference Report**<sup>1</sup> ("the Report") on improving diversity in Parliament and political life. The Report called for Government, Parliament and the political parties to work together to promote greater diversity in the UK's democratic institutions, so that they better reflected the diversity of UK society. Along with the under-representation of women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds, the Report noted that disabled people were also clearly under-represented in the UK's political institutions.

4. In Parliament, the precise number of (declared) disabled MPs was unknown, but the number was clearly very low. Indeed, to be representative of the entire UK population (in which people with some form of disability represent about 16% of the population, or 11% of the working age population), we would expect to see about 100 or 70 MPs, respectively, with some form of disability.

5. The number of (declared) disabled Local Authority (LA) Councillors was about 14%. However, evidence suggested that most of these disabilities related to age-related impairments, reflecting the older age profile of LA Councillors, many of whom may have first been elected years before their impairments developed.

6. More fundamentally, there was no quantitative data for the number of disabled people who failed to be selected/elected, and/or who were prevented from trying simply because of cost barriers.

7. In particular, the Report noted the additional disability related costs which aspiring disabled candidates could face, throughout selection and election periods, who often have far less disposable income than non-disabled people anyway. This was in addition to other barriers (e.g. arising from misperceptions about disabled people's capability and /or electability), which created real and genuine barriers to participation. The Report recommended that in order to "level the playing field" for disabled candidates, the Government should establish a Fund to help candidates meet the cost of reasonable adjustments during campaigns. Such a Fund would be divided between the parties, with provision made for Independent candidates. The Report stressed that such a Fund should not provide an unfair political advantage for disabled candidates.

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<sup>1</sup> Speaker's Conference - <http://www.parliament.uk/speakersconference>

## Policy Response

8. Government responded by committing to provide:

*"extra support for people with disabilities who want to become MPs, Councillors and other elected officials"*

and this was included in the Coalition Programme for the incoming Government in 2010<sup>2</sup>. In spring 2011, the Government conducted a public consultation on a strategy to implement this. In its response to the Consultation in September 2011, the Government committed to running a two-year **pilot** Fund, as one of several complementary measures (see below) to support disabled people aspiring to elected office.

9. The aim of the pilot Fund was to assess covering the additional costs disabled people could face in seeking election (see Scope of the Fund below), and understand the degree to which this would enable them to compete on a level playing field with non-disabled candidates. The overall aim was to reverse the under-representation of disabled people in local and national political life.

## Stakeholder Engagement

10. A stakeholder group, chaired by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) and meeting quarterly over 2012-14, was established to oversee implementation of the strategy/Fund. It was crucial that development of the strategy for the Fund was fully informed by the perspectives of disabled people who were to be the main beneficiaries, (i.e. a "bottom-up" approach), and others involved in political life at national and local level. The Group comprised representatives from:

- Political parties\* - meetings were attended by Conservative, Green, Labour, Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish Nationalist Party (the latter until 2012)
- Disability sector - Equality 2025, Action on Hearing Loss, Disability Rights UK, Scope, and Mencap
- The Local Government Association - two representatives, covering Local Authority interests, Independent candidates and the smaller parties
- The House of Commons Commission
- The Cabinet Office (re electoral law).
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission
- The Office for Disability Issues
- Digital Outreach Ltd (Convey) - from July 2012, as Administrator of the Fund
- The Electoral Commission, as an **Observer**.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://resources.cohesioninstitute.org.uk/Publications/Documents/Document/Default.aspx?recordId=172>

(\* An invitation to participate in the Stakeholder Group was sent to all Parties represented in Parliament after the 2010 General Election).

## Contractual Arrangements

11. To ensure **independence from Government** in administering the Fund, it was necessary to appoint an external contractor who met the definition of a “**Permissible Donor**” under the ‘Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000’.<sup>3</sup>
12. Following an open tendering exercise in spring 2012, **Digital Outreach Ltd**, trading as “**Convey**”, was appointed as the Administrator for the Fund from July 2012 until 30 June 2014 and subsequently administered the grant funding on behalf of GEO for the duration of the pilot.
13. Convey was assisted in its decision-making by an **Independent Advisory Panel** (“the Advisory Panel”). The members (as shown in Annex A) all of whom were experts on disability and election practice, and who were appointed by Convey, advised on individual cases. An Appeals Panel was also established by Convey to consider any appeals by applicants about funding decisions, but which in practice was not utilised.
14. In order to cover the May 2015 General Election and Local Authority Elections, an open “Expressions of Interest” exercise was held in late 2013, when Convey was appointed to administer the pilot Fund for a further year. In light of the experience over 2012-14, for the extension period, the **Advisory Panel’s** role was restricted to advising **only** on cases which raised new and unprecedented issues.
15. This also reflected the benefits of being able to iron-out many points of principle which had already emerged during 2012-14, and responding to applicants’ feedback (see paragraph 48 below). This enabled Convey to handle applications more cost-effectively and enhanced the decision-making process for the benefit of the applicant.

## Scope of the Fund

16. At the outset, grants of between £250 and up to £20,000 (only in exceptional circumstances) were made available. However, the higher value grant increased to £40,000<sup>4</sup> from March 2014. The grants were available for disabled people to meet additional costs in seeking selection as a candidate for a registered political party **and/or** election related activity. Funding was also available for Independent candidates on the same terms as for Party candidates.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/political-parties-campaigning-and-donations>

<sup>4</sup> Grant increase due to excessive costs experienced previously for the provision of BSL and in anticipation of candidates requirements during the forthcoming General Election campaign.

17. Funding was not available for the costs which all candidates, regardless of any disability, could face, e.g. deposits for Parliamentary elections; printing of campaign material; nor indeed other expenditure which aspiring candidates can face in seeking selection (as described in the Speaker's Conference Report).

18. **It should be stressed that an applicant's prospects of being selected and/or elected were not a criterion for accessing the Fund.** The Fund was aimed at supporting participation in the political process, and testing whether additional financial support would help to increase the representation of disabled people in public life, recognising that many non-disabled people take several attempts to get selected and/or elected - and even then are not always successful.

## Candidate Selection Timetables

19. As many party candidates are selected up to one year in advance of the election concerned, demand from party candidates during the first year of the Fund was limited, meaning that the Fund had only limited impact during this period. This contributed to the decision to extend the pilot by one year, so that it could, in effect, cover two full years of Local Authority elections, as well as the 2015 General Election.

## Legal Compliance

20. It was essential that the funding comply with the law on candidates' election expenses<sup>5</sup> which have to be declared after each election and are open for public inspection. This underpinned the Fund's focus on meeting the costs of "Reasonable Adjustments", by covering only additional, disability related costs relating to specific electoral activity. Suspicions of over-spending and/or gaining an advantage over other candidates are a matter for the police to investigate.

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<sup>5</sup> See Electoral Commission guidance at: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

## Elections Covered

21. Elections (and by-elections) to the following bodies/positions were covered during the period of the pilot:

- **UK Parliament** - 650 seats, contested by 3,971 candidates, in the May 2015 General Election.
- **English Local and Mayoral** elections - May 2013, 2014 and 2015 - 15,837 seats, contested by about 60,000 candidates overall, including **Town and Parish Council** elections from March 2014.
- **Greater London Authority** (by-elections only over 2012-15, although none were held)
- **Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales** - November 2012 - 41 positions, contested by 191 candidates.

## Eligibility: Definition of “Disability”

22. The Equality Act 2010 definition of disability states:

*‘A disabled person is someone with a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’.*

23. People who met the definition of disability were, in principle, eligible to apply to the Fund and receive an award of grant, appropriate to the barriers they faced as a result of their disability. In this respect, it should be stressed that not all forms of disability would necessarily create a cost barrier to seeking selection/election. Assessment of applications was not done on a “tick box” basis but, in accordance with the above definition, was “principles based”, with the level of “need” and cost reflecting the circumstances of each applicant.

## Applications Process

24. The application process operated according to Convey’s ‘*Statement of Funding Policy*’, as agreed with GEO. Convey designed and managed the applications process, in consultation with the ‘Independent Advisory Panel’. A flow chart illustrating the process is at Annex B.

25. As the Fund was **demand-led**, the money allocated to the pilot, (although ‘capped’), was subject to increased funding levels **if the demand outstripped the supply**, (i.e. no applicant would be denied a grant on the grounds that the fund had reached its financial threshold). However, there was a financial ceiling imposed with



regards to the amount of grant to be awarded, in that no applicant could receive more than £40,000 in a calendar year, which was considered sufficient to meet all reasonable needs.

## Confidentiality

26. GEO played no part in the process of assessing grant applications or the disbursement of grants to applicants. It advised Convey only on matters of principle and electoral law, consulting the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission as necessary.

27. In consulting GEO, and in providing management data relevant to the pilot, Convey removed any information which could be used to identify candidates/parties, so that GEO could advise only on matters of principle, without being influenced (**or being perceived to be influenced**) by “political considerations”.

28. **Personal data** on applicants was held (and has been retained by Convey), in accordance with the ‘Data Protection Act’ (DPA).

## Other Measures

29. As well as the pilot Fund, during 2012-15, the A2EO strategy also included:

- a) An **online training course**, providing an introduction to the basic skills and knowledge needed for seeking selection/election.
- b) Annual funding for up to **three additional paid internships** with MPs for disabled people under the Speaker’s Parliamentary Placement Scheme.<sup>6</sup>
- c) **Guidance for political parties** on their legal obligations towards disabled members and candidates under the Equalities Act 2010.<sup>7</sup> (see also paragraphs 53-55 below).
- d) **Funding for the Local Government Association** to facilitate a one-year programme of **mentoring and training support to potential Local Authority candidates** with disabilities (from February 2014). The need for this support was identified by Convey from discussions with applicants (see paragraphs 51-52 below).
- e) **Legislation** (from **1 April 2013**) to exclude personal costs (i.e. including disability related costs) from counting towards candidates’ spending limits at elections and by-elections for the UK Parliament, Police & Crime Commissioners, and to the Greater London Authority. From **1 July 2014**, the exclusion was extended to local government (including Parish and Town Council) elections in England and Wales.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.speakerscheme.co.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/85508/disabled-access-guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85508/disabled-access-guidance.pdf)

30. The measures at 29 (c) to (e) all directly impacted on the operation of the pilot Fund (see below).

## International Recognition

31. In February 2015, the Geneva-based **Zero Project Foundation**<sup>8</sup> selected the Fund as one of the top global Innovative Policies to support and encourage political participation by people with a disability.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://zeroproject.org/conference-2015/>

## Statistics

32. At the close of the pilot, **67 people** had stood for election, some of whom might not have done so if the Grant had not been available.

### Key Statistics

- **No of applications** - 141
- **No of applications approved** - 94 (67 candidates) total value of £418,734
- **Overall average value of awards** - £4,455
- **Highest award** - £39,735
- **Lowest award** - £130
- **Awards for Parliamentary elections** - 29, total value of £278,609 average £9,607 (average amount claimed £6,596)
- **Awards for English Local authority elections** - 60, total value £135,329, average £2,255 (average amount claimed £2,207)
- **Awards for English Town and Parish Council elections** - 5, (total value £4,796 averaging £1,395 (average amount claimed £1,053)

(There were no applications in respect of the Greater London Authority (as there were no by-elections), nor awards for Police and Crime Commissioner positions)

### Main categories of support required by applicants (by value of awards)

- **Support worker/carer** - 53%
- **British Sign Language/communication support** - 22%

(NB - many applicants had a combination of support requirements)

### Diversity data (by awards)

- **Gender:** male - 53%; female - 47%
- **Ethnicity** (top three): White - 82%; Asian, all backgrounds - 7%; Black African/Caribbean - 6%
- **Age range**, (top three, by applicant): 45-54 years old -41%; 35-44 - 19%; 55-64: 35%.

### Regional Spread (by seat) of awards (top three)

- **SE England** - 30%
- **Greater London** - 26%
- **North West England** - 9%

### Parties of applicants

- **Conservative** - 14%; **Green** - 5%; **Labour** -39%; **Liberal Democrat** - 19%; **UKIP** -13%
- **Other parties** - 3%
- **Independent candidates** - 7%

**Number of funded candidates elected** (as advised by applicants) - 13 (all LAs)  
(10 over 2014/15)

## Diversity of Applicants

33. Although no data exists on the diversity of candidates in Parliamentary and Local Authority elections over the period of the pilot (although the main parties are increasingly publishing diversity data on their General Election candidates), the data below suggests that pilot Fund candidates were more diverse than elected representatives, in terms of gender, ethnicity and age. However, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions, given the small number of pilot applicants, and the lack of diversity data on candidates (as opposed to MPs/Councillors) overall.

	Fund applicants %	Fund awards - by amount %	MPs (2015 GE) (%)	LA Councillors (2013 Census) (%)
<b>Male</b>	58	53	71	67
<b>Female</b>	42	47	29	33
<b>BME</b>	20	17	6	3
<b>45-54 age range</b>	41 (highest)	n/a	see below	see below
<b>35-44 age range</b>	19 (second highest)	n/a	see below	see below

In Parliament,<sup>9</sup> **the average age of MPs** following the 2010 General Election fell slightly to **50 years** old.

The **average age of councillors**<sup>10</sup> had risen slightly in 2013 (60.2 years old) from 2010 (59.7 years old). Overall, 18% were aged under 50, 21 % were aged 50-59, and 61% were aged 60 or over.

## Regional Spread of Applicants (by location of seat)

34. The data above shows that 56% of awards (by value) went to candidates standing in London and the South East. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Parties were better at attracting disabled candidates in these regions and, of course, some of these were Independent candidates anyway. This suggests that more could be done (including by the Parties) to attract disabled candidates outside London and the South East.

## Administration issues and costs

35. There was no correlation between the value of an application and the complexity in assessing it. Over the three-year pilot, the average cost of processing each grant

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-for-the-new-parliament/the-new-parliament/characteristics-of-the-new-house-of-commons/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGCL01/LGCL01.pdf>

award was 31% (i.e. £31.00 for every £100 spent), or 38% in respect of amounts actually claimed by applicants (see below). As the table below shows, this dropped to 13% in the final year (or 18% for claims made), from 52% (i.e. £52.00 for every £100 spent) in the first two years (or 100% for amounts claimed). This decrease can be attributed to:

- a) Administration costs being based on a combination of fixed costs and by number/complexity of cases handled under Fund 2 (2014-15), compared with the fixed costs model used for Fund 1 (2013-14). The fixed costs model was necessary as GEO and the Administrator could not predict the number and complexity of cases. Under Fund 2, the Administrator was able to make efficiency savings, as experience gained over 2012-14 reduced the time spent on assessing applications.
- b) The low number of cases in the first year (whilst administration costs were fixed), because many Party candidates had already been selected for the May 2013 LA elections.
- c) Fund 2 included awards for Parliamentary candidates in the General Election, which were higher in value than for Local Authority candidates, whilst administration costs decreased over the same period.
- d) The increased value of awards for Local Authority candidates from May 2014 whilst administration costs decreased.

	No of awards	Amount of awards (£)	Average award (£)	Fee/award ratio (fee/claims ratio) [to nearest 5%]
<b>Fund 1 (2012-14) excluding start-up costs)</b>	45	181,621	4,036	[50 – 55%]
<b>(re amounts <u>claimed</u>)</b>	45	(£94,662 - claimed)	(£2,104 - claimed)	[95 – 100%]
<b>Fund 2 (2014-15)</b>	49	237,112	4,839	[10 – 15%]
<b>(re amounts <u>claimed</u>)</b>	49	(£176,598 - claimed)	(£3,604 - claimed)	[15 – 20%]
<b>Overall</b>	94	418,733	4,455	[30 – 35%]
<b>(re amounts <u>claimed</u> over 2012-15)</b>	94	(271,260 - <u>claimed</u> )	(3,569 - average <u>claim</u> )	[35 – 40%]

The amounts actually claimed by applicants were only about 65% of the value of awards. This is because of a combination of applicants over-estimating their needs and/or not being selected as a candidate, meaning that funding awarded for election campaigns was not needed (and candidates being honest).

## Key Findings

36. **The findings below must be seen in context of the degree of innovation involved in establishing and administering the Fund, which should not be underestimated.** It was without precedent. Putting theory into practice was especially challenging for the Administrator as new, and often unforeseen issues, constantly arose.

37. Also, account must be taken of the small number of applications/awards when trying to make comparisons with other data on political activity and in forecasting future demand and impact, e.g. on diversity. **For example, the Local Authority elections held over 2012-15 attracted some 60,000 candidates in total - of which just 58 were supported by the Fund.**

38. This illustrates the need for extreme caution in making comparisons, assumptions and in claiming any form of “success” or otherwise. The reality is that whilst the Fund clearly made a difference for those who were awarded grants, **the impact on increasing participation by disabled people has been negligible.** That said, the Pilot has highlighted a number of issues which merit further consideration (as described below).

## How Much Difference Has the Fund Really Made?

39. While we know that 67 people (some got more than one of the 94 awards, because they applied for further elections) did indeed benefit from funding, **we do not know how many others would have applied but for the other barriers they may have faced.** However, it is clear that demand increased as knowledge of the Fund spread, especially from 2014 onward. Also, the survey of applicants over 2014-15, (see below) showed that 18 out of 30 respondents had in fact previously stood for election, of which seven had been elected (to Local Authorities), i.e. without the benefit of the Fund.

40. Even without the Fund, these candidates might have stood anyway. However, we do not know the size of the “funding gap” which has been filled for each applicant, nor whether their disability had deteriorated since they first became politically active, with the arrival of the Fund enabling them to continue to seek elected office.

## Cost Barriers

41. As the Speaker’s Conference Report recognised, standing for election can be expensive anyway, e.g. including a requirement to pay a £500 deposit for Parliamentary elections<sup>11</sup>. This expense impacts especially on disabled people, who on average have

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in January 2015 the Electoral Commission recommended that the requirement for candidates to pay a deposit should be abolished as it did not seem reasonable to have a barrier to standing for election that depends on someone’s financial means (whether or not they are disabled);([http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/180458/Standing-for-Election-in-the-UK-report-Jan-2015.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/180458/Standing-for-Election-in-the-UK-report-Jan-2015.pdf))

lower levels of disposable income. The Fund's effectiveness varied in how much it was able to support disabled candidates: for some it met all or most of their needs, but was limited for others as it could not address the deeper underlying issues identified by the Speaker's Conference (such as lost earnings). This in turn impacted on the aim of achieving a "level playing field" - see below.

*"I would stand again, but it is such a huge commitment and uses so much energy. Unlike other candidates, I cannot stand for public office AND work so this is a financial deficit that I have to contend with ..... if the Fund were able to help with a wider range of expenses, this would help".*

**Candidate comment, May 2015**

## Achieving a "level playing field"

42. In terms of trying to achieve a "level playing field", account must be taken of the varying nature of candidates' campaigning activity - this is in addition to the other barriers disabled people can face (see above). This is because the level of activity which candidates (disabled/non-disabled) are able or wish to undertake will be determined by a huge number of factors, including a combination of:

- a) Their personal commitment.
- b) The level of commitment and backing from their political party.
- c) Their (or their Party's) financial resources available for "normal" election activity - which can be considerable.
- d) The spare time/capacity they have to engage in a selection/election campaign.
- e) Their capacity (not least time) to engage in "pre-election" activity, often over an extended period, e.g. in attending meetings with local interest groups, especially if other candidates are attending, and events arranged by their Party (e.g. training, briefing, networking events).

43. The above will be influenced by the nature of the seat the candidate is contesting, e.g. whether it is "marginal/winnable" or considered "safe" (either for the candidate or an opponent) and for which little or no campaigning activity is envisaged anyway. Other factors include demographics, e.g. whether the constituency/ward is in a rural or urban area, which will impact on the amount of door-to-door canvassing.

44. **Indeed, no two elections or candidates' requirements were the same:** every application had to be carefully considered to ensure that only appropriate costs were covered. In particular, the Fund had to adopt an "**Apportionment Policy**", for the purchase of equipment, so that only election related costs were covered. Apart from guarding against misuse of public funds, this would protect candidates, and the Fund,

from challenge (e.g. by other candidates). **In the event, there were no challenges.**<sup>12</sup> However, as this meant candidates still had to meet significant costs from their own resources, this did focus attention on how far the Fund was achieving a level playing field.

45. Taken together, the above factors illustrate the difficulties inherent in defining normal “election activity” and hence a “level playing field” or “parity” with other candidates, and thus deciding on the appropriate and legally compliant level of funding.

46. This judgement will always be subjective at best. In some cases, funding will effectively provide for a level playing field or “parity”, (e.g. see quotes from applicants) whilst in others there will still be a large gap in capability between a disabled candidate and others contesting the election.

47. Although the average amount of grant was just under £5,000, in reality some candidates may have needed a lot more in order to fully engage in a selection/election campaign over a sustained period to feel they were really competing on the same terms as other candidates. We do not know how many people were put off applying by the “constraints” of the Fund - or indeed never put themselves forward because of all the barriers they would have to overcome.

## Applicant Feedback

48. Following the May 2015 General Election and Local Authority elections, an online survey was carried out of applicants who had received grants over 2014-15. There were 31 responses (out of 46 grant recipients), mainly from applicants who had contested Local Authority elections. The responses were generally positive, and in line with a similar survey carried out in November 2013 (in light of which some aspects of the criteria and application process were modified). The 2015 survey showed that:

- 10 funded candidates had been elected.
- 18 had previously stood for election (and seven had been elected) i.e. without funding.
- 3 thought that, without a grant, they would still have been able to stand for election.
- Whether or not elected, the majority said they would consider standing for elected office again, and would apply to the Fund to do so.

Candidates were generally positive about the support the Fund provided for canvassing/leaflet delivery, etc., saying that they could not have stood without the support. However, one said that more funding was needed, e.g. to cover costs of at least

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<sup>12</sup> In late 2015 there was an arrest (and subsequent conviction) of a Fund beneficiary and their support worker for fraud relating to the Fund



one mail drop to every voter, as some mobility impaired candidates were still not as fast as able bodied candidates. Other comments included:

*“ I will be able to take a full part in the election instead of feeling second class”*

*“I felt I was given the opportunity to undertake the campaign on more of an equal basis as the candidates from the other parties. Before that, I felt disadvantaged “*

*“Without the Fund I wouldn't have been able to stand. I never would have been able to fund my disability related costs myself”*

*“I was able to contest County Council election which I have been unable to do previously due to mobility problems. Under the Fund I was able to use taxis to get around to visit constituents “*

*“Put me on a level playing field by helping me to attend events and meetings, bridging the gap when applying for seat; I felt this put me on a level with everyone else.”*

**Candidates' comments**

## Other Findings

### Candidates' expenses limits

49. **The removal of candidates' personal expenses from spending limits in elections had a positive impact on take up.** This was in response to the previous limit of approximately £1,000, which effectively “capped” the amount of support candidates could receive from the Fund, thus reducing potential demand.

50. The increase in applications for local elections, from four in 2013 Local Authority elections, to 23 in 2014 (with 55 awards overall), may be attributable to this. **Whether or not the Fund is continued, this reform will be a lasting legacy of the Pilot.**

### Training and mentoring needs

51. **The provision of direct funding was not always what aspiring candidates needed.** For some applicants who were interested in becoming local Councillors, it became apparent that what they really needed was training and mentoring in the skills needed to be a candidate, before being in a position to apply to the Fund.

52. In response to this need, from February 2014, the GEO funded a one year programme for the Local Government Association to facilitate, (in conjunction with the parties and disability charities), tailored training and mentoring for aspiring disabled candidates, using skilled mentors with experience of standing in local elections. Seventeen aspiring candidates from across the Parties/Independents were supported;

the learning from the programme was shared with the Parties and disability charities at a seminar in spring 2015.

## **Legal obligations of the political parties**

53. The Guidance issued by the GEO in 2012 (see paragraph 29 above) was intended to assist the political parties in meeting their legal obligations (i.e. to make “reasonable adjustments”) towards disabled members and candidates under the Equality Act 2010. In this respect, the issue arose of the extent, if at all, to which the Fund should cover the costs which disabled candidates could face in attending events arranged exclusively for party candidates, e.g. training, briefing sessions, networking events. There is anecdotal evidence of applicants’ fears about public attitudes towards the ability of disabled candidates, and that as a consequence Parties may be reluctant to adopt them as candidates in key seats.

54. Depending on individuals’ circumstances, such costs could be significant (e.g. the provision of BSL interpretation) especially for smaller parties and local branches/associations, and possibly beyond the level of what might be deemed a “Reasonable Adjustment” as required under the Equality Act 2010.

55. However, it was important to ensure that the Fund was not being used to pay for support which the parties were, arguably, legally obliged to meet in order to encourage the candidature of disabled members. Accordingly, in the small number of cases in which this issue became apparent, the Fund negotiated agreement with the candidate/party on the costs it should cover, including on a “match funding” basis, reflecting what was considered to be an affordable/reasonable contribution for the Party/s concerned. This process in itself helped focus attention on the parties’ obligations towards disabled candidates.

## **Lack of financial support for elected local councillors**

56. Aspiring Local Authority candidates with significant needs were concerned about the apparent lack of support from Local Authorities if they were elected - something the Fund could not cover. This could be an issue to explore further, to ensure as necessary that LAs are fully aware of their legal obligations, and that aspiring candidates are aware of their rights.

## Summary and Recommendations

### Costs and Value for Money

57. As described at paragraph 35 above, the Fund has been very expensive to administer overall. The Fund is a “niche product” for a very small market (and one which is unlikely to grow significantly) and without any meaningful comparator.

#### *Recommendation*

58. **It is a matter of judgment as to whether or not the Fund has represented Value for Money and the degree to which this should inform a decision to continue the Fund.**

### Achieving a “level playing field“

59. It is difficult to say if a “level playing field” has been achieved and (related to this) whether there is still a large pool of untapped demand, which could be accessed if the approach to defining “additional costs” was “relaxed”. The complexity in defining the “additional costs”, given the unique nature of each individual’s circumstances, along with the wide scope of “election/campaigning activity” can vary widely across seats, depending on the candidate’s perceived chances of being elected.

60. For some candidates, funding has made a real difference in enabling them to stand for election, whilst for others it has been less effective because the scope of the Fund does not cover costs which all candidates, disabled or non-disabled can face. This is reinforced by the fact that disabled people on average have less disposable income than non-disabled people.

61. Any desire to relax the rules, e.g. by relaxing the “apportionment policy” would potentially make costs open ended in terms of the value of awards and in attracting more applications.

62. This would, however, reduce complexities in assessing applications, leading to some administration cost savings, albeit these are difficult to quantify.

63. However, there could be an increased risk of legal challenge to candidates if funding was seen as not being strictly for electioneering purposes, and/or perceived as giving funded candidates an unfair advantage (i.e. it might not be classed as a “personal cost” and would therefore be subject to candidates’ expenses limits).

#### *Recommendations*

64. **Any continuation of the Fund should recognise that the scope for relaxing the rules is very limited, and that the degree of a “level playing field” achieved for each funded candidate will vary considerably: a reality which will have to be recognised.**

## Role of the Parties

65. **Paragraph 53** above describes how the Fund had to consider whether parties should be funding candidates' "reasonable adjustments", especially where candidates were attending events arranged by their parties. Although pragmatic solutions were achieved (e.g. through a match funding approach), it will always be debatable as to whether, as a matter of principle, public money should be used at all in these circumstances (although it is difficult to quantify the actual savings which would be made by completely withdrawing such funding).

### *Recommendation*

66. **Whether or not the Fund is continued, Government should offer to work with the Parties and disability charities to review the Guidance on "Reasonable Adjustments" and how this is implemented, especially at branch level<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, there would be benefits in "refreshing" the Guidance and raising awareness of the needs of disabled members and candidates, which would be timely in the light of the Pilot.**

67. However, there are potential **risks** with this, in that the parties may do less regarding "reasonable adjustments"(e.g. by seeing these as costly and burdensome "Red Tape, imposed from the centre"), with reduced Government funding actually leading to fewer disabled candidates being adopted. This risk can be managed as necessary: we can point out the benefits in that the parties would potentially stand to gain more members/candidates and thus strengthen their appeal to the voters, adding as necessary that any fears about voters being put-off by disabled candidates are unfounded.

## Diversity/regional breakdown of applicants

68. See paragraph 33-34 above. From the limited data - and health warnings - it seems that Fund candidates were more diverse than elected representatives, in terms of gender, ethnicity and age, although the majority of awards were for candidates in London and the South East.

### *Recommendations*

69. **If the Fund is continued, the Administrator along with the Parties, disability charities and the LGA should promote the Fund's record in attracting a diverse range of applicants, which it wants to maintain/enhance, as well as promote it more outside London and the SE. The Budget allocation should allow for an increase being achieved.**

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<sup>13</sup> The EHRC issued guidance for political parties on the Equality Act 2010 early in 2018  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/equality-act-2010-guide-political-parties>

## **Annex A: Members of Independent Advisory Panel**

**Anthony Zacharzewski** - The Democratic Society

**John Turner** - Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators

**Colin Rawlings** - Professor of Politics and Director of the Elections Centre, Plymouth University

**Eleanor Lisney** - Director, *Connect Culture*, a disabled user-led community group that focuses on building an inclusive community

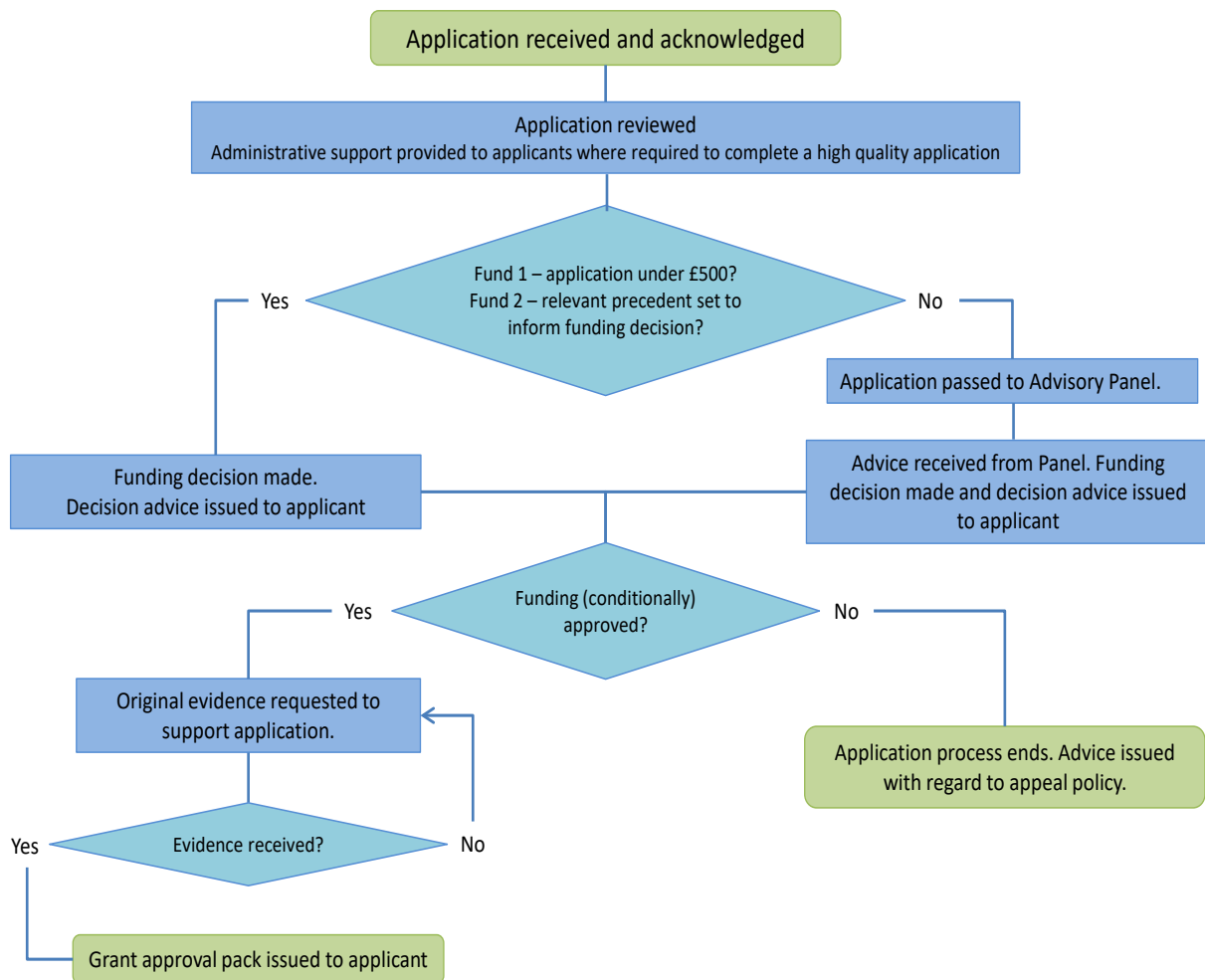
**Alice Langtree** - member, British Council's Disability Advisory Panel

**Dr David Slingsby** - member, British Council's Disability Awareness Panel

**David Price** - works with charity researching ways of improving support for groups of people who face problems of physical access

**Dr Alice Maynard** - Chair of Scope, Director of *Future Inclusion*

# Annex B: Fund Application Process





Government  
Equalities Office

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