



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance to local authorities: consultation

Summary of responses and the Government's response

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Introduction

1. In the period December 2013 to March 2014, England experienced widespread flooding as a result of severe weather.
2. Following this incident, a review group was set up to assess what permanent changes may be needed to the Bellwin Scheme in the light of the more frequent and challenging severe weather events.
3. The review considered the existing terms of the scheme, including:
 - Thresholds
 - Grant rate
 - Eligible spending criteria
4. This consultation sought views on the suggested revised principles following the review.

About the consultation

5. The consultation ran from 27 November 2014 to 2 January 2015 for a period of 5 weeks and sought views from local authorities and other interested parties.
6. The purpose of the consultation was to set out the Government's proposals for the revised principles of the Bellwin Scheme. This document summarises the responses to the five questions set out in the consultation document.
7. The consultation responses have been read and categorised in relation to the questions asked in the consultation. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to respond to the consultation.
8. The consultation received 88 responses from a combination of Local Authorities, Police Crime Commissioners, Fire Authorities and the Local Government Association.
9. The following methodology was adopted for the collation and analysis of consultation responses and submissions:
 - read the written responses to develop summaries and statistical breakdowns;
 - classified written responses and linked them to consultation questions;
 - recorded general trends and themes arising from the submissions.

Consultation responses

10. This section provides a summary of the responses we received to the consultation on the Bellwin Scheme of emergency financial assistance to local authorities. The detail of each proposal is set out in the consultation document.

Question 1: Do respondents favour retaining the new lower thresholds?

Number of respondents supporting the proposal: 97%

Number of respondents opposing the proposal: 3%

11. We received 88 responses to this question and almost all respondents were in favour of retaining the new lower thresholds. Many respondents were pleased with the clarity provided by publishing the provisional thresholds each year alongside the Local Government Finance Settlement.
12. A small number of respondents felt that they would welcome a further reduction and the opportunity to review further reductions to thresholds in future.
13. Some respondents argued that the thresholds were unfair to upper tier authorities with responsibility for fire as it can make it harder for the fire authority to claim above the threshold. When the scheme was activated in response to last year's severe weather, Upper Tier authorities with responsibility for Fire were treated on an equal base to local authorities with standalone Fire authorities.

Question 2: Do respondents agree with the Government paying 100% of costs above the thresholds?

Number of respondents supporting the proposal: 100%

Number of respondents opposing the proposal: 0%

14. There was overwhelming support for this proposal, indeed, 100, per cent of respondents agreed with the proposal.

Question 3: Does the respondent agree that to ensure that the scheme truly covers emergency response, the Government should widen the type of costs that can be claimed and to shorten the time period for eligible spending to one month?

Number of respondents supporting the proposal to widen the type of costs that can be claimed under the Bellwin Scheme: 100%

Number of respondents opposing the proposal: 0%

Number of respondents supporting the proposal to shorten the time period for eligible spending to one month: 49%

Number of respondents opposing the proposal: 51%

15. All respondents agreed that the Government should widen the type of costs that can be claimed under the Bellwin Scheme; however 51% of respondents did not agree that the time period for eligible expenditure should be shortened to one month. Those that were opposed to this proposal argued that the time period was too prescriptive and too short to cover the extent of potential spending during an emergency.
16. However, if there was flexibility to extend the time period in exceptional circumstances there would be more support for the proposal.

Question 4: Do you agree that the Government should widen the definition of eligible costs to include some forms of capital?

Number of respondents supporting the proposal: 99%

Number of respondents opposing the proposal: 1%

17. The majority of respondents agreed that the Government should widen the definition of eligible costs to include some forms of capital.
18. Local Authorities asked for further clarification on what kind of permanent repairs would be eligible and that they be made known in advance to avoid unnecessary debate in the immediate aftermath of an emergency when claims are being calculated and submitted.
19. Other suggestions for eligible expenditure included, 'betterment' where any capital expenditure builds in an improved resilience such as higher level of climate resilience than before.

Question 5: Does the respondent have any other comments on the proposed changes?

20. We asked respondents whether they had any other comments on the proposed changes, these are outlined below:
21. There was concern over the exclusion of repairs to road surfaces. Respondents called for a clearer definition of what counts as response and recovery. They asked for details of recovery schemes in advance and not on an adhoc basis.
22. Some respondents felt that elements of support offered by the Bellwin Scheme did not recognise the support of other organisations or the impact of an emergency on other organisations.
23. It was apparent from responses that local authorities would welcome clearer guidance about the general operation of the scheme, its purpose and what it covers.

Government's response

24. The Government would like to take this opportunity to thank all respondents who have taken the time to contribute to the consultation.
25. In response to these representations, the Government has decided to retain the new lower thresholds and to publish the value of each council's provisional threshold each year alongside the Local Government Settlement. The Government will also pay 100% costs above the threshold. We calculate that the improved terms introduced for last winter's scheme were worth an additional £10 million.
26. In addition and in response to the consultation, the Government will also permanently treat Upper Tier authorities with responsibility for Fire on an equal base to local authorities with standalone Fire authorities.
27. As a way of ensuring that the scheme truly covers emergency response, the Government will shorten the time period for eligible spending to one month from when a particular incident is deemed to have ended not from the start of the incident. The Government will also extend the period local authorities have to prepare their claims by a further month (taking the total period allowed for administration to two months).
28. The Government also commits to making the scheme more flexible by widening the type of costs that can be claimed to include some forms of capital, so that immediately following an emergency, councils can act as quickly as possible to deal with local problems. The Government will amend the scheme guidance to better explain how the Bellwin Scheme operates, including further clarity on what is considered eligible expenditure.