Access to elected office for disabled people: a response to the public consultation

September 2011

HM Government

Contents

Introduction

1. Ensuring that everyone has a voice in our democratic institutions makes our democracy stronger and improves the decision making of those elected bodies. That is why the Government set out its ambition to provide extra support for disabled people who want to become MPs, councillors or other elected officials as a commitment within the Coalition Agreement.

2. This commitment followed the findings from the cross-party Speaker's Conference which reported in January 2010 on how to increase diversity in Parliamentary representation through tackling some of the barriers facing under-represented groups (in particular women, ethnic minorities and disabled people).

3. The Speaker's Conference identified three key barriers for disabled people seeking elected office: attitudes, financial constraints, and accessibility. We recognise that addressing these barriers is central to the effectiveness of this policy and will seek ways to address them through the final Strategy.

4. The proposals outlined in the public consultation were drawn up after an informal engagement exercise was undertaken by Government in September/October 2010. Organisations we contacted included:

- all the political parties represented at the Palace of Westminster;
- disability organisations including RADAR, Scope, RNIB and the RNID;
- organisations with an equality focus, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Equality and Diversity Forum.

5. We consulted on six proposals:

Proposal 1: Government should work more closely with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA) and disability organisations to develop focused awareness raising.

Proposal 2: Work with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA) and disabled people's organisations to develop a cross-party Ambassadors programme.

Proposal 3: Provide training and development opportunities aimed at supporting disabled people through the route to political participation.

Proposal 4: Establish an Access to Elected Office Fund to support disability related costs.

Proposal 5: Work with political parties to analyse their existing disability access policies and cascade and promote any good practice.

Proposal 6: Promote and explain legal obligations that apply to political parties, e.g. develop a short guide, website materials and/ or a toolkit to support local authorities and political parties to fulfil their duties under the Equality Act.

6.   This document sets out information about how the consultation was conducted, provides a summary of the responses received and describes the outcome of the consultation. A more detailed summary is given for the key question asked in the consultation: which one or more of the proposals do you think would have the greatest impact (in supporting disabled people) and an overview of responses is given for the remaining questions asked.

7.   The Government has taken account of the responses received in deciding which proposals to take forward as part of the Access to Elected Office Strategy to support disabled people who want to apply for elected office. The Government will take forward all the proposals, with the exception of the cross-party Ambassadors programme (proposal 2).

8.   The bulk of the funding will be directed towards delivering proposal 3 (training and development opportunities) and proposal 4 (establishing a Fund for disabled people who are seeking elected office). We will seek to deliver proposal 1 (awareness raising), proposal 5 (disability access policies) and proposal 6 (promote legal obligations) in a proportionate way to ensure that the funding is prioritised for the proposals with the highest levels of support.

9.   We will be working over the coming months with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA), disability organisations and other equality groups to finalise the Strategy. We will also continue to work with the Devolved Administrations to enable best practice from this strategy to be used for elections to the devolved legislatures and for local elections in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

10.   The Strategy will provide support for disabled people who want to stand either for political parties or as independent candidates for UK Westminster elections, English local authority elections, Greater London Authority (GLA) elections, English Mayoral elections and elections for Police and Crime Commissioners.

Further information

11.   If you want to know more about this work then please register your interest by:

- e-mailing: accesstoelectedoffice@geo.gsi.gov.uk
- telephoning: 020 7035 8057/8064
- minicom: 020 7035 4742 (09:00-17:00 Mon to Fri). Please note that this service is for members of the public with impaired hearing.
- writing to us at: Access to Elected Office Team, Government Equalities Office, Home Office, 3rd Floor, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

The consultation process

12. The public consultation on proposals to provide additional support for disabled people who are seeking elected office was conducted between 16 February 2011 and 11 May 2011. An EasyRead version of the consultation document was published alongside the full version. Braille copies were provided on request, and other alternative accessible formats were also available.

13. The Government Equalities Office (GEO) hosted the consultation document prominently on its website. It was also featured on the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) and DirectGov websites.

14. Key partners, including disability organisations and political parties, were contacted directly to alert them to the consultation and to invite them to comment on the proposals, including a number of key equality groups and representatives of the public, private and voluntary sector. Equality 2025 has been actively involved in discussions from the outset. Two roundtables involving representatives from the political arena and disability organisations were held in May 2011 in order to discuss the proposals in more detail. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability also held a seminar dedicated to the consultation in March 2011.

15. In addition, GEO consulted its wide network of contacts through stakeholder bulletins and events, presented the proposals at meetings with other Government Departments; and with equality groups from across the equalities spectrum. Although the proposals do not apply to elections within the Devolved Administrations, Ministers also wrote to the Devolved Administrations in Wales and Scotland inviting views and setting out our intention to work with them in sharing best practice.

16. The consultation asked 17 questions:

- 3 questions about the general strategy;
- 3 questions on the issue of changing attitudes (proposals 1 and 2);
- 4 questions on training, development and support (proposal 3);
- 6 questions about the Access to Elected Fund (proposal 4);
- 1 general question on policies and guidance (proposals 5 and 6).

17. A total of 45 responses were received. One organisation responded to the EasyRead version. One respondent requested that their response remain confidential. The responses came from different sources which the chart and tables below illustrate. The categorisation of respondents is based on the information recorded on responses or if this information was not included, based on the best judgment of officials using the information supplied.
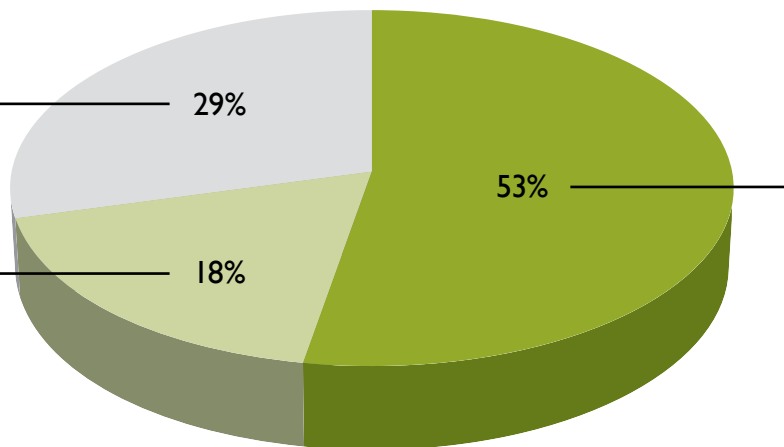
Breakdown of respondents to the consultation by sector

Other
e.g. Individuals
(including local
councillors),
Trade Unions,
political parties

29%

53%

Voluntary
e.g. Disability
organisations,
equality groups

Public Sector
e.g. Public authorities,
representative bodies

18%

Total number of responses received	45
Standard responses	44
Easy Read responses	I

18. The Government is grateful for all the consultation responses received. These have been individually considered by GEO and have been taken into account when deciding the priorities for the Access to Elected Strategy. While it is not possible to describe all responses or views in detail, this paper summarises the key points raised.

19. The analysis of responses to questions posed by the consultation document is set out below. Where percentages have been used, they have generally been calculated for indicative purposes only, as a percentage of the total responses received (including those where no response was given to a particular question or no specific preference was expressed). In calculating percentages, no weighting has been applied to any particular response.

20. A more detailed breakdown is provided for Question 1. A statement of which proposals will be taken forward follows this breakdown (p.13). Shorter summaries are provided for the other questions posed within the consultation to indicate the range of responses received.

21. It should be noted, however, that the consultation process was a qualitative and not a quantitative exercise, so the data and outcome is necessarily based on officials' analysis of respondents' detailed answers.

Summary of responses to the consultation

Question 1: Which of these proposals or combination of proposals do you think would make the greatest impact?
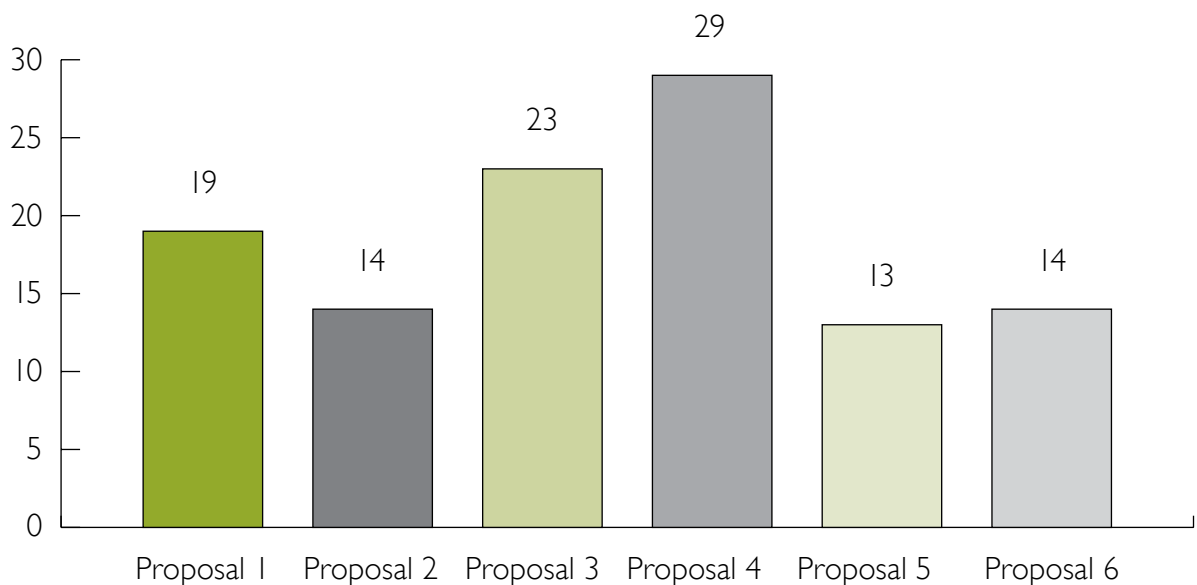
22. 35 responses indicated a preference towards an option or combination of options (78%). The remaining 10 respondents (22%) did not specify which proposals were favoured within their response. 7 respondents (16%) indicated that they would like to see all 6 proposals implemented.

23. Due to the nature of the question posed, we have analysed the findings by individual proposals in order to gauge the levels of support.

Proposal 1
Government should work more closely with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA) and disability organisations to develop focused awareness training

24. There was a medium level of support for proposal 1. 19 respondents (42%) indicated that it was important to develop focused awareness raising in order to change possible negative perceptions regarding the capabilities of disabled people holding elected positions, but the majority of these respondents (40%) indicated that this proposal was important if delivered alongside other proposals.

Bar chart showing levels of support by proposal:
- Proposal 1: 19
- Proposal 2: 14
- Proposal 3: 23
- Proposal 4: 29
- Proposal 5: 13
- Proposal 6: 14

Of the 9 responses:

- 2 were from national public sector organisations;
- 2 were from local/regional public sector organisations;
- 8 were from national voluntary organisations;
- 7 were from local/regional voluntary organisations.

Proposal 2
Work with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA) and disabled people's organisations to develop a cross-party Ambassadors programme

25. There was a lower level of support for the second proposal of setting up a cross-party Ambassadors programme, with 14 respondents (31%) indicating that this proposal was an important way of addressing barriers to elected office. All 14 respondents indicated that this proposal was important if delivered with one or more of the other proposals.

26. Of the 14 responses received:

- 7 were from national voluntary sector organisations;
- 3 were from local/regional voluntary sector organisations;
- 1 was from a national public sector organisation;
- 2 were from local/regional public sector organisations;
- 1 was an individual response.

Proposal 3
Provide training and development opportunities aimed at supporting disabled people through the route to political participation

27. There was a relatively high level of support for this proposal with 23 respondents (51%) indicating a preference for this proposal. 2 of these said that this could be the only proposal that should be pursued. 21 responses (47%) indicated that this proposal was important if delivered in conjunction with one or more of the other proposals.

28. Of these 23 responses:

- 7 were from national voluntary sector organisations;
- 7 were from local/regional voluntary sector organisations;
- 1 was from a national public sector organisation;
- 4 were from local/regional public sector organisations;
- 3 were from individuals;
- 1 was from a Trade Union.

Proposal 4
Establish an Access to Elected Office Fund to support disability-related costs

29. The highest level of support was received for this proposal. 29 respondents (64%) highlighted this proposal within their response. 6 of the 29 responses (13% from total number of responses) indicated the importance of this proposal without referring to any of the other proposals.

30. Of these 29 responses:

- 2 were from national public sector organisations;
- 5 were from local/regional public sector organisations;
- 12 were from national voluntary sector organisations;
- 4 were from local/regional voluntary sector organisations;
- 5 were from individuals;
- 1 was from a political party.

Proposal 5
Work with political parties to analyse their existing disability access policies and cascade and promote good practice

31. The lowest level of support was received for this proposal with 13 respondents (29%) indicating a preference for this option, but only if delivered in conjunction with other proposals.

32. Of these 13 responses:

- 1 was from a national public sector organisation;
- 7 were from national voluntary sector organisations;
- 2 were from local/regional public sector organisations;
- 3 were from local/regional voluntary sector organisations;

Proposal 6
Promote and explain legal obligations that apply to political parties, e.g. develop a short guide, website materials and/or a toolkit to support local authorities and political parties in fulfilling their duties under the Equality Act.

33. A relatively low level of support was also received for this proposal with 14 respondents (31%) highlighting the option in their response to Question 1. No responses highlighted this proposal as a possible standalone option. Of the 14 responses:

- 1 was from a national public sector organisation;
- 5 were from national voluntary sector organisations;
- 3 were from local/regional public sector organisations;
- 4 were from local/regional voluntary sector organisations;
- 1 was from an individual.

34. The majority of respondents, therefore, indicated a preference for providing training and development (proposal 3) and establishing a dedicated Fund for potential disabled candidates (proposal 4). These proposals received more than 50% support from all respondents.

35. **Our Response**

Summary for Q.1: The Government has considered the responses carefully, and will pursue the following proposals, as part of the Access to Elected Office strategy for disabled people:

- **Proposal 1** – Government should work more closely with political parties, the Local Government Association (LGA) and disability organisations to develop focused awareness raising.
- **Proposal 3** – Provide training and development opportunities aimed at supporting disabled people through the route to political participation.
- **Proposal 4** – Establish an Access to Elected Office Fund to support disability related costs.
- **Proposal 5** – Work with political parties to analyse their existing disability access policies and cascade and promote any good practice.
- **Proposal 6** – Promote and explain legal obligations that apply to political parties, e.g. develop a short guide, website materials and/or a toolkit to support local authorities and political parties to fulfil their duties under the Equality Act.

Due to the levels of support received, funding will be prioritised for Proposals 3 and 4. We will also work to deliver Proposals 1, 5 and 6 but will seek to do so in a proportionate way in order to avoid directing resources away from the higher priority options.

We will consider the comments provided in answer to questions 2-18 when developing and implementing the detailed proposals, with the aim of launching the final strategy in early 2012.

Proposal 2, the establishment of a cross party Ambassadors programme, will not be pursued as part of the strategy due to the level of resources required and the comparative lack of support for this option.

Question 2: Are there any barriers for disabled people running for elected positions which are not addressed by these proposals? If so, what are they? And how might they be overcome?

36. There were 37 specific responses to this question, which described a multitude of barriers which were often interlinked. A number of respondents thought that too many disabled people feel excluded from democracy e.g. because manifestos are inaccessible, incomprehensible language (especially for people with learning difficulties) and limited accessibility to polling stations.

37. Several respondents also cited the existing culture of Parliament itself as a barrier and thought that change was needed in order to encourage disabled people to apply for elected office. Flexible working should be considered for local and national politicians.

38. Many respondents felt that physical barriers can make campaigning very difficult as campaigning can involve travel to different types of buildings and locations, including rural areas where there are lots of narrow and uneven surfaces.

Question 3: Are you aware of any existing work that these proposals might build on?

39. There were 22 specific responses, describing current and past initiatives which could be relevant. Several respondents described programmes which provide training in leadership skills, public speaking, confidence building and networking for success and life coaching. Other projects have provided training for young disabled people to become leaders in their community and develop as peer educators.

40. Some respondents suggested building on the Access to Work model. The principles of the scheme and practical support on offer could be directly applied to candidates putting themselves forward for elected office.

41. One programme in Northern Ireland increased knowledge and confidence in local and national political systems among deaf and hard of hearing people, with workshops providing assertiveness training, informal discussions around issues of importance to the participants and a panel debate with a range of politicians from the four main parties.

42. Many respondents recommended regular participation sessions between local politicians and the hearing loss community, and political awareness training to those who express an interest in elected office. One-to-one discussions with local politicians were recommended as helping to lessen their nerves and help to bridge the perceived gap between those in power and people on the ground, especially when political figures related personal experiences of deafness. A relatively modest investment of time on behalf of politicians in an informal setting paid dividends in terms of raising awareness of deaf issues.

43. Guides, such as Radar's MPs' Guide on Disability, could inform guidance for political parties and elected office-holders in general, whilst Radar's MP Disability Dialogue could provide a model to foster stronger local engagement between disabled people and elected office holders.

Raising Awareness

Question 4: How can we best raise awareness effectively to reach/communicate with disabled people and organisations?

44. There were 33 specific responses, with many suggesting ways of building on existing disability and political awareness raising initiatives, amongst disability groups and the public more widely.

45. Several respondents said there should be positive role models who can demonstrate what disabled people can do for society. Disabled politicians at all political levels should be encouraged to speak at events for disabled people.

46.   Targeted campaigning could be effectively directed at the youth/student wings of the major political parties and college or university based political associations, since these offer an ideal way for people to make the first step into politics.

47.   Disabled people's organisations that are user-led would be well placed to disseminate information to disabled people and organisations such as Local Authorities. Disability organisations could also carry out engagement events to encourage disabled people to put themselves forward. Respondents also suggested that political organisations could run advice surgeries in partnership with disability organisations.

48.   Respondents flagged the importance of not concentrating communication through 'disability channels', as not every disabled person will access them. For example, information about Youth Parliament should include examples of young disabled people who have participated.

Question 5: What should be the key functions and support provided by the Ambassadors?

49.   There were 30 specific responses for this question. Respondents suggested a range of potential functions for Ambassadors including:

- Monitoring the whole political arena, ensuring its accessibility and promotion at all points.
- Identifying talented individuals as a first step in an ongoing process of tailored support.
- Providing specific, practical guidance (e.g. a toolkit), as well as moral support and inspiration to disabled candidates. In order to do this effectively, Ambassadors must be equipped with the appropriate knowledge in order to signpost individuals to organisations and sources of support.
- Supporting disabled people to challenge discrimination, for example, if selection interviews are held in a building that is not accessible, or if members of the political party make negative comments, or policy material and marketing is not accessible to disabled people.

50.   Some respondents, however, were concerned that there is not currently a large enough body of disabled MPs and councillors to create an effective Ambassador scheme and it could be a significant burden on a small group of people. Disabled people want to be politically active for the same reasons as everyone else, and not necessarily because they are disabled. Respondents also flagged the need to be aware of Ambassadors' possible concerns about being pigeon-holed.

51.   Some respondents also thought there was a danger that parties may delegate their central equality responsibilities to Ambassadors.

Question 6: How can we engage with the general public, and political parties, to address the negative perceptions of electing disabled people?

52.   29 responses were received with the overall majority stating that it was important to have more positive images of disabled people within the media. Many respondents suggested that existing MPs and local councillors should be encouraged to act as role models and share their experiences of holding elected positions. Most respondents felt that such role models should be encouraged to provide case studies for use within the national media i.e. a day in the life of a disabled politician or local councillor. Role models could also use social networking sites.

53.   Some respondents argued that it was more important to address potential negative perceptions within political parties as they thought that the general public would necessarily have reservations about electing a disabled person to represent them. They suggested that political parties should work with disabled people or disability organisations to ensure that disability equality training was available to party officials, especially those who are involved in the selection process for candidates.

54.   One respondent thought that there needed to be more visible evidence that disability requirements are being routinely taken into

account in order to send a clear signal to disabled people that such requirements are important. For example, any provision of communication support at Parliamentary Committees should be visible in any broadcasts or by providing captioning for all parliamentary related business.

55.   A few respondents argued that it was important to communicate with young people, possibly through social networking sites or through education.

Provision of training, development and support

Question 7: What key skills are needed to become a local or national politician?

56.   29 substantive responses were received. A variety of skills were highlighted. Many respondents cited the following skills or attributes (in order of popularity):

- An interest in community issues and local/ regional agendas.
- Communication skills (with a particular emphasis on the need for public speaking).
- Self confidence and being assertive in order to effectively challenge others.
- Analytical skills.
- Self discipline.
- Organisational skills.
- Basic deaf awareness skills for all politicians and training in communication skills for deaf politicians.

57.   Some respondents felt that politicians needed particular characteristics such as compassion, empathy, diplomacy and enthusiasm for helping others.

Question 8: How can training and development best be provided and made accessible to disabled people?

58.   Many respondents agreed that training and development is important and that additional opportunities should be available to disabled people to support them to get elected. They

highlighted the need for a combination of disabled people, disability organisations, and political parties to be involved in the provision and delivery of training and development activities. People felt that this training should be available to anyone who wishes to be elected, including those not directly involved in political parties such as independent candidates.

59.   Respondents agreed that the accessibility of any training and development activity is important. Issues which were identified as needing consideration included the accessibility of transport, buildings, and course materials being available in a variety of appropriate accessible formats.

60.   A variety of training and development formats were identified as being useful. The most frequently mentioned were online learning, and face to face sessions. Some respondents also highlighted the importance of mentoring, work shadowing and internships for disabled people who have an interest in elected office.

Question 9: What other types of support would be particularly beneficial to prospective and elected disabled candidates?

61.   Many respondents highlighted three other forms of support that they felt would be beneficial:

- **Mentoring, buddying and shadowing.** A significant number highlighted that these forms of support would be beneficial to prospective and elected disabled candidates. Some stated that this would be best carried out by disabled politicians or other disabled people who have been in similar positions in the past. They also suggested that there were similar schemes run for people from other under-represented groups which could provide a useful model for this work.
- **Networks.** A number of the respondents highlighted the importance of support networks for disabled people wishing to enter or already involved in political life. One respondent identified similar networks for women and suggested that a similar model

could be used. It was noted that there needed to be organisational support for networking both electronically and face to face.

- **Accessible training and development.** A large number of respondents highlighted that any training and development activity will need to be made accessible to disabled people. Issues which were identified as needing careful consideration included transport, timings of courses, personal support, accessible buildings, and the need for text-phones to enable communication with deaf people.

Question 10: What kind of training would offer the most effective way of promoting the capacity amongst non-disabled MPs or councillors to support disabled candidates?

62. 33 respondents answered this question. However, not all of these addressed the question directly. The majority of those who did make suggestions expressed the need for more awareness of disability issues and the capabilities and achievements of disabled people. Respondents argued that targeted disability 'awareness training' for local and national politicians would address negative perceptions and create a greater understanding of problems associated with different types of disability.

63. Some respondents noted that many disabled people will not even consider a career in politics as they will not see it as being a possibility that is open to them and that political parties need to take an active role in engaging and encouraging disabled people.

64. Several respondents cited the need for more diversity and equality training and that this training should be designed and delivered with the involvement of disabled people.

65. A number of respondents suggested that shadowing and mentoring schemes could partner non-disabled MPs and councillors with disabled candidates or newly elected MPs and councillors. This could provide the mentor with an opportunity to gain increased insight and first hand understanding of the issues faced by a disabled candidate.

Improving accessibility to elected office

Question 11: Given limited resources, what criteria should be considered when deciding which potential disabled candidates should benefit from a fund?

32 respondents answered this question but many did not directly address the issue of possible eligibility criteria for the fund proposal.

66. The majority of responses did not explicitly state potential criteria for the Fund proposal. More than one respondent thought that the Fund should provide support for any candidate who needs extra financial support as a result of a disability, though they did acknowledge that practical implementation of this would be determined by available resources.

67. A number of respondents acknowledged the difficult and political sensitivities of developing criteria which were fair, clear and transparent to all those seeking to apply but stressed that these were all vital to the credibility of the overall strategy. There was a strong view from several respondents that criteria need to be developed and agreed in consultation with disability rights organisations.

68. Several respondents suggested looking at the criteria for Access to Work funding and using this as a basis for the Access to Elected Office Fund. A small number suggested that candidates should be registered disabled under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

69. A number of respondents also thought that applicants to the Fund should be able to demonstrate a track record of political activity either through a political party or at a more grass roots level by working for their local community. Some respondents thought that the merit of applications and the likelihood of election should be considered, taking into account the views of the relevant political party and those who know them. These same respondents thought that decision making should involve disabled people.

Question 12: At what stage should an individual be eligible for support from a fund?

70. 24 responses were received, with the vast majority preferring funds to be available at the pre-selection stage. Some respondents suggested that candidates could be asked to demonstrate some level of commitment to holding public office, such as evidence of community or voluntary work, in order to find a way of assessing eligibility for those who have not had previous political experience.

71. Most respondents indicated that political parties tend to provide more support once a candidate had been officially selected and that support was, therefore, more crucial at the pre-selection stage since barriers would be harder to overcome without party support. Support throughout the early stages would also assist independent candidates significantly since candidates would probably need to finance all costs through their own revenues.

72. Several respondents thought funding should only be available to individuals once they had been officially selected as a party candidate or during election campaigns for independent candidates.

73. A few respondents argued that since procedures were different for different political parties, there should be a general application process with no restrictions relating to eligibility. Applications could be considered against the same set of general criteria, regardless of how far the candidate had progressed.

Question 13: How could a cash-limited fund fairly prioritise requests within any year?

74. 22 responses were received. There was no clear consensus or majority view amongst respondents as to how funds could be prioritised.

75. Some respondents thought that funding should be considered on an annual basis which would allow the means of assessing applications against each other and prioritising applications according to different measures such as merit or likelihood of election. An annual funding "window" would also provide a way of trying to distribute funds to a broad spectrum of candidates e.g. balancing funds between local and parliamentary elections. One respondent suggested that there should be an opportunity to apply for funds twice a year.

76. A small number of respondents argued that the levels of funding should fluctuate in terms of demand so that there would be larger levels of funding being disseminated during election campaigns where the costs were likely to be higher but for fewer candidates. Although there may be significantly more applications in the lead up to the official selection process, the amounts requested should involve lower levels of funding since it was likely that less support would be needed. It was also suggested that funds for any expenses related to the assessment or selection stages should be accessed at any time, whereas there could be a set cut-off point for the election fund to cover costs during the campaign period.

77. One respondent suggested that the Fund should operate in the same way as the Disabled Students Allowance, with capped amounts of money for different types of support (e.g. costs for communication support, travel or support workers) and applicants submitting evidence of expenditure.

78. Another respondent suggested that decisions on funding could be made by small regional committees comprising disabled people of different types (preferably existing elected officials) and a representative of the funding body.

79. Some respondents stressed the importance of not prioritising low level requests of funding at the detriment of higher level awards such as ongoing funding for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters.

Question 14: How can we determine which activities should be included for support and over what period?

80. 25 substantive responses were received. A significant number of respondents agreed that all activities, which are not covered by existing obligations under the Equality Act 2010, should be within the remit of the Fund. However, it was stressed that funds should not be used to gain a political advantage over other candidates to avoid any potential backlash against disabled candidates. Requests would, therefore, need to be carefully considered in order to ensure that funding was strictly used to overcome disability related barriers and not to cover general political activities such as the production of party literature or promotion materials.

81. A significant number of respondents suggested that the Fund should cover the following types of costs:

- Communication support throughout the selection process e.g. help with the costs of employing a (BSL) interpreter or communicator to accompany a person, where there might be communication barriers during the selection processes and hustings.
- Special aids and equipment – provision of aids and equipment which non-disabled candidates would not need.
- Support workers – help with the costs of employing personal support workers to support the disabled candidate in undertaking their candidature duties.
- Travel and accommodation – support with the extra costs of travel or accommodation, for example the extra cost of taking a taxi rather than a bus, or staying in an accessible hotel room rather than at a party member's house, while performing their duties as a candidate.

82. A few respondents also felt that the Fund should cover some miscellaneous costs such as 'one off' items of support that do not fit elsewhere, such as a grant towards the costs of disability awareness training for members of the local association.

83. There was no real consensus in terms of the time period in which candidates can receive financial support from the Fund. Some respondents felt that candidates should only be eligible for funds post selection and pre-election, i.e. during the election campaign itself. Other respondents preferred the funds to be available during the pre-selection stage since candidates were likely to receive more assistance with disability related expenditure once they had been selected as an official candidate.

Question 15: How should funds be distributed once it has been agreed that an individual will receive funding?

84. 19 responses were received. The majority argued that the payments should be made directly to the individuals who are seeking assistance in order to cut out any bureaucracy and ensure that all the financial assistance granted is received by the individual.

85. A significant number argued that payments should be made in advance to avoid putting individuals, who are on low incomes or without a steady cash flow, at a disadvantage.

86. Some respondents felt that the money should be distributed to individuals once receipts for the relevant purchases were available or with some payments going directly to the organisation providing the service or products, i.e. BSL interpreters.

87. Some respondents argued that the funds should be closely monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure that the funds are being distributed fairly and are effectively used. The Access to Work model was also cited as being a good one to follow in terms of distributing funds.

88. One respondent felt that a one-off grant should be made to the individual after making a general assessment of needs.

89. Another respondent argued that upper and lower limits should be set and distribution decided in part by the outcome of any needs-based assessment.

Question 16: Are there any areas/types of expenses which the fund should not cover?

90.   21 responses were received. The vast majority of respondents agreed that the Fund should not cover any non-disability related expenses or any expenses which are equally applicable to non-disabled candidates, since this may provide candidates with a political advantage. Respondents also agreed that the Fund should not cover those costs which should be met by political parties when fulfilling their obligation to provide reasonable adjustments.

91.   Some respondents specified particular activities which should not be funded, i.e. entertainment, alcohol, clothing, accommodation in a ward or constituency.

92.   A few respondents highlighted the need to take other allowances into account when deciding funding, i.e. Access to Work, Personal Independence Payments etc.

93.   Several respondents raised the issue of whether the Fund should cover any costs related to running an election campaign. There was a clear consensus that the Fund should not cover the production of any election material, such as posters, letters or leaflets.

94.   Two respondents felt that there should be no restrictions in terms of what types of expenses should be covered.

Question 17: What types of national and local policies, guidelines and resources should political parties have in place to provide practical support and access to disabled candidates?

95.   29 responses were received. The majority highlighted the need for political parties to understand their legal obligations, as set out in the Equality Act 2010, as they felt that the legislation provides a good framework for political parties. Respondents also felt that political parties should be actively seeking ways to promote participation amongst disabled people.

96.   A large number of respondents felt that political parties should have a well advertised policy on providing reasonable adjustments, in order to build confidence and encourage candidates to disclose details of impairments. This information should be readily available and in accessible formats.

97.   A significant number of respondents indicated that political parties should consult disabled people/disability organisations to establish effective equality and diversity policies, including guidelines on accessibility and to ensure that they are communicating effectively. Party literature and websites should contain accessible material. Several respondents also felt that all political parties should have a dedicated disability officer to establish a good dialogue with disability organisations and draw up national or local policies on disability.

98.   A few respondents highlighted the importance of introducing deaf awareness training for party officials and the need to provide documents in BSL. Consultation with leading deaf awareness organisations would provide a good basis for understanding the requirements of BSL users. Respondents also flagged the need for political parties to have a zero tolerance approach to discrimination.

99.   Some respondents thought that political parties should monitor their membership to have a clear idea of diversity requirements. Regional representatives on regional committees could have a role in overseeing the policy for reasonable adjustments. Political parties might also want to consider offering incentives to local constituencies who support more diverse candidates, in order to overcome the disconnection between central party offices and local party structures.

Question 18: Are there any other comments you would like to make in relation to this consultation that have not already been covered by this form? If yes please explain.

Main points raised in response to Question 18:

- More political education in schools to address attitudinal/cultural barriers. This is a particular issue with Special Educational Needs and Learning Disabled students who might miss out on any form of political education.
- Need to ensure that the distinction between disability organisations and disabled people's organisations is understood by the Government and political parties. Both types of organisation need to be involved in developing the strategy.
- The Fund proposal is welcomed but the amount that has been earmarked is a drop in the ocean.
- It was noted that financial commitments for winnable or marginal seats are more considerable and the additional level of expenses may be a tipping point for many candidates.
- One response attached a petition with 300 signatures asking that the law be changed to allow MPs to job share.
- The perceived stigma regarding mental illness was also raised as a significant barrier. Respondents welcomed the intention to repeal Section 141 of the Mental Health Act.
- Some respondents flagged the need to consider the possible impact on benefits, allowances etc. It was also suggested Councillors' allowances should be exempt from income tax.

Annex A
List of organisations and individuals that responded

Scope
RADAR
Liberal Democrats
RNID
Association of Democratic Service Officers
North Kesteven District Council
Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
Ideal for All
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council
Scottish Council on Deafness
People First
Muscular Dystrophy Campaign
Police Authorities of Wales
Colchester Borough Council
Dyslexia Pathways
Spinal Injuries Association
Infrastructure Network for Disability Information
Submission from 9 May Roundtable, hosted by the Office for Disability Issues
Submission from 9 May Roundtable, hosted by Scope
Submission from RADAR Young Ambassadors Workshop – Leeds
Wiltshire Council
Wiltshire Council Staff Disability Forum
Mencap
Councillor Pam Thomas
Scottish Youth Parliament
National Association of Deafened People
Southampton Centre for Independent Living (SCIL)
Communication Worker's Union (CWU)

Action Deafness
British Deaf Association
E-local News
Leicestershire Centre for Integrated Living
Regional Equality and Diversity Partnership – East Midlands
Rethink
Alison Hicking
Siobhan Fennel
Peter Farrington
Linda Curran
Alison Bucknell
Liz Williams
Ted Pottage, NHS Foundation Trust Governor
Linda Mclean
Irena Paterson
Councillor David Buxton