

Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland) 2016-17 Pilot Evaluation report

Introduction

This report will evaluate the pilot project for the Access to Elected Office Fund Scotland. The Fund ran as a pilot from August 2016 until 5th May 2017. It was open to disabled people who were running for selection and as confirmed candidates, within a party or as an independent, for the 2017 local government election. The Fund was designed to 'level the playing field' for disabled people to fight political campaigns where they face additional costs due to impairment related barriers that non-disabled people don't need to consider.

Background on the Fund

Inclusion Scotland believes that adhering to the social model of disability is the only way in which full inclusion of disabled people in society will be achieved. As a Disabled People's Organisation, we are governed by

disabled people, and work to ensure our voices are heard at all levels of society and decision making. This means that disabled people should be equally represented in decision making roles as decision makers. A core part of our work involves understanding the barriers disabled people face, and the solutions they themselves feel would decrease them.

The underrepresentation of disabled people in politics and public life was highlighted at a think tank event held by Independent Living in Scotland in 2013. James Dornan MSP was present, and was particularly interested in addressing this. He offered to support Inclusion Scotland in addressing this, and secured the backing of the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body. The Equality Unit of the Scottish Government granted one-year funding for a 2014-15 pilot recruiting seven disabled graduates as paid parliamentary interns.

The pilot proved successful, and research from the interns highlighted the many barriers

to political inclusion that disabled people face. Some of the interns were able to take part largely due to support from Access to Work, and the advice Inclusion Scotland was able to provide around reasonable adjustments and employee rights. However, there were no comparable support structures consistent across political parties and organisations. It was important to us to learn more about the barriers that inhibit disabled people from being involved in politics, and ultimately putting themselves forward for elected office.

In 2015, the Equality Unit granted Inclusion Scotland funding to conduct a coproduced research project with disabled interns across the main political parties. The research focussed on the barriers that disabled people face in accessing elected office. One of major finding showed that financial barriers were an issue for people when considering more involvement in politics, or standing for election. Disabled people have higher additional costs of living and are statistically worse off than non-disabled people. Some participants highlighted instances where

additional costs prevented them from taking part in political activities, or where support or items which would cost money were necessary for their participation. It was clear that disabled people were too often unable to take part equally with non-disabled members, and therefore would struggle to build a profile and pass a selection process against more included members.

Through our Access to Politics work we have offered non-financial advice and assistance to disabled people who involved in politics on any level. This has included individual goal setting, encouragement, peer networking, and advice on rights and adjustments organisations should be making to ensure equal access. We have delivered branch talks and fringe sessions at party conferences on steps parties can take to make their activities more inclusive. However, barriers remain that cannot be reasonably adjusted for without financial assistance that parties themselves often do not have the resources to meet.

When asked how they would describe their experience of the Access to Elected Office Fund, 75% of candidates reported “very positive” and 25% reported “positive”. None of the candidates reported “neutral”, “negative”, or “very negative”.

Outcome Summary

The following were the original outcomes specified in the funding agreement that established the Fund pilot. These established a brief set of targets for the pilot to aim to achieve.

In general, the pilot exceeded all targets within the outcome set and overall achieved a stronger result than expected for the initial pilot. This can be credited to achieving a high level of awareness through political parties and via the Electoral Commission, as well as to the robust positive outcomes of individual support that was offered to candidates.

Outcome 1 - At least 30 disabled candidates will have been supported by the Access to Elected Office Fund.

- 44 disabled people were supported by the Fund. 39 became official candidates either as an independent or through their political party.

Outcome 2 - Success rate of applications which are supported by advice shall be at least 80%.

- 100% of applications that went to panel were successful in being supported by the Fund.

Outcome 3 - Monitoring and evaluation feedback will demonstrate that advice resulted in appropriate and effective support being requested from the Fund by candidates.

- 100% of candidates surveyed felt “very supported” by the Inclusion Scotland team.

Outcome 4 - Disabled people are provided with financial assistance, to help address access barriers they face in seeking selection and/or election in the Scottish Local Authority elections in 2017.

- 8% of candidates surveyed said that the Fund “completely” removed the barriers they faced. 58% said “mostly”, and 34% said “some”. No candidates replied “not at all” when asked how much the Fund decreased the campaign barriers they faced.

Recommendations Summary

The following recommendations for future action are derived from learning in the pilot and feedback obtained from participants. Some relate to action to be taken by the project itself, or particular bodies within it (e.g. the Access to Politics and Fund Advisory Group). Other actions would need to be taken up by other parties, or the Scottish Government.

1. A more detailed strategy and operational criteria should be agreed for the Advisory Group, including advising on higher-level strategies for the Fund and wider Access to Politics work.

2. Representation on the Advisory Group should be reviewed to ensure members can fully commit and are best placed to implement change in their own organisations.
3. Meetings for the Advisory Group are scheduled in advance with an agreed frequency, and other channels of communication are explored as needed for reports and shared learning.
4. The methods used by the Decision Panel should be reviewed by the Fund and the Advisory Group to identify potential improvements in efficiency, and clarity of operating criteria and principles. This should include communication channels, understanding of the Panel's role, and expectations of commitment.
5. The Advisory Group and Inclusion Scotland would look to further publicise

the Fund, including success stories from the pilot. This should include working with political parties to encourage promotion via their own internal communication networks.

6. Additional accessible information should be produced for people thinking of applying to the Fund, based on learning from the pilot and feedback from applicants.
7. Inclusion Scotland should develop a strategy for building an awareness of how to conduct inclusive selection processes within parties.
8. Sufficient operational resources for the Fund should be maintained to ensure a high quality, person-centred approach supporting all applicants throughout their journey.

9. The Advisory Group should discuss common issues around reasonable adjustments by political parties and provide a steer on what is deemed reasonable, or otherwise, for differing scenarios.

10. The Advisory Group should discuss steps parties can take to change their culture around party activities, to ensure disabled people aren't excluded.

11. Further consideration should be given to addressing the particular barriers faced by BSL users and other deaf people who require communications support to participate in political activity leading up to seeking candidacy. This should include parties increasing their deaf awareness and considering improvements to inclusive practice.

12. The Fund should be opened well in advance of parties having their selection process, so that disabled people receive the support they need to decrease barriers preventing them from seeking selection on a level playing field.
13. Clarity would be needed from the Scottish Government on how flexible the Fund budget can be, if demand exceed available budget during any particular period.
14. The Fund should conduct a mapping exercise of assistive technology providers and organisations who support disabled people in Scotland, to ensure best value for money, and the best fit for individual applicants.
15. The Fund should move to a model of conducting third-party assessments for assistive technology for complex cases

(e.g. via occupational therapists, or others with similar skill-sets.)

16. More information and clarity on options for support and processes involved (e.g. Personal Assistants) should be developed and made available to Fund recipients so that they can make an informed decision on what suits them best.
17. Continue to review the use of personal assistants to identify areas of support that are appropriate or not taking into account electoral regulations.
18. Procedures should be updated to account for learning from the pilot, including review procedures, guidance documents and agreements between Inclusion Scotland and recipients.

19. Procedures should be updated to account for learning from the pilot, including review procedures, guidance documents, and agreements between the Fund and recipients.

20. Inclusion Scotland and the Advisory Group should encourage the UK Government to re-amend legislation to allow the operation of the Fund in the event of a Westminster election.

21. Inclusion Scotland should work with other organisations to further investigate the barriers that decrease the participation in politics of those with mental health conditions, cognitive impairments and neurodiversity, and identify steps to take to address this in the context of the Fund.

22. Inclusion Scotland should work with other equalities organisations to develop

best practice in equalities monitoring of applicants to the Fund to be able to fully evaluate the inclusivity of the Fund to all protected groups.

23. Inclusion Scotland should proactively reach out to people from other protected groups, recognising the additional barriers to political involvement faced by disabled people who have multiple protected characteristics.

Section 1: Processes and procedures for the Fund

This evaluation covers the structures set-up to support the Access to Elected Office Fund. As well as the processes applicants went through from first contact up until the election, and the learning gathered throughout.

Recommendations are made for future delivery of the Fund, and for priorities in the wider Access to Politics work of Inclusion Scotland.

1.1 Purpose of the Fund

The Fund was available to disabled people who were seeking selection, or were confirmed candidates, for the 2017 Scottish Local Authority election. This included both party candidates and independent candidates. The Fund provided the financial assistance to pay for practical support and adjustments to enable applicants to campaign on a level playing field with non-disabled candidates. Support was available from when individuals decided to seek selection with a political party or put themselves forward as an independent candidate. Where they were successful in securing a nomination, support would continue up to and including the election counts and, if elected, any council negotiations before they started work.

The following principles were outlined by Inclusion Scotland at the beginning of the Fund:

- The Social Model of Disability
- Person Centred Approach
- Disabled People led

- Impartiality
- Accessibility

1.2 Advisory Group

The Access to Politics Advisory Group was set-up to provide periodic policy guidance and expert advice to Inclusion Scotland and the Decision Panel on the use of the Fund, as well as more general guidance on the wider Access to Politics service for disabled people seeking political engagement. This included the following responsibilities to:

1. Propose options for criteria to be used to provide disabled people a grant from the Fund.
2. Consider what constitutes activity that a disabled candidate reasonably might be expected to do in order to win selection and/or election, and determine for what activities reasonable adjustments should

be provided under the Equality Act 2010.

3. Provide guidance on where support provided under the Fund could to overlap with what would be considered campaign expenditure.
4. To more generally engage with the projects in two-way dialogue about ways in which politics can be made more inclusive of disabled people, and the role that parties and institutions can play in supporting this.

The following organisations were represented on the Advisory Group:

- Scotland's five political parties represented in the Scottish Parliament:
 - Tasmina Ahmed-Sheik MP (SNP)
 - Caitlin Stott (Labour)
 - Taylor Muir (Conservative)

- Peter McColl / Sarah Beattie-Smith (Green)
- Peter Barrett / Millicent Scott (Liberal Democrats)
- Laura Hutchison (Equality and Human Rights Commission)
- Willie Sullivan (Electoral Reform Society)
- James Fowlie / Gillian Fyfe (Coalition of Scottish Local Authorities)
- Colin Lee (Coalition of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations)

Members suggested the Electoral Commission should be on the Advisory Group; however, the Commission could not be involved directly due to conflicts of interest. They were instead heavily consulted by Inclusion Scotland regarding the impact of electoral regulations on Fund processes throughout the pilot. The Commission also actively promoted the Fund to candidates, and continued to be supportive beyond the election.

On reflection some members felt while they were offered an advisory role, the lack of regular meetings of the group once the Fund opened (mainly due to a lack of capacity during what then became an extremely busy period) resulted in little opportunity to feed into the development of the work. A solution would be to hold quarterly or biannual meetings, and for group members to be sent written updates on the Fund.

In some cases, parties put forward voluntary role holders as their representatives.

Subsequently, it has been suggested that where possible the Fund approach paid staff/officers to represent political parties on the Advisory Group. This would encourage longer term working relationships, and make it more likely representatives would be able to oversee implementation of actions at the party end. It was felt there should be more of a higher-level strategic role for the Advisory Group. Also, in future, the Advisory Group should contribute on the planning process, ways to publicise the fund, encourage

inclusivity in parties' selection processes, and general good practice.

Recommendations:

1. A more detailed strategy and operational criteria should be agreed for the Advisory Group, including advising on higher-level strategies for the Fund and wider Access to Politics work.
2. Representation on the Advisory Group should be reviewed to ensure members can fully commit and are best placed to implement change in their own organisations.
3. Meetings for the Advisory Group are scheduled in advance with an agreed frequency, and other channels of communication are explored as needed for reports and shared learning.

1.3 Decision Panel

The Decision Panel was created to monitor the recommendations developed by the Fund. It was responsible for approving award decisions, based on the criteria agreed by the Advisory Group. Members of the Panel were appointed by Inclusion Scotland. The Panel was entirely made up of disabled people, all with expertise on reasonable adjustments and overcoming barriers facing disabled people.

The panel were:

- Chris O'Sullivan (Head of Business Development and Engagement, Mental Health Foundation)
- Siobhan McMahon (former Labour MSP)
- Dennis Robertson (former SNP MSP and qualified social worker)
- Heather Armstrong (former NUSS Disabled Students Officer)
- Marianne Scobie (Depute CEO, Glasgow Disability Alliance)
- Etienne D'Aboville (CEO, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living)

The Decision Panel met twice, once in June 2016 and once in November 2016. In the latter meeting, the Panel discussed and approved the first applications. Decisions of the Panel thereafter were made via e-mail. The Panel also attended training on the reasonable adjustment duty of political organisations, delivered by the EHRC in September 2016.

Two members of the Decision Panel gave feedback for this evaluation:

- The workload was fair, but they would have struggled if there were any more applications to assess.
- There should be a realistic estimation of expected time commitments for those taking part in the Panel.
- The format of recommendations was helpful, logical and consistent.
- One member felt as if decisions were already made by the Fund, and the Panel was merely rubberstamping it due to time pressures.

- There were communication issues due to the use of email chains, with some members not seeing full discussions, and uncertainty around whether the panel was making shared decisions, or voting individually.
- Applications could be sent to relevant members of the Panel, with the group only looking at controversial issues or general policy points. Face to face meetings should be reserved for such matters.

Recommendation:

4. The methods used by the Decision Panel should be reviewed by the Fund and the Advisory Group to identify potential improvements in efficiency, and clarity of operating criteria and principles. This should include communication channels, understanding of the Decision Panel's role, and expectations of commitment.

Section 2: Promotion of the Fund with stakeholders

The Fund “soft launched” on 3rd August 2016, with gradually increasing levels of promotion over the following few months, as the Fund’s structures were put in place.

2.1 Disabled people

The Fund was promoted to potential applicants through social media, Inclusion Scotland’s networks, newspaper articles, a Reporting Scotland TV segment, a BBC radio feature, the Electoral Commission, and political parties themselves. The Fund also reached out to party disabled member groups, and former ambassadors of the grass-roots cross-party “One in Five” campaign.

One party included information about the Fund in their emails to members, announcing that the selection process was open. This resulted in a large volume of enquiries from their disabled members in the opening weeks

of the fund. These measures were effective, however, feedback suggests that there could have been a much wider reach when publicising the Fund. Some applicants heard about the Fund further into their selection process, and felt that they were disadvantaged by this; it was suggested more guidance materials in the early stages would have been helpful. An information booklet should be developed, and made available in different accessible formats, with the Fund's processes and timescales given to manage applicants' expectations. This may have a positive effect on application rates, but also reduce staff time in answering queries which could be covered in accessible information.

2.2 Parties and other stakeholders

Prior to the Fund's launch, Inclusion Scotland met with COSLA, and the leader of the Independent Councillors group, to discuss the promotion of the Fund to independent candidates, and the potential for professional networking with sitting councillors. Inclusion

Scotland also met with the Electoral Commission to discuss promoting the Fund.

In some cases, selection processes within political parties were already under way or even partially completed when the Fund launched, whereas in others they had not yet begun. The Fund presented at the Commission's Political Parties Panel meeting, ran fringe events and stalls at all main Scottish party conferences, and gave talks at party branch meetings on request.

Feedback from a party official suggests that in future, there may be ways to secure further political party buy-in to maximise understanding of the Fund, and the processes surrounding it. The same official suggested that ideally, the Fund should formally meet all parties before selection begins, with guidance on ensuring their processes are accessible.

Recommendations

5. The Advisory Group and Inclusion Scotland look to further publicise the Fund, including success stories from the

pilot. This should include working with political parties to encourage promotion via their own internal communication networks.

6. Additional accessible information should be produced for people thinking of applying to the Fund, based on learning from the pilot and feedback from applicants.
7. Inclusion Scotland should develop a strategy for building an awareness of how to conduct inclusive selection processes within parties.

Section 3: Application Process and Applicant Support

The application process was initiated when disabled people seeking to stand as candidates got in touch with the Fund. Staff discussed the need and eligibility, initially by phone or email, then arranged a meeting to

go through the application in person, which included:

- Details of where they planned to stand and within which party, if any.
- The campaign activities they expected to undertake, and the potential barriers.
- Discussion on whether their party may be able to offer support.
- Discussion on the solutions that would reduce their campaign barriers, and how the fund could be used to pay for them.
- General advice on support.
- Discussion on expectations and projected timelines.

An application form was completed during the initial meeting, and a recommendation report was written based on this. This report was anonymised, and forwarded to the Decision Panel.

One of the applicants said that the application process was “much more efficient than Access to Work”.

Feedback around the application process was
In particular, Fund recipients commented on feeling staff were available to help where needed, that they were knowledgeable on the barriers disabled people faced, and were always helpful and supportive. Such feedback shows the importance of a person-centred approach and individual support to those applying and receiving support from the Fund.

Recommendations:

8. Sufficient operational resources for the Fund should be maintained to ensure a high quality, person-centred approach supporting all applicants throughout their journey.

3.2 Assessing party support

Assessing potential party support varied in difficulty across cases. Applicants were asked if they had disclosed impairment status to their party, and in some cases applicants

were adamant they did not want to disclose this, or involve their branch in discussions. In the evaluation, one party officer suggested there should have been a structure for the Fund to share information with parties when given permission to do so. This should be investigated for future, but it is important to note that given the complex nature of disabled people's identities in a world which often discriminates against them, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this aspect of Fund provision.

Some applicants had very small branches, and in some cases they were competing for selection against a number of other candidates. One applicant who is a BSL user could not regularly participate fully in branch meetings, due to the lack of BSL interpreter support prior to their application. This put them at a significant disadvantage during the selection process, due to not being able to develop as much of a profile with members who were voting in the selection.

For the Fund to operate in a fully balanced manner, where political organisations share the responsibility for supporting disabled candidates, parties need to ensure their processes are inclusive, and demonstrate these are being acted upon. There can be instances where an individual is both a key branch contact and a candidate for selection. As a result, there is a conflict of interest in being the individual disabled applicant's contact regarding reasonable adjustments.

These examples show a clear issue in party political culture regarding the provision of reasonable adjustments.

Recommendations:

9. The Advisory Group should discuss common issues around reasonable adjustments by political parties and provide a steer on what is deemed reasonable, or otherwise, for differing scenarios.

10. The Advisory Group should discuss steps parties can take to change their culture around party activities, to ensure disabled people aren't excluded.

3.3 Issues around specific impairment types

3.31 BSL users

The pilot Fund supported one BSL user during their attempt to seek selection as a candidate for their party. This primarily consisted of paying for BSL interpreters to support the applicant during community and party meetings. This was to help raise their profile with party members who would be voting in the selection.

The applicant was also provided with advice around how adjustments might be made by the branch to fully include them, and how they might use alternative means of communication to reach out to members. Their party was also provided with advice regarding their own obligations to provide

interpreter support for the formal parts of the selection process, including attending vetting assessment. This involved a series of interviews and group exercises. Without BSL interpreter support the applicant would have been substantially disadvantaged or unable to complete the vetting process. Since the process of seeking selection within a political party is covered under Equality Act duties the party paid for the costs of this support themselves. They also allowed additional time for the applicant's interview to adjust for the extra time required for interpretation and clarifications.

From working with this applicant we identified the following issues for future attention:

By the time Fund support was implemented only weeks remained before the selection took place. The applicant had up until this point experience significant barriers in their participation at branch meetings and a significantly reduced opportunity to build their profile with the local members who would make the selection decision. Our understanding is that the successful candidate

already had a significant local profile. It is difficult to envisage the BSL user having a fair opportunity to seriously challenge the other candidate while only having communication support in place for the last several weeks. Feedback from the applicant confirms that they feel they would require such support in place for a much greater period of time in the run-up to an election to achieve a more level playing field.

We reached out to the relevant branch to offer them advice on making meetings more inclusive for the applicant. This included offering to deliver an awareness session for members, with a view to making them more aware of how adjustments might allow a BSL user to perform as a candidate and, if elected, as a councillor. We did not receive a reply to this offer. Future provision of such awareness raising may be helpful in removing possible (likely) attitudinal barriers amongst members to supporting the candidacy of a BSL user (or indeed other disabled candidates).

We also noted the potential for a conflict of interest to arise where potential opponents for

selection may be involved in the administration of the branch, and therefore have an interest in not creating a level playing field for a challenger. Good practice in future for political parties might include ensuring that there is a designated person with responsibility for addressing access issues around selection processes who is not themselves involved as a candidate.

Recommendation:

11. Further consideration should be given to addressing the particular barriers faced by BSL users and other deaf people who require communications support to participate in political activity leading up to seeking candidacy. This should include parties increasing their deaf awareness and considering improvements to inclusive practice.

Section 4: Awards

4.1 Award processing times

One measure identified as a key performance indicator was the timeline of awards made. As set out in the original Fund brief, the target time applicants' initial meeting and the Decision Panel outcome was three weeks. The Panel met on the 23rd November to look at the first set of recommendations.

The final 23 applications took an average of 23 days, consistent with the target time of three weeks. The previous 21 applications took longer, for various reasons. This was mostly due to that fact that the Fund was setting-up third party support relationships, and ensuring that each candidate had the best level of support that the Fund could access. Some candidates required complex levels of support, and which it took time to get in place.

Feedback from Fund recipients recommended the process be opened earlier in future, so successful applicants could benefit from the Fund during parties' selection phases, and

ensure support is place in time for the campaign period.

This is also an important consideration due to the barriers faced in the selection process. Important aspects of seeking selection such as profile raising require support, therefore disabled candidates were already at a disadvantage by the time the Fund opened.

Recommendation:

12. The Fund should be opened well in advance of parties having their selection process, so that disabled people receive the support they need to decrease barriers preventing them from seeking selection on a level playing field.

4.2 Value of awards

44 disabled people's applications to the Fund went to the decision making panel. All 44 were successful in receiving a support budget award from the Fund.

The total budget amounts awarded was £211,088.80.

The actual spend by the end of the Fund was £81,282.53

The lowest amount awarded was £49.99 and the highest was £21,813.41.

The lowest actual spend was £10.60 and the highest actual spend was £14,584.21.

There was a large variance between the budget awards and the actual amount spent. There were several reasons for this.

- Many applicants had high expectations of themselves for their campaign, and Inclusion Scotland worked with individual goals when making award recommendations.
- In cases where an individual was not selected the award was put back into the Fund, and items were returned.
- PA/Comms Support and Travel budgets were usually not fully utilised, and processing times created varying degrees of underspend (in some cases the delay in

approving the application meant less activity was undertaken than planned).

The decision was made to set no upper limit on awards. Since the Fund operated on a pilot basis, the Scottish Government indicated they were open to increasing the funding available if needed. It was acknowledged that upper limits could disadvantage applicants with more expensive adjustment needs, such as BSL users. Currently, this is an issue with Access to Work, which has a cap on claim amounts. There are already indications this disadvantages particular impairment groups, such as BSL users.

Both panel members who contributed to the evaluation stated, while there was plenty of money available for the level of demand during the pilot, this may not have been the case if there were more applicants, and they were unsure if awards should be constrained accordingly. This raises a need for clarity from funders around availability of funds, and to consider how this is approached in the future to ensure equal access is not compromised.

Recommendations:

13. Clarity is needed from the Scottish Government on how flexible the Fund budget can be, should demand exceed available budget during any particular period.

Section 5: Support Provided

5.1 Equipment and software

A range of assistive technology was awarded to candidates, to decrease impairment-related barriers whilst doing their campaign related activities:

- Spellchecking software
- Speech to text software
- Voice recorders for notetaking meetings
- Magnifiers and equipment to read documents aloud
- Devices to assist communication such as listeners, hearing aid amplifiers and voice amplifiers.

To provide equipment and software to fund recipients, Inclusion Scotland primarily worked

with Concept Northern, a Scotland-based company specialising in assistive technology. In specific cases, assessments and recommendations were also provided by Action on Hearing Loss, and Enable.

Feedback from fund recipients about the process of getting equipment and training from Concept Northern was generally positive.

Due to a lack of time to build relationships with multiple suppliers, during the pilot the Fund relied largely on Concept Northern, which has experience of providing services to people claiming Access to Work and Disabled Students' Allowance, and is a provider for various public bodies. However, it is important there to diversify suppliers in the future. The Fund should always strive to ensure that it is cost effective, and that assessments are fully person-centred. A mapping exercise should be conducted to gain an understanding of providers available across the private, public, and third sectors, to understand the support available. The Fund should also consider the use of third party assessors, such as

occupational therapists, to conduct assessments where necessary.

Recommendation:

14. The Fund should conduct a mapping exercise of assistive technology providers and organisations who support disabled people in Scotland, to ensure best value for money, and the best fit for individual applicants.
15. The Fund should move to a model of conducting third-party assessments for assistive technology for complex cases (e.g. via occupational therapists, or others with similar skill-sets.)

5.2 Personal Assistant support

23 fund recipients were awarded personal assistant support. The budget for personal assistants was calculated with a start-up cost of £947 as well as cost of £18 per hour awarded to cover both the personal assistants wage and/or agency costs. This was in line

with the Self Directed Support model but with a higher standard rate to cover the costs needed to hire PA's quickly and for irregular hours.

The Fund required recipients to either become an employer and hire their own PA's or use an agency. The Fund worked with Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living (LCIL) and Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living (GCIL) as third party support organisations to assist in helping the recipients register as an employer and hire. Most recipients chose to hire someone they knew who had an understanding of their support needs. This proved to be a lengthy process and took time and effort to get into place. Awards being made earlier in the process would have saved precious time and energy whilst campaigns were in full swing. There was mixed feedback around the ease of this process, indicating that there should be more clarity for applicants about the different options available.

One Fund recipient felt that postage cost support would have been more cost-effective than PA support in terms of delivering leaflets;

a task carried out by PAs. The Fund did not cover postage costs in this manner as these were considered campaign costs by the Electoral Commission. This would go beyond reasonable adjustment as mailing leaflets could likely cover a wider area than someone delivering by hand, and therefore give an unfair advantage to a disabled candidate.

Recommendations:

16. More information and clarity on options and processes should be developed and made available to Fund recipients so that they can be fully aware of all that is involved in accessing PA support.

17. The role of PAs in supporting candidates should be monitored on an ongoing basis so that the Advisory Group can consider where other adjustments or types of Fund support could be reasonable.

18. Compensatory adjustment – have a discussion with the Advisory Group on this topic, to get political party ‘buy-in’ on how this is treated in the future. Possibility of going further than reasonable adjustment where full adjustment cannot be made?

5.3 Communication support services

5 fund recipients were awarded communications support services – £22,417 was awarded in total (£15,210 of which was awarded to one of the recipients for BSL support.)

The types of communications support awarded included Easy Read translation, proof readers, note-taker support, and BSL interpretation.

5.4 Transport and accommodation costs

29 fund recipients were awarded support for transport and accommodation costs, in most

cases funding for taxis. £57,592 was awarded in total, of which £5,541.75 was used.

In most cases, fund recipients claimed back taxi support through an expenses form. Feedback about this process was very positive.

5.5 Coaching/training and impairment related support work

Two fund recipients were awarded budgets for coaching/training and support work relating to their impairment - £5285.39 was awarded in total. Of this, £4500 was awarded to one of the recipients for support work, and £500 to the same recipient for coaching. Support included helping an applicant with a learning disability prepare for a selection interview.

5.6 Reviews of support

Due to the timescale of the Pilot there was no opportunity to carry out structured reviews of support offered to recipients of the Fund. Recipients were asked to maintain contact

and provide important updates where necessary – for example, developments in their selection process, or requests for additional support. In some cases, amendments were made to the awards provided to fund recipients. These were made by the Fund directly, if the changes fell within the margins agreed by the Decision Panel. In more complex cases, the Panel was consulted to provide an updated decision.

Recommendations:

19. Procedures should be updated to account for learning from the pilot, including review procedures, guidance documents, and agreements between the Fund and recipients.

Section 6: Post-Election

6.1 Election spending returns

In 2016 the Scottish Parliament passed an amendment to electoral regulations which made clear that impairment-related costs

would not be counted as part of campaign expenses in Local Authority elections. This meant disabled people with impairment-related expenses were not disadvantaged as candidates after impairment-related expenses were taken into account. This simple change in legislation was a significant step in making politics more accessible for disabled people, and allowed the Fund to have a greater impact. However, contributions from the Fund still needed to be recorded on returns, which are publicly available documents. This effectively removes any guarantee of anonymity from applicants who don't wish to publicly disclose they are disabled. As this potentially compromises a person-centred approach, we should investigate possible ways for this issue to be overcome.

The Fund engaged in considerable discussions with the Electoral Commission to clarify guidance for candidates on level of detail was required to register impairment-related expenses. We arrived at clear guidance on a basic listing of disability-related expenditure, and now have a greater

understanding of the reporting requirements of disabled candidates, and that these are not unduly onerous.

6.2 Support after election

For Fund recipients elected as councillors, it was the responsibility of their Local Authority to enact reasonable adjustments, including support from Access to Work. Feedback on these adjustments from successfully elected candidates has so far been positive. Inclusion Scotland advised recipients and their colleagues about support and adjustments where requested.

6.3 Considerations for by-elections and Scottish Parliament elections

There was a Scottish Parliament by-election during the pilot period, for the Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire constituency, but on this occasion no candidates applied to the Fund. Before the pilot, the Fund would not have been able to react to by-elections. By

implementing a soft-rollout of the Fund several months before candidate selections, campaigns, and elections, we will be in a much better position to respond to potential Scottish Parliament and Local Authority by-elections. An early start for the Fund is also important, as the dates of the next full Scottish Parliament (2021) and Local Authority (2022) elections may change to accommodate the expected 2022 UK General Election.

6.4 Considerations for UK-wide Fund

The snap UK General Election of 2017 came shortly after the Local Authority election. Inclusion Scotland had queries from disabled people who wanted to apply to the Fund to support them for the Westminster campaign. The lack of Fund availability was cited in the media as a reason for one candidate withdrawing from the election. The Fund could not be operated because the legislation permitting it is no longer active in UK law, and there was not enough time to push for change on this matter.

Recommendation:

20. Inclusion Scotland and the Advisory Group should encourage the UK Government to re-amend legislation to allow the operation of the Fund in the event of a Westminster election.

6.5 Diversity of applicants

Full equalities monitoring was not conducted until the end stages of the Fund. On observation based on assumed public gender identities, gender balance among recipients was almost 50/50, with 19 female and 20 male candidates, with 7 women and 8 men being elected as councillors. Some female applicants may have been helped to achieve candidacy by gender quota policies within their own parties.

In the future, the Fund should proactively seek to maintain balanced gender representation (including those who are non-binary) and strive to increase the representation of people who identify with other protected groups. Inclusion Scotland is part of the Equal

Representation Coalition, a group made up of Scottish equalities organisations who pushing for equality in public life. This network should be fully utilised when promoting the Fund, and participants from these protected groups should be actively sought and encouraged. A diverse bank of case studies should be collected and promoted through a variety of channels, including publicly, and with organisations that support individuals.

Applicants had a diverse range of impairments. Even with the positive environment we created for the disclosure of impairments there were some indications that there may have been additional undisclosed “hidden” impairments, or possibly that applicants may have been unaware of them (however this is by nature a rather speculative observation). Work should be done to understand the types of adjustments the Fund could cover for mental health conditions, learning disabilities, and neurodiversity, and these should be promoted with mental health organisations, DPOs and peer groups.

Recommendations:

21. Inclusion Scotland should work with other organisations to further look into the barriers that decrease the participation in politics of those with mental health conditions, cognitive impairments and neurodiversity, and identify steps to take to address this in the context of the Fund.

22. Inclusion Scotland should work with other equalities organisations to develop best practice in equalities monitoring of applicants to the Fund to be able to fully evaluate the inclusivity of the Fund to all protected groups.

23. Inclusion Scotland should proactively reach out to people from other protected groups, recognising the additional barriers to political involvement faced by disabled people who have multiple protected characteristics.

Section 7: Overall Impact of support

7.1 Barriers

When asked if the Access to Elected Office Fund “helped them fight their campaign on a more level playing field”, 100% of supported candidates said it had. While no candidates replied “not at all”, there is clearly more that needs to be done to further decrease barriers in society which affect disabled people standing for elected office.

The following were identified as key performance indicators:

- Number attending fringe meetings, promotional events.

The Fund engaged with over 1000 people throughout the course of the pilot, through stalls and fringes.

- Number of enquiries

There were over 67 enquiries, of which 44 turned into applications that went to the Decision Panel. Others were applicants who decided not to run, or were not selected by

their parties before their applications went to the Panel, and therefore withdrew. Some pulled out of the process because of health or other personal reasons.

When asked how they would describe their experience of the Access to Elected Office Fund, 75% of candidates reported “very positive” and 25% reported “positive”. None of the candidates reported “neutral”, “negative”, or “very negative”.

7.2 Difference made to recipients’ ability to stand as candidates and campaign

Several of those who had been supported through the Fund expressed they wouldn’t have been able to run had they not received support from the Fund:

- One candidate was thinking of leaving halfway through their campaign because of negativity from their party branch; but decided to keep going due to support from

Inclusion Scotland staff and attending meetings organised by Inclusion Scotland.

- “[Inclusion Scotland’s] support gave me the confidence to be more active. Without it I wouldn’t have stood for election.”
- “There would not have been a campaign without the help.”
- “Things would've cost me a lot more energy and any campaigning would've been far less effective.”
- “Less easily, but I could still have done it. The hustings would have been scarier and potentially more difficult.”
- “More time would have been spent off the campaign trail”

When asked how easily they could have campaigned without the Access to Elected Office Fund, 75% of candidates reported “not easily” and 25% reported “not at all”. None of the candidates reported “very easily” or “easily”.

7.3 Impact of support

- One candidate said having a PA meant they could campaign at times that suited them. Without this flexibility they would have relied on the availability of volunteers rather than freely going out when they felt most able. Overall, having a PA meant they could be independent and that they could carry out their campaign as they wished, just as a non-disabled person could.
- A blind candidate had a PA help in reading maps, putting data into computers, and finding addresses for campaigning. Having this support meant they felt less intimidated going canvassing, helping them overcome the barriers associated with being visually impaired in an unfamiliar area.
- One applicant said, “My PA was able to help with tasks that were physically, or at some points, mentally, difficult. She also organised my diary in a way which took into account that I require rest periods, and in fact insisted that I stuck to those.”

7.4 Legacy of the Fund pilot for future elections

Following the conclusion of the local election, several of the unsuccessful candidates supported by the Fund have indicated their intention to try again in future elections.

In addition, a candidate came forward for the Westminster snap-election who clearly stated that it was hearing about the Fund which made them start thinking about standing, and considering that would be a realistic option for them. Unfortunately, it later became clear that we were unable to offer Fund support to them due to restrictions of reserved legislation – however they proceeded with their candidacy anyway and sought alternative support via volunteers and donations.

Several successful candidates have subsequently made speaking appearances at events and/or on media to speak about the support they received and the importance of more disabled people becoming elected representatives.

The success of the Fund pilot was also recognised by it being shortlisted by SCVO for the “Pioneering Project” award for the 2017 Scottish Charity Awards.

Annex: Demographics of Fund recipients

1. Totals

Approved by panel:

44 applicants, for 7 parties (plus independents), in 18 local authority areas

Selected as candidate:

39 candidates, for 7 parties (plus independents), in 17 local authority areas

Elected as councillor:

15 councillors, for 4 parties, in 12 local authority areas

2. Parties

Scottish Conservatives: 4 approved by panel, 4 selected as candidates, 4 elected as councillors.

Scottish Green Party: 5 approved by panel, 5 selected as candidates, 1 elected as councillor.

Scottish Labour Party: 4 approved by panel, 4 selected as candidates, 1 elected as councillor.

Scottish Liberal Democrats: 2 approved by panel, 2 selected as candidates, none elected as councillor.

Scottish National Party: 19 approved by panel, 15 selected by party, 9 elected as councillor.

Scottish Socialist Party: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none elected as councillor.

Trade Union and Socialist Coalition: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none as councillor.

Independents: 8 approved by panel, 7 stood for election (1 withdrew), none elected as councillor.

3. Local authorities

Angus Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

Argyll and Bute Council: 2 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

Dumfries and Galloway Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

East Dunbartonshire Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none elected as councillor.

Edinburgh City Council: 8 approved by panel, 8 selected by party, 3 elected as councillor.

Falkirk Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none elected as councillor.

Fife Council: 3 approved by panel, 3 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

Glasgow City Council: 3 approved by panel, 3 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

Highland Council: 3 approved by panel, 3 selected by party, 2 elected as councillor.

Inverclyde Council: 3 approved by panel, 2 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

North Ayrshire Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none elected as councillor.

North Lanarkshire Council: 4 approved by panel, 4 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

Orkney Islands Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none elected as councillor.

Renfrewshire Council: 6 approved by panel, 5 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

South Ayrshire Council: 2 approved by panel, 2 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

South Lanarkshire Council: 2 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, 1 elected as councillor.

Stirling Council: 1 approved by panel, 1 selected by party, none elected as councillor.

West Dunbartonshire: 1 approved by panel, none selected by party, none elected as councillor.

4. Gender:

Due to incomplete response rates to the equality forms, we have had to make assumptions of gender in some cases. Based on these, out of 39 candidates supported by the Fund, 19 are women and 20 are men. Of the 15 elected, 7 are women and 8 are men.

5. Impairment type range and breakdown of applicants:

- Deaf: 1
- Hearing Impairment: 5
- Blind: 5
- Visual Impairment: 4
- Learning Disability: 1
- Dyslexic: 7
- Health Condition: 16
- Mental Health: 6
- Wheelchair User: 4
- Speech Impairment: 3
- Mobility Impairment: 13
- Physical Impairment: 7
- Neurodiversity: 2
- Cognitive Impairment: 1

Note: In some cases, applicants have multiple impairments so the total number above exceeds the number of applicants.

Annex: End of Pilot Candidate Survey Questions

Q1. How did you find out about the Access to Elected Office Fund?

Q2. How would you describe your experience of the Access to Elected Office Fund? Why?

Q3. How supported did you feel by the Inclusion Scotland team? Why?

Q4. How much do you think the Access to Elected Office Fund helped to decrease the campaign barriers you faced? Why?

Q5. Did you feel the Access to Elected Office Fund helped you fight your campaign on a more level playing field? Why?

Q6. How easily could you have campaigned without the Access to Elected Office Fund? Why?

Q7. What barriers did the Access to Elected Office Fund help to decrease?

Q8. What barriers did the Access to Elected Office Fund NOT help to decrease?

Q9. How could we improve the process of the Access to Elected Office Fund for you in the future?

Q10. What did your political party do to help decrease the barriers you faced throughout your selection process and campaign? And what could they do better?

Q11. Did you receive support from Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living? Please tell us about your experience?

Q12. Did you receive support from Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living? Please tell us about your experience?

Q13. Did you receive support from Concept Northern (Assistive Technology)? Please tell us about your experience. Was the training worthwhile? What equipment/assistive technology did you receive and how useful was it?