



# Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland) 2016-17 Pilot Summary



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## The Fund

The Access to Elected Office Fund (Scotland) was established by Scottish Ministers as a pilot project running from August 2016 until 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017. The Fund was available to disabled people who were seeking selection or confirmed as candidates for the 2017 Scottish Local Authority election. This included both party candidates and independent candidates. 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. 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 within 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.

Central to the entire design process of the pilot Fund was the principle that disabled people themselves tend to best know what is needed to overcome barriers to participation, and that it is **only through treating disabled people with dignity and respect** that any process seeking to provide support to bring about equality and fairness can fully succeed. As a national Disabled People’s Organisation, Inclusion Scotland applied these principles in every aspect of our delivery of the pilot on the Scottish Government’s behalf.

**Application awards were based directly on barriers identified with each individual applicant in their individual contexts** (party affiliation, campaign prominence, geography) and decisions on awards were made by a **panel made up of disabled people**.

## Structure

Support was provided to Inclusion Scotland by the Access to Politics Advisory Group (setup to provide periodic policy guidance on the use of the Fund, as well as more general guidance on the wider Access to Politics for disabled

people seeking political engagement). The applications themselves were reviewed and decided by a Decision Panel. The latter panel was entirely comprised of disabled people, all with expertise on reasonable adjustments and overcoming barriers faced by disabled people. This included two disabled former elected politicians. Inclusion Scotland staff were responsible for carrying out assessments and then writing up the applications on behalf of the applicants, and then submitting them to the Panel for approval.

### **Application and Awards**

Applications were initiated when disabled people seeking to stand as candidates contacted the Fund. Staff discussed with applicants their needs and eligibility, initially by phone or email, then arranged a meeting to go through the full application in person, including:

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

Application forms were completed during these meetings, and anonymised written recommendations were forwarded to the Decision Panel.

An important aspect of the design of this stage of the programme was **seeking to minimise the amount of time and energy the applicant themselves needed to expend on the process** – recognising that this was in of itself an **additional burden experienced only by disabled potential candidates**, and that an onerous and stressful process could put off potential applicants. This design decision **sets the pilot Fund clearly apart** from comparable schemes such as Access to Work and benefits application processes administered by the UK Department of Work and Pensions.

The decision was made to set no upper limit on awards, as having one and it being reached would imply discrimination against those whose impairment related barriers happen to have more expensive solutions compared to others (e.g. sign-language users). Since the Fund operated on a pilot basis, the Scottish Government indicated they were open to increasing the funding available if needed. In general for the pilot budgets for support tended to be

generous, not wishing to put candidates in the position of worrying about running not just at the most critical final stages of a campaign – however actual claims of money could only be made based on what was actually required and evidenced through receipts – or directly invoiced to Inclusion Scotland. The **total budget amounts awarded came to £211,088.80**, with the **actual final spend by the end of the Fund coming to £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.

Thanks to earlier Scottish Government legislation change to clarify this, Fund support did not affect candidate expenditure limits. This recognised that additional costs relating to disability should not disadvantage a candidate in terms of spending on campaigning for election. In order to ensure transparency however, candidates were still required to declare the support using a separate additional form. The Fund, working with the Electoral Commission, provided award recipients with a breakdown of what to declare from the Fund itself, to assist this process.

### **Promoting the Fund**

Prior to the Fund's launch, Inclusion Scotland met with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (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. The Fund also reached out to party disabled member groups, and former ambassadors of the grass-roots cross-party "One in Five" campaign.

The Fund "soft launched" on 3rd August 2016, with gradually increasing levels of promotion over the following months, as its structures were put in place. 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, and political parties themselves. 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. 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.

### **Outcomes & Applicant Feedback**

The pilot exceeded all targets within the outcomes set, and overall achieved stronger results than expected. The following outcomes were specified in the funding agreement that established the Fund pilot (**actual outcomes are listed in bold**):

- 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, of whom 15 were elected councillors.**
- Success rate of applications which are supported by advice shall be at least 80%. **100% of applications that went to the Decision Panel were successful in being supported by the Fund.**
- 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.**
- 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.**

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”. 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”.

Several candidates supported through the Fund felt they wouldn't have been able to run without the assistance received:

- “[The Fund’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”

## **Demographics and Statistics**

- There were over 67 enquiries, of which 44 turned into applications that went to the Decision Panel. All 44 were successful in receiving a support budget award from the Fund. Of the others, some 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 because of health or other personal reasons.
- Before the election, there were 39 candidates for 7 parties (plus independents) in 17 local authority areas. After the election, 15 councillors had been elected for 4 parties in 12 local authority areas.
- 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.
- 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.

### **Further information:**

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