

Easy Read

Review of the Access to Elected Office Fund

Money to help disabled people stand for election in Wales



This document was written by the research team **Angharad Davies, Alice Dawkins, & Matt Lewis-Richards** for **Welsh Government**. It is an easy read version of ‘**Review of Access to Elected Office Fund Pilot**’.

June 2023

How to use this document



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Words in **bold blue writing** may be hard to understand. You can check what the words in blue mean on **page 32**.



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Introduction



We wanted to find out what people think about the **Access to Elected Office Fund**.



The **Access to Elected Office Fund** is money to help disabled people stand for **election**.



An **election** is when people vote for the person they want to represent them. It could be for Parliament or your local council.



The **Access to Elected Office Fund** is to pay for things that help disabled people have an equal chance. For example, special equipment and computer equipment.



We spoke to:

- **Stakeholders**
- Members of the **Decision Making Board**



- **Candidates**

A **stakeholder** is a person with an interest in something or a connection to it.



A **candidate** is a person who asks people to vote for them in an election.



This document is a report about the review we did on the **Access to Elected Office Fund**. It includes:

- What we found out
- Our **recommendations**



Recommendation means saying what actions to take to solve a problem.



This report will help the Welsh Government decide what to do in the future.

About the Access to Elected Office Fund



In all levels of government there are few disabled people.



There are few political parties who are doing things to reduce **barriers** for disabled people.



Barriers are things that stops us doing something. Barriers can include money or where a person lives.



The Welsh Government started the **Access to Elected Office Fund** for the **Senedd Cymru election** in **May 2021**.



The **fund** was available for disabled people standing in the **Local Government elections in May 2022**.



The aim of the **fund** is to make sure disabled people can take part in the **Senedd** and **Local Government** by standing for **election**.

The fund is to pay for things like:



- Transport if you cannot use public transport like buses and trains.



- Screen reader software and other computer equipment.



- Training to use computer equipment and other software.

- British Sign Language interpreters, and information in Braille, Easy Read and audio.



- Personal help.

About barriers disabled people face



The **Social Model of Disability** is a way of seeing the world. It says that people are disabled by **barriers** in society, not by their differences.

These **barriers** can include:

- Negative attitudes like thinking disabled people cannot do things.
- **Physical barriers** like stairs.



The **Social Model of Disability** helps us to see the **barriers** that make life harder for disabled people.



Political parties do not always pay for personal costs. This means disabled people cannot have support like sign language and equipment because of the cost.

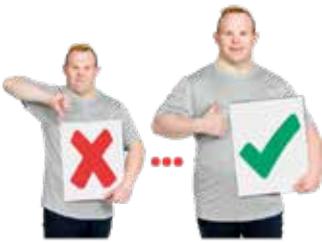


The Welsh Government is trying to remove these **barriers**.

About the review



We worked with **Opinion Research Services (ORS)** to review the **Access to Elected Office fund**. We did the review from November 2022 to March 2023.



We asked people what they thought was working well and what could be better.

Our goal was to:



- Understand the aims of the **fund**.



- Talk to the people involved in the development of the fund to find out if the **funding** did well.



- To understand how the fund worked for **candidates**, both before and after the **elections**.

We spoke to:



- Members of the **Welsh Government** and **Disability Wales** involved in the development of the fund.
- **Stakeholders** and members from the **Welsh Local Government Association**, the **Electoral Commission**, **Inclusion Scotland**, and **Policy Advisors**.
- **Candidates** that applied for the fund.



We recorded all interviews with the consent from people who took part.



We have included what we found out in this report.



We spoke to lots of people to find out what they thought. The views and experiences recorded are only of those that we interviewed.

What we found out

1. Access to Elected Office Fund



The fund gave the disabled candidates the **reasonable adjustments** they needed to stand for **election**.



Reasonable adjustments are changes that places and services can make so everyone is able to use them. For example, putting ramps in buildings for wheelchair users. Or giving information in easy read.



This helped make things fair between disabled and non-disabled **candidates** during the **campaign** for **election**.



A **campaign** is a way to tell people about something important. Or to try to change something, for example a policy or the way people think.



Candidates and **stakeholders** said it would be good to tell **candidates** about the **election** process and the support they could get.



They said this could be part of the funding process for disabled people interested in standing for **election**.

2. What members of the Decision Making Board said



Members of the **Decision Making Board** said that it was easy to apply for a place on the board.



Disability Wales provided support to people who needed help with the application form.



Some members of the **Decision Making Board** said that they got to know about the role from **Disability Wales**.



The role was for people with different knowledge and experiences.



Some members said that the role should be advertised more in future.

The role of a Decision Making Board member



Members of the **Decision Making Board** agreed that their job was clear. They had to check applications and decide what support and how much money the Fund should give.



Some members said that it would be good to have members who already knew about **funding** or similar schemes.



Having people with different experiences helped make fair decisions about applications.

3. Supporting candidates to complete application forms



Stakeholders said **Disability Wales** did a good job helping **candidates** with their application forms. It made the quality of applications better.

Issues with timings



Stakeholders said the time given for applications was short. Applications were only allowed 6 weeks before the **campaign** started.



This made it difficult to process all the applications in time.



Board members said the application time should be longer and support should be available early.

For example, support and equipment could be provided before the 6 week **campaign** time. It would:

- Give board members more time to process applications.
- Give **candidates** more time to learn how to use the technology or equipment.
- Give **candidates** more time to learn about the **election** process.



4. Follow the Social Model of Disability approach to decide what support to give



There should be a list of rules for the fund to make it clear what support the fund will give.



Follow the **Social Model of Disability** when writing the rules for the applications.

5. Why disabled people want to stand for election



Candidates said they wanted there to be more disabled people at all levels of the government.



All the **candidates** we spoke to have experience or interest in local and national politics.

Barriers for disabled people



There were many **barriers** that **candidates** thought they would face when standing for **election**. The most common was **physical barriers** like stairs.



They could not get to people's houses by themselves because of **barriers**.

Other barriers they told us about:



- Not able to drive.
- Finding it hard to climb stairs to people's houses.
- Not able to walk for a long time.
- Not able to stand for a long time to talk to people.



Candidates said that these **physical barriers** would stop them from doing better.



Some **candidates** said that without the fund it would cost them a lot of money to pay for the support they needed.



Some **candidates** said that other people not knowing enough about their disability could make it difficult for them.

6. The application process



Candidates said they heard about the fund through organisations like Disability Wales or a local councillor.

Information on funding

Candidates said it was easy to **access** information online.



Access means being able to take part.

Support and advice



Candidates were able to get help from **Disability Wales** by phone or video call.



Support and advice for **candidates** made the application process easy and **accessible**.



Accessible means everyone can find and use something.



Most **candidates** applied for personal assistants and technology like computer equipment.



Disability Wales gave them advice on what they would need for their **campaign**. This made it easy for **candidates** to know what support to apply for.

Reasonable adjustments



Candidates were not sure about **reasonable adjustments**.



Some **candidates** were confused about what would be a **campaign** cost and what would be a **reasonable adjustment** for their disability.



The **Decision Making Board** said there should be clear guidance on what costs are allowed in future.

7. Support from the fund



All the **candidates** that we spoke to said they had all or most of the support that they applied for.



Some **candidates** could not get the full support because they found out about the fund later. There was not enough time between applying for the **fund** and the start of the **election**.



Candidates said that they did not get some support they had asked for.



All **candidates** who did not get the support were told why they did not get it.



Many said they would not have been able to stand for **election** without the support they got.



Stakeholders agreed that giving **candidates** the support they needed made a big difference to their **campaign**.

Timings

Stakeholders and **candidates** said short timings were the biggest **barrier** for **candidates**:



- **Candidates** spent some of their **campaign** time learning about the new equipment.



- **Candidates** from political parties could not apply for funding until they were confirmed as **candidates**.



- Some **candidates** got their equipment and support after the **campaign** started.



Some suggested that **candidates** should be able to apply for equipment and support in advance. It would give them more time to get used to the equipment.



Stakeholders and **candidates** said that giving funding to whatever people applied first would not be the right thing to do.



Some **candidates** can take longer to complete applications than other **candidates**.

Making things fair



Stakeholders and **candidates** said the **fund** helped to make things more fair between disabled and non-disabled **candidates**.

8. Funding for candidates with other protected characteristics



Stakeholders and **candidates** said that people with other **protected characteristics** face **barriers** that are different to disabled people.



A **protected characteristic** means different groups of people who might be treated less fairly.

Some groups of people might be:

Disabled people

Men or women

People from different races or cultures

People of different ages

Straight, gay and lesbian people

People from different religions or people who do not have a religion

Women who are pregnant or have a new baby

Married people or who have a civil partner

Transgender people



People said that the **fund** should focus on disabled people. We should look at other ways to help **candidates** with other **protected characteristics**.

Other barriers



Stakeholders said that it was important to think about people who have problems with money.



Disabled people find it difficult to get a job. This can have an impact on the amount of money they have.



Some **stakeholders** and **candidates** said that money could be given to a non-disabled **candidate** if they had no job.



Some people said we could give money to pregnant women and carers.

Working with voluntary organisations



Working with voluntary organisations would help disabled people who have other **protected characteristics**.

Supporting candidates after they are elected



Stakeholders said elected **candidates** should continue to get support in their role.

Accessibility in government buildings



Stakeholders said that there were **accessibility** problems with local and national government buildings.



Community councils also have **accessibility** problems.



This can stop elected **candidates** getting involved in politics.

Working with other organisations and political parties



Candidates said it was important to work with organisations across Wales to tell people the **fund** is available.



Stakeholders said it was important to involve political parties in the help offered to disabled **candidates**.

Permanent funding

Stakeholders said there should be permanent help available to tell **candidates** about:



- The **election** process.
- What support could be available for them.
- What money they could apply for.

Increase timescales



Candidates and **stakeholders** said that **candidates** should get more time to apply. They should get the support they need early.



Decision Making Board members said that they need more time to process applications and find the support people need.

Advertising the fund



Candidates and **stakeholders** said it was important to advertise the fund in future. For example, on social media, television or radio.



This will encourage more people to think about standing for **election**.



Candidates said that local councils and political parties should promote the **fund**.

Key Recommendations

What we think the Welsh Government and its partners should do to make the Fund better:



1. Provide support for disabled **candidates** who want to stand for **election** in Wales in future.



2. Provide training on how to use technology or other support equipment before the **election**.



3. Make sure there is support and guidance available along with the funding.



4. Make funding available to people with other **protected characteristics**.

Other things to think about

How we could make things better:

- Learn from the applications we get. Things like:
 - Providing advice and guidance.
 - Having a **Decision Making Board**.
 - Increasing the time between applying and providing support.



- Support members of the **Decision Making Board** to process applications.



- Tell political parties about the support available.



- Make sure **independent candidates** know about the help available and can **access** it. Some **candidates** are independent, this means they are not part of a political party.



- Make sure the support is available for people with all disabilities.



- Support elected **candidates** in their role at all levels of government.

Hard Words

Access

Access means being able to take part.

Accessible

Accessible means everyone can find and use something.

Barriers

Barriers are things that stops us doing something. Barriers can include money or where a person lives.

Candidate

A candidate is a person who asks people to vote for them in an election.

Election

An election is when people vote for the person they want to represent them. It could be for Parliament or your local council.

Protected characteristic

A protected characteristic means different groups of people who might be treated less fairly.

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