

Grants for Disabled Candidates

Disabled people who want to stand for election as a councillor or MP, including the 2015 General Election, can benefit from two separate but closely related initiatives to access grant schemes which help cover any additional costs they may face.

The Government Equalities Office set up the **Access to Elected Office Fund** in 2012. This is open to any disabled potential candidate. A **new mentoring scheme**, run and for Liberal Democrats, has also recently been launched.

As a result, real practical and financial support is now available to promote more council and Parliamentary candidates with disabilities with mentoring support and real money grants.

These have been approved by the Electoral Commission as not encroaching on election expenses rules and to help overcome the particular physical and mental barriers that inhibit people with disabilities from standing for election.

Mentoring is a very important part of encouraging and supporting disabled individuals to stand for public office. A mentoring contract won by the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) from the Local Government Association (LGA) is being delivered by Steve Hitchins as an extension of the **Be a Councillor programme**. Steve told us:

'There are three critical elements to this project. I will be working with ALDC, the LGA and the Liberal Democrat Disability Association (LDDA) to disperse the information as widely as we can. Unless we have candidates or people who are thinking about being candidates we cannot take full advantage of this programme.'



Those who apply and are put on the **fast track programme** will receive 1:1 mentoring, probably from a local Lib Dem councillor or former councillor, to guide such candidates think through both how they will work as a councillor and as a candidate in both selection and the campaign. Mentors are paid at the LGA peer rate of £303 per day for up to four days work.

This second point is important because part of the mentor's work will include assisting such candidates to apply for a grant from the **Access to Elected Office Fund**. Although most grants are in the region of £500, some have been for substantial funds. They can provide very practical support such as signers, wheelchair assistants and anything likely to assist candidates overcoming physical and mental barriers that inhibit electoral success.

This is a new area for Liberal Democrats and we have much to learn but that shouldn't deter any with disabilities coming forward. Lib Dems are looking for a handful of candidates already selected in target seats for 2014 but plan a more ambitious programme for 2015.

Please note the **mentoring programme** is only for candidates with disabilities in winnable seats at the moment. If this includes you please let Steve know.

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Direct financial support is also available for potential candidates through the **Access to Elected Office Fund**. The Fund not only has been extended by an extra 12 months to the end of March 2015 but also has had the upper limit doubled to £40,000 per calendar year. More details about this **Access to Elected Office Fund** can be found on:

http://www.libdems.org.uk/financial_support_for_disabled_election_candidates_extended_to_2015

These quotes are also on this page:

Michael MacDonald, fund applicant and Liberal Democrat candidate in the Priory ward for Trafford Council's 2014 local elections, said:

'Having previously stood for election, I knew that the support provided by the Fund was much needed for disabled candidates. The personal cost of standing for election for me was very high, as I needed to pay for British Sign Language translators, and this created a huge barrier to me participating fully in the process. Knowing that I now have access to this support at no personal cost to me is such a relief. Knowing that I can get the support I need, when I need it, it has filled me with confidence and rebuilt my enthusiasm for politics.'



Phil Stevens, Chair of the Liberal Democrat Disability Association, added:

'The Liberal Democrat Disability Association welcomes the news that the Fund is to be extended for a further year. We believe that disabled people should be fairly represented at all political levels, and this is an important step towards achieving an electorate which represents the needs of all society – including disabled people. We hope that due to the assistance Access to Elected Office can afford disabled people, more of our members and potential disabled candidates across the country will be able to stand in the 2015 local and UK parliament elections. The increase in upper grant limit from £20,000 to £40,000 is fantastic news for those disabled candidates who face significant costs, such as the cost of employing British Sign Language interpreters or note takers.'



The Fund is independently administered by Digital Outreach Ltd (Convey) on behalf of the DCMS. For more information or to apply for a grant, visit the Fund's website:

<https://www.access-to-elected-office-fund.org.uk/about-the-fund/>

You can also read Michael MacDonald's full case study, plus a collection of stories from other disabled people in political life, including Baroness Sal Brinton, David Buxton and Greg Judge - see:

<http://www.access-to-elected-office-fund.org.uk/about-the-fund/case-studies/michael-andrew-macdonald/>

<http://www.access-to-elected-office-fund.org.uk/about-the-fund/case-studies/baroness-brinton/>

<http://www.access-to-elected-office-fund.org.uk/about-the-fund/case-studies/councillor-david-buxton/>

<http://www.access-to-elected-office-fund.org.uk/about-the-fund/case-studies/greg-judge/>