



# The Empowerment Fund

## Summary of Consultation Responses





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Online via the Communities and Local Government website: [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

October 2008

Product Code: 08DLG05611A

ISBN: 978-1-4098-0699-8

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# Introduction

1. As part of the *Communities in Control: real people, real power* White Paper, Communities and Local Government announced the intention to launch a £7.5m Empowerment Fund. The fund will provide support for third sector organisations able to operate across England to help local communities turn key proposals in the white paper into practical action on the ground. The financial assistance provided by the Empowerment Fund is designed to be strategic and not related to the delivery of particular projects or programmes but enabling organisations to do more than they would otherwise be able.
2. On 9 July 2008 the Department issued a 12 week consultation – *The Empowerment Fund: Consultation on proposals for funding third sector organisations to empower communities across England* seeking views on a draft prospectus of the Fund.
3. Responses were requested by 30 September 2008 and this document provides a summary of those responses received as well as setting out the Government's response to the issues raised as part of the consultation.
4. In total, 123 responses were received. These included responses from national, regional and local third sector organisations, as well as public bodies and individuals. A full list of respondents can be found at annex A.
5. Responses varied immensely in their views. Communities and Local Government would like to thank all those who took the time to respond.
6. Overall, there was a general welcome for the intentions of the Empowerment Fund. There were, however some issues of concern around its operation or lack of clarity, as well as a desire among some for a local delivery fund instead.
7. We are encouraged by the very strong response to the consultation, which has provided us with a range of evidence and views to help inform the Government's consideration as to how to proceed with the Empowerment Fund.

# The consultation

8. Comments on all aspects of the draft Prospectus were welcomed but consultees were asked to consider the following questions specifically:
- a) **Are the proposed set levels of funding (see section 2.3 of the draft Prospectus) appropriate?**
  - b) **Do the empowerment themes set out in section 3 of the draft Prospectus merit support from the Empowerment Fund, given that Fund's objectives?**
  - c) **Should any of the themes in the draft Prospectus be omitted or others included if the Empowerment Fund is to achieve its objectives?**
  - d) **Are different arrangements required for community involvement in planning?**
  - e) **Do you have any comments on the design of the application form (see Annex A to the draft Prospectus)**

## Summary and consideration of responses

### A: Are the proposed set levels of funding appropriate?

9. There was no consensus on the level of funding available through the grants. Some respondents felt that the fund itself would be too small to make a noticeable difference while others felt that levels of grant were substantial and suitable. There was recognition that it was a limited overall fund among many respondents. Most respondents were comfortable with the principle of a fixed level of grant although some, principally those also arguing for eligibility for local organisations, felt applicants should state how much they needed.
10. Many third sector organisations were disappointed with the financial thresholds. While some understood the principle behind the thresholds, they felt that the levels proposed in the fund were restricting and could indirectly discriminate against certain organisations. This was one of the main issues emerging from the response to the consultation for three key reasons.
  11. First, that many organisations that would otherwise be eligible would be excluded by the qualifying threshold. We received several responses stating support for the thresholds to be lowered to enable these organisations to be eligible to apply for the fund. It was felt that many of these organisations are of strategic importance to community empowerment or focus on a particular aspect and their experience and value would be arbitrarily excluded.
  12. Second, and related to the first issue, was the point that thresholds could potentially discriminate against equalities groups that were typically smaller in terms of income size and thereby increase the disparity within the sector. It was also felt that the thresholds could limit innovation and new approaches.
  13. Third, was a concern that local and regional organisations were excluded from applying to the fund.

### Government Response

We have retained the principle of a **fixed level of grant** because we want to limit the number of organisations so that the fund makes a meaningful impact.

We have also retained the principle of preventing overdependence on this funding stream. Therefore, the Fund will contribute no more than 50 per cent of an organisation's income in any one year.

The purpose of the proposed fund is to strengthen the national infrastructure and intermediary bodies who can translate key proposals of the *Communities in Control: real people, real power* white paper into practical action on the ground with local communities. Therefore, we will not be extending eligibility to organisations that do not meet the criteria for being able to operate across the country. We will, however, encourage partnership bids where the lead applicant is eligible.

## B: Do the empowerment themes set out in section 3 of the draft Prospectus merit support from the Empowerment Fund, given that Fund's objectives?

14. The majority of respondents welcomed the themes and focus on empowerment. However, there were a number of comments about the potential overlap of the themes which they claim may lead to difficulty with the selection and assessment.
15. Several respondents suggested that working with excluded communities should be an underpinning principle for all themes, not just collaboration.
16. There was a mixed reaction to the inclusion of social enterprise. Some of the respondents said that it was more of an approach than a theme and did not seem congruous with the other themes.

### Government Response

We welcome the general support for the themes proposed and linkages to Communities in Control. We have reviewed and in some cases rephrased the wording of themes.

We recognise the fact that many organisations supporting community empowerment are active across the themes, although there are also specialist organisations. We have strengthened how we will assess the organisations contribution and impact to community empowerment.

## C: Should any of the themes in the draft Prospectus be omitted or others included if the Empowerment Fund is to achieve its objectives?

17. We asked this question as we were keen to find out if we had a good mix of themes and ensure we had not excluded key issues critical to the overall delivery of Communities in Control.
18. There was a mixed reaction to the 'improving communication between councillors and citizens' theme and whether this was not a responsibility for local government.
19. A range of new themes were proposed including capacity building, youth leadership, volunteering, community asset ownership, and local authority relations.

### **Government Response**

As above we have reviewed the wording of themes and in some circumstances, we have rephrased the themes. **However, we do not propose to omit any of the themes that were outlined in the draft Prospectus.**

We have also decided against including themes where we already have arrangements, such as in developing the Asset Transfer Unit, or there is work in other departments, such as the Department for Children, Schools and Families work on youth leadership.

We agree that working with excluded groups should be an underpinning factor across all the themes and have amended the Fund to reflect this.

## D: Are different arrangements required for community involvement in planning?

20. Many respondents said that as community involvement in planning is a theme within the Empowerment Fund, there should not be any different arrangements or eligibility.
21. However, there were suggestions that this theme needed further clarification. There was a call for applying organisations to demonstrate a clear strategy of how they will involve **all** communities – especially those that, historically, do not normally get involved.
22. There were questions about why this theme in particular had ring fenced funding especially as planning funds are already available eg planning delivery grant.

**Government Response**

We agree that there should not be different arrangements for the planning theme within the Empowerment Fund.

### E: Do you have any comments on the design of the application form? (See Annex A to the draft Prospectus)

23. There was praise for the light touch approach and the effort made to minimise the burden on organisations. However there were a number of concerns regarding the application process.
24. Many of the respondents expressed concern about the brevity of the application form and ability to test the quality of applicants. It was questioned whether the form would elicit sufficient information to make a robust choice and concern that it is easy for organisations to look good on paper.
25. There were also requests for clarification regarding the number of themes organisations can apply for. Some respondents felt that organisations should be able to apply for more than one theme due to the cross cutting nature of the themes.
26. A few respondents were concerned about the tight timescales and potential for slippage especially given the Christmas period. It was suggested that the closing date be extended. There was also concern about the impact of limited notice before funds became available.

**Government Response**

The intention was to have a light touch application process, with the focus on the organisation's strategy, plan and explanatory statement. However, we agree there is need for further information at the application stage to assist in the process. We have therefore requested additional information in the application form which we believe will enable us to make informed decisions.

We also recognise the concern about the timeline. Therefore, we have decided to allow for a longer application process to early January 2009, and we will also ensure that the funding is available from April 2009. The end period has subsequently been extended to March 2012.

## Emerging Issues

### ***Legal Power***

27. Many respondents said that they were confused about the legal power for the Fund (section 70 of Charities Act 2006). The draft Prospectus states that applicants must be third sector organisations that fall within the scope of the Charities Act 2006. However, some respondents were concerned that this could potentially exclude some social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives.

### **Government Response**

On eligibility, we can confirm that any third sector organisation that satisfies the Department that it's a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution will be eligible to apply for the Fund.

### ***Consortia/Partnership Bids***

28. There was a call to encourage partnership/consortia bids and give applicants time to develop consortia bids for the Fund, as many organisations' constitutions would not allow them to take on the role of a lead corporate body.

### **Government Response**

We will support partnership applications where the lead partner organisation meets the eligibility criteria of the fund in its own right. However, we want to assess whether the partnerships are robust and sustainable.

## Next steps

29. Alongside this summary of consultation responses, we have also published the final Prospectus for the Empowerment Fund and the application form.
30. The application stage for the Empowerment Fund will close on 6 January 2009.

## Annex A: List of Respondents

Accent Group  
ACEVO  
Advantage West Midlands  
Al-Habib Islamic Cultural Centre  
All Saints Community Project  
Association of Town Centre Management  
Aylesbury Vale District Council  
BATIAS  
Big Lottery Fund  
Black Training and Enterprise Group  
Brian Thomson  
Bristol Disability Equality Forum  
British Humanist Association  
BTCV  
CALCS  
Care and Repair England  
CDFA  
CEMVO  
Child Accident Prevention Trust  
Church Urban Fund  
Citizens Advice Bureau  
Civic Trust  
Clare Grogan  
Colin Thomas  
Community Alliance  
Community Development Exchange  
Community Development Foundation  
Community Foundation Network  
Community Matters  
Community Sector Coalition  
Connect Public Affairs  
Contact a Family  
Co-operatives UK  
Cornwall Centre for Volunteers

David Butters  
David Heinersdorff  
Deborah Tripley  
Derek Thom (WCRT)  
Development Trusts Association  
E A Condron  
Elders Council of Newcastle  
Empty Homes Agency  
ENCAMS  
Enfield Voluntary Action  
Environmental Law Foundation  
Equality and Human Rights Commission  
Equality South West  
Faith Based Regeneration Network  
Federation for Community Development Learning  
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens  
Federation of Irish Societies  
Forest of Dean Music Makers  
Foyer  
Friends, Families and Travellers Community Base  
Frontier Youth Trust  
Gillian Hein  
Gypsy and Travellers  
Hampshire Association of Local Councils  
Homeless Link  
Housing Associations' Charitable Trust  
Humanity, Equality, Rights  
Hurst RA Hurstierpoint Tenants and Residents Association  
Impetus  
In-Development CIC  
James Semple  
Jim and Jeanette Bowen  
Jonathan Birdwell  
Krata  
Latin American Women Rights Service  
London Borough of Waltham Forest

Leeds Voice  
Bristol Lesbian & Gay Foundation  
Living Streets  
London Gypsies and Travellers  
London Voluntary Service Council  
Longridge UK  
Media Trust  
Michelle Gasperini  
Mysociety  
National Council for Voluntary Organisations  
National Secular Society  
NAVCA  
Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation  
North East Empowerment Partnership  
North London CVS Partnership  
Race on the agenda  
Realign UK  
Regional Action and Involvement South East  
Regional Action West Midlands  
Regional Voluntary Sector Networks Forum  
Re'new  
Richard Pagett  
RNIB  
Rossendale Enterprise Anchor Ltd  
Salford City Council  
School for Social Entrepreneurs  
Selby AVS  
Social Audit Network  
Social Enterprise Coalition  
Social Entrepreneurship Policy Group  
Social Firms UK  
Somerset County Council  
South Tyneside Football Trust  
South West Forum  
Stevens and Bolton LLP  
Tenant Participation Advisory Service

Terrence Higgins Trust  
The GlassHouse  
The Young Foundation  
Time Banking UK  
Tom Handler  
Town and Country Planning Association  
United Response  
UnLtd  
Urban Forum  
Valerie Casson  
Voice4Change England  
Voluntary Organisations Disability Group  
Voluntary Sector North West  
VONNE  
Vox Community Empowerment Network  
Wear Valley Community Network  
Whitefriars Housing Group Ltd  
Women Resource Centre  
Women's Design Service  
W T Evans

**ISBN: 978-1-4098-0699-8**

ISBN 978-1-4098-0699-8



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