

Electoral Reform Society Annual Report 2012-13



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Electoral Reform Society

Annual Report 2012-13

September 2013

Foreword

This has been a terrific year for showing our fresh relevance, purpose and drive.

With three clear goals in mind – to undermine First-Past-the-Post; to campaign for STV to be adopted for local elections in England and Wales; and to establish the ‘credibility, connections and voice’ to achieve other victories for voters – we’ve shown the force of our fresh approach. By commenting on a broader set of democratic issues, we get more traction for our specific calls to change the voting system.

After the 2011 referendum, some wanted to write off electoral reform for a generation. We’ve blown this apart by finding fresh angles on the inequities of FPTP. From putting a cash value on the status quo (**Penny for your Vote?**) to exposing the obstacles preventing parties from building a broad base in society (**From Councillors to MPs**), the groundwork we are doing now is vital to secure future reform.

Politics will only change if people make their frustrations known. Our **Rotten Boroughs** initiative has captured powerful testimony, showing how too many voters – especially those in local ‘one-party states’ – feel our democracy gives them no voice.

From Police and Crime Commissioner elections to House of Lords reform and the role of big money in politics, we’ve been all over national and local media, setting the terms of the debate.

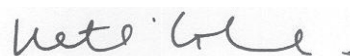
In Scotland and Wales we continue to punch above our weight. Highlights include a fantastic participative inquiry (**Democracy Max**) ensuring that people have the space to debate the long-term nature of Scottish democracy amidst the immediate attention on the referendum vote. In Wales, we have had an incredibly productive year working with all the parties and attracting political and media attention to our ideas on local government reform, devolution, and gender and

diversity in politics. Highlights include winning cross-party support in the National Assembly for the idea that power over local voting systems should be devolved to Wales.

This year we have made great strides engaging members and supporters in our campaigning work. For instance, our **Penny for your Vote?** campaign attracted over 13,000 supporters to take part by finding out how much their vote is worth.

The political parties are now in general election mode, and the Society is gearing up to get the maximum from the campaign and all the opportunities it offers.

Our thanks to staff, Council members, ERS Ambassador Dan Snow, partners and every single member and supporter who is helping us build a better democracy.



Katie Ghose
Chief Executive
Electoral Reform Society



Amy Dodd
Chair
Electoral Reform Society

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ROTTEN BOROUGH

RB1

FAILING VOTERS SINCE 1835

Campaigns

This year the Electoral Reform Society started to benefit from the hard work put in to regain credibility since the AV referendum.

By building successful campaigns on the back of solid research, we have made significant progress towards achieving our strategic goals.

Our key achievements in 2012-13 have been:

- **Manifesto commitments on local government voting reform and votes at 16**

- **Mainstream media coverage of the inequities of First-Past-the-Post**

- **Leading and shaping the debate on the future of Scottish democracy**

In all of our work we have sought to develop credibility, connections and voice in order to set the agenda on democracy in Britain.

We have combined tireless behind-the-scenes work with public campaigns involving tens of thousands of supporters. This has given us the strength and credibility to make real progress in building a better democracy.

In March we published **Reviving the Health of our Democracy**. This laid out our thinking on the challenges facing British politics and on the measures needed to improve our democracy.

Rotten Boroughs

Local democracy in much of England and Wales is a story of one-party states and uncontested seats. A fairer voting system would change that.

What we've done

We launched a major public-facing campaign

asking members of the public to tell us their stories about how local democracy has let them down. Over 500 people replied, giving us a rich store of local knowledge and a highly effective source of public pressure. These stories included positive experiences of life under a fairer local voting system in Scotland.

During the local elections in May we garnered widespread media coverage on one-party states.

Our 2013 local election report **From Councillors to MPs** demonstrated the need for parties to build up a solid council election base in order to win seats. We used this to argue that a fairer voting system for local government would allow for a superior balance of seats across the country and allow parties to regain footholds in previously 'no-go' areas. This was described by Conservative MP Stewart Jackson as 'excellent'.

In June, the Liberal Democrats made a commitment to reform the electoral system for local government in England and Wales.

Lords reform

After a tough year for Lords reformers in 2012 with the House of Lords Reform Bill being killed off in Parliament, reforming our outdated second chamber is once again back on the agenda.

What we've done

We published a briefing on the Super-Sized House of Lords, arguing that at current rates of appointment there will be as many as 2,000 peers after the next general election.

By demonstrating the unsustainability of the appointments system, our message cut through to the media and policymakers. When Lords appointments were made in July 2013, the ERS received widespread media coverage including Newsnight, ITV Daybreak and The Guardian.

Undermining FPTP

First-Past-the-Post creates many different types of inequity, but perhaps none are so revealing as the imbalance between voters in safe seats and those in marginal seats.

What we've done

In August we published a major piece of research entitled **Penny for your Vote?**, which spelt out exactly how much the parties spend per vote at election time. This revealed that in 2010, some votes were worth 22 times more than others.

By putting a cash value on the inequity of FPTP, we won mainstream coverage – in outlets not known for their support of electoral reform – for an issue which most thought would be ignored for many years after the 2011 AV referendum.

We also made quick, reactive interventions throughout the year in order to highlight problems with FPTP. For instance, we demonstrated how the by-election in South Shields in April was barely worth holding as the seat has not changed hands since 1935.

Votes at 16

The fact that 16- and 17-year-olds are allowed to vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum presents a great opportunity for more permanent voting reform across Britain.

What we've done

We used the independence referendum reform to argue both behind the scenes and in the press for British parties to include votes at 16 in their manifestos. By tying in votes at 16 with a commitment to improved citizenship education, we made a compelling case for reform. In August, the Labour Party signalled that it

would include votes at 16 in its 2015 manifesto.

PCC elections

Our AGM last year took place just after the Police and Crime Commissioners election. Our prediction of 18.5% turnout had actually turned out to be an overestimate, with turnout at a record-breaking low of 15.1%.

What we've done

We analysed the results and surveyed the candidates to create a report entitled **How not to run an election**. This gained significant media coverage both locally and nationally. We successfully led the debate on PCCs to ensure that democratic concerns are at the front and centre of this issue in years to come.

Women in Politics

The UK is a long way from achieving gender equality in public life. If the country reflected the make-up of Parliament, only one in five of us would be women. The ERS believes that our parliament should reflect the people it represents.

What we've done

The Society is a founding member of the Counting Women In coalition, a group of organisations brought together to shine a light on gender inequality in British politics. This year the coalition released the hugely successful **Sex and Power 2013** report, which revealed that in many cases women's representation in public life has actually declined. We asked ERS members and supporters to help spread the word via social media, and created an online tool that enabled them to write directly to party leaders to lobby them about their party's plan for achieving gender equality.

BOOTLE

14p
PER VOTE



LUTON SOUTH

£3.07
PER VOTE

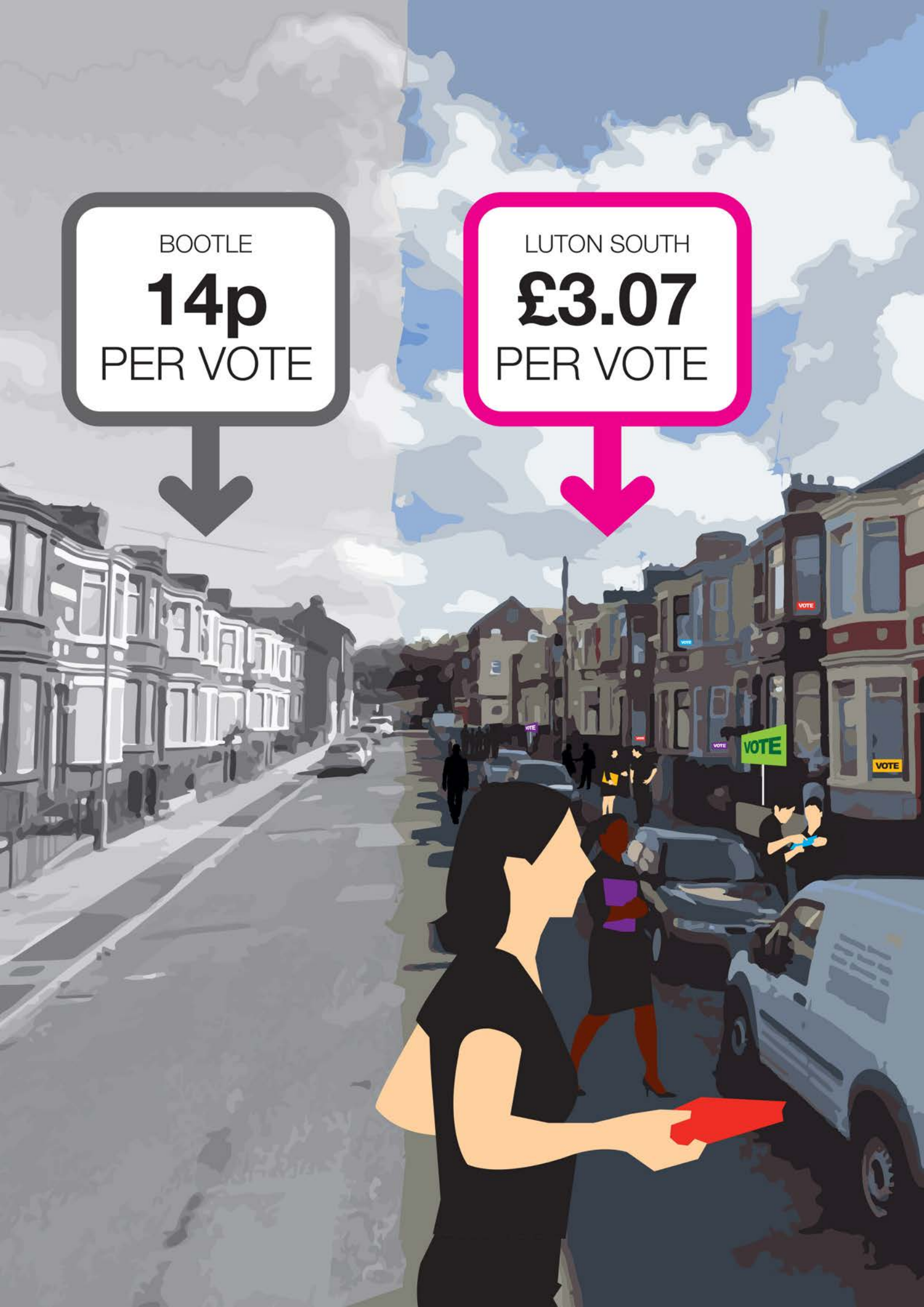




Photo: Gilles Moulin (gilesmoulinphotography.com)

Work in Scotland

Through hard work and innovation, ERS Scotland has become the leading voice in the ongoing debate about the future of Scottish democracy. With so much attention focused on the independence referendum, ERS Scotland has used this energy to ensure that democratic concerns are at the centre not only of the independence referendum but also wider political discussion in Scotland.

Democracy Max

The Democracy Max inquiry into a good Scottish democracy continued through the first half of the year, culminating in a sell-out debate at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August which was followed by a reception to celebrate the launch of our publication **A vision for a good Scottish democracy**.

The next steps involve honing in on specific campaign asks arising from Democracy Max and building a coalition around a convention on a modern Scottish democracy early in 2014.

What we've done

In the past 12 months, ERS Scotland has engaged face-to-face with hundreds of individuals from politicians and government officials, to campaigners and activists, and people from all walks of life who are interested in a better democracy. We have developed relationships and built partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals. Our

reputation as commentators on democratic issues across the board goes from strength to strength, and we have become an important member of the policy community and of wider civil society.

We have secured many column inches, not just reporting on Democracy Max, but also representing our views on the mechanisms of the independence referendum and other democratic issues. We have given written and oral evidence to the Scottish Parliament Committee who are discussing and debating the legislation which is necessary for the referendum, including the Bill to extend the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds. Our online presence is vibrant, with refreshed web pages at the ERS domain, a successful Twitter account and frequent invitations to contribute to other online forums.

ERS Scotland looks forward to taking the vision of a better democracy arrived at through Democracy Max and actively campaigning for key elements to become a reality.



Work in Wales

ERS Cymru has been working to position itself as the 'go-to' organisation on democratic and constitutional reform issues in Wales. We have increased our engagement with decision-makers, the media and civil society leaders, and have become a leading voice on a wide variety of democracy-related issues.

ERS Cymru's work this year has concentrated on three areas: these are local government reform, devolution, and gender and diversity.

Local Government

Our campaign on local government has focused on achieving the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for local elections and making Welsh town halls more open and transparent. We have met with the Minister for Local Government, presented evidence to the National Assembly's local government committee and influenced the passage of the Local Democracy (Wales) Act 2013.

We won cross-party support in the National Assembly for the idea that power over local voting systems should be devolved to Wales. We also successfully campaigned for local authorities to broadcast proceedings and allow greater use of social media in meetings. This generated significant TV, print and online media coverage.

Devolution

We pushed for a new Wales Bill – a law that will improve how Assembly elections are run. This gained front-page coverage in the Western Mail in the run-up to the Queen's Speech.

We have also advocated and gained media coverage for reversing the ban on dual candidacy. And we were the first NGO to present oral evidence to the Commission on Devolution (Silk Commission).

Gender and Diversity

We released our first annual **Welsh Power Report**, which looked at women in public life. The report gained extensive media coverage including the front page of the Western Mail. Our work on women's representation has been praised by the then Equalities Minister Jane Hutt, the Presiding Officer Rosemary Butler and equalities groups including EHRC, Chwarea Teg and the Women's Institute.

Members & Supporters

Consolidating Systems

This year the ERS has invested significant resources in consolidating our membership base and improving our internal systems. Whilst there has been some attrition following the expiry of members who signed up during the free membership offer of 2011-12, the ERS has undertaken a renewals programme in the first half of 2013 which has seen our membership base stabilise. We are now taking every opportunity to grow our membership and engage with new audiences on our issues.

Involving Members

We are remaining true to our roots and our long-standing commitment to defeating First-Past-the-Post and achieving STV. At the same time we are leading the debate on a broad range of democracy issues that affect millions of people in Britain. Involving our members and supporters with our mission to build a better democracy in the UK is crucial to our success.

Thousands of members and supporters of the Society have taken part in our campaigns in the last year. From writing to the Home Secretary regarding the shambolic Police and Crime Commissioner elections, to telling us their local experiences of Rotten Boroughs and broken local democracy in England, Scotland and Wales, to calculating the value of their votes and sharing it with friends on Facebook and Twitter, the contributions of our members and supporters have helped make our campaigns a success.

This year our members have also had the opportunity to:

- Plan and participate in the first ever Grassroots Activists Conference, co-hosted by Unlock Democracy and ERS, making connections with

other activists and campaigners across the UK

- Vote for a new Council to govern the Society for the next two years

- Attend local events around the UK as well as the Society's national events

ERS supporters were invited to join members in taking part in:

- Shaping the findings of the Democracy Max inquiry in Scotland

- Participating in ERS Wales events and discussions on reforming the Welsh Assembly, achieving improved devolution and increasing women's representation

Social Media

We have made fantastic progress when it comes to incorporating social media into all our campaigning work. Members and supporters enjoy sharing their views on our regular ERS blogs and on social media, and we have picked up hundreds of new likes on Facebook and followers on Twitter.

This means our campaigns can reach audiences that don't necessarily use traditional sources of information and instead rely on social media for their news.

Our **Penny for your Vote?** report and corresponding campaign has been our most successful online activity to date, with over 13,000 people taking part. The online campaign successfully promoted the report as well as a novel interactive online action which shows the user how much their vote was worth to political parties at the 2010 general election. This helped us to deliver a central ERS campaign message – that not all votes are created equal after all.

Staff

Building a better democracy

The Society has a talented team spread out over three national offices in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

We were pleased to welcome Will Brett to the team in June this year to head up our media work and handle communications.

We were also delighted to welcome historian and broadcaster Dan Snow as our first ambassador, after our last AGM voted overwhelmingly in favour of his appointment.

Many thanks to Ashley Dé who left us this year after six years of excellent and important work at the ERS.

Current staff

Katie Ghose
Chief Executive

Campaigns, Research & Policy

Darren Hughes
Director of Campaigns and Research
Will Brett
Head of Media
Jess Garland
Policy and Research Officer
Claudia Laidlaw
Campaigns and Membership Officer

Chris Terry
Research Officer
Nick Tyrone
Senior Adviser, Public Affairs & Head of Resources

Operations

Kate West
Chief Operating Officer
Stuart Thomas
Operations Officer & Executive Assistant to the CEO

ERS Scotland

Willie Sullivan
Director
Juliet Swann
Campaigns and Research Officer

ERS Cymru

Stephen Brooks
Director
Owain Llyr ap Gareth
Campaigns & Research Officer

Thanks to all staff for their hard work, and thanks also to the staff of Electoral Reform Services Ltd for their hard work and support during the year.



Governance

The Council

The Council is the Electoral Reform Society's governing body. It is made up of 15 members who are elected every other year and serve for a two-year term.

Between 17 November 2012 and 7 September 2013, the following members served on the Society's Council:

Amy Dodd, *Chair*
Jess Asato, *Vice Chair (Management)*
Andy May, *Deputy Chair (Campaigns and Research)*
Keith Sharp, *Deputy Chair (Group Relations) until 20 July 2013*
Chris Carrigan, *Treasurer*

Crispin Allard
John Ault (removed 4 May 2013)
Keith Best
Andrew Burns
Clare Coatman
George Gabriel
Amisha Ghadiali
Annabelle Harle
Ben Lille
Michael Meadowcroft

No Council member received any remuneration for services as a Council member during the year. Since the last AGM on 17 November, a total of £1,237 was reimbursed to Council members to cover travel and subsistence expenses.

2013 Council Elections

2013 was a Council election year, and saw 23 candidates standing for election. The polls opened on 2 August and closed on 30 August 2013. The following candidates were elected and will take office at the close of the AGM on 7

September 2013:

Crispin Allard
Jess Asato
Chris Carrigan
Clare Coatman
Stephen Curran
Amy Dodd
Sara Hyde
Tim Knight
Andy May
Michael Meadowcroft
Paul Pettinger
Ken Ritchie
Keith Sharp
Jon Walsh
Damien Welfare

Members of the Council will elect four Officers: the Chair, Vice Chair (Management), Treasurer and Deputy Chair (Campaigns and Research), who will each adopt particular areas of strategic focus. The Officer elections will take place directly after the AGM on 7 September 2013.

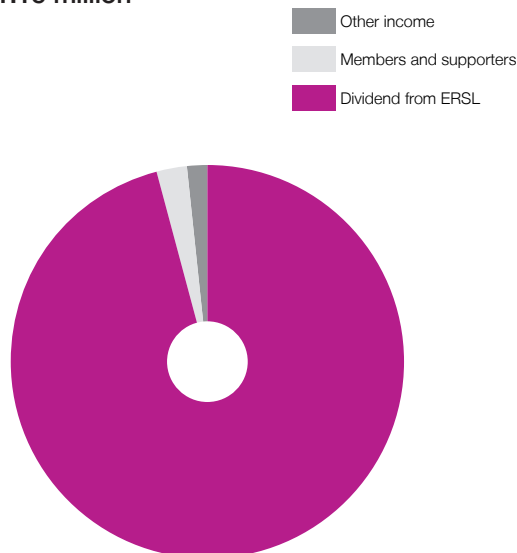
Elections Panel

We also held elections to the Elections Panel in 2013. This exists to offer independent scrutiny. Made up of three panel members who are elected by the Society's membership every four years, their role is to ensure that the Society maintains the highest democratic standards by providing advice to the Returning Officer on the conduct of the Council elections, resolving disputes and reporting to Council.

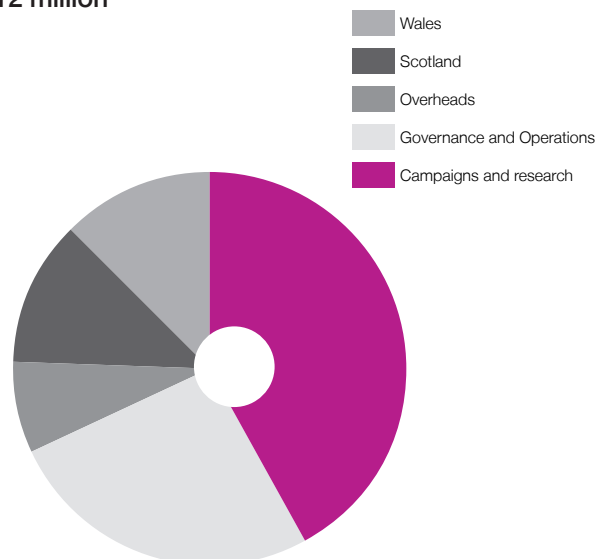
This year, two candidates were nominated to stand for election to the Panel. *Daniel Vince-Archer* and *David Mathieson* were both elected unopposed. There is one final vacancy which will be filled by the newly elected Council by co-option in due course.

Finance

Income (2012)
£1.15 million



Expenditure (2012)
£1.12 million



Full accounts are available online at:
www.electoral-reform.org.uk/finances

Saving on office costs

The ERS is shaping up as a leaner, more prudent and more effective organisation than it has been in the past. Part of this change involves saving on our overheads so we can direct as much of our financial resource as possible directly into campaigning and research.

In 2013 we cut our office expenses by 20%, and developed a plan to move from our current premises into more efficient office space. We will continue to find savings where we can, and where they do not damage our ability to campaign effectively for change.

Fundraising

It is a major priority for us to diversify and grow new funding sources in order to create the basis for a sustainable financial future.

To this end, we are developing a year-round fundraising programme and this year's initiatives will include an inaugural Annual Fundraising Dinner, hosted by our Ambassador Dan Snow.

The Electoral Reform Society is campaigning to build a better democracy.

This report covers the period November 2012 to September 2013.
