

Electoral Reform Society

Annual Report 2013-14



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September 2014

 Electoral
 Reform
 Society

Foreword

This year has seen the ERS confirm itself as a trusted commentator, influencer and campaigner on the widening gulf between people and politics.

2014 has been an election-heavy year, and we seized the opportunities provided by local and European elections to highlight the flaws of First Past the Post. We made the most of the local elections, ensuring that the most glaring inequities of the status quo were firmly on the agenda of decision-makers, the media and most importantly the wider public.

By then we had already set out a confident case for adopting the Scottish system of local proportional representation in England and Wales. We published three party-facing reports – **Northern Blues, Towards One Nation** and **Red Line Issue** – and attracted new allies to our cause. Our work succeeded in opening up a debate within the Conservative party as well as Labour, and seeded local PR into the wider conversation about devolution of power to the local level.

For most voters, European politics is even more remote than national politics. This year we broke new ground, publishing our first report on the democratic deficit in Europe (**Close the Gap**). Its positive reception, and the new audiences it has attracted, shows once again the value of broadening our remit to achieve the credibility, connections and voice we need to fulfil our aims.

In Scotland and Wales we were already established as the ‘go-to’ commentators on democracy. This year’s innovative, influential campaigns on devolution and the quality of local democracy have cemented that position. The analysis emerging from our Cardiff and Edinburgh office is fundamentally shaping the debate on democracy in the devolved nations, whether through ground-breaking participative

events such as **From Centre to Community** in Scotland or through powerful lobbying efforts such as **Size Matters** in Wales.

Our members and supporters have never been as engaged and involved in our work as they are now. Their actions have helped to shape both legislation (such as the Lobbying Bill) and debate (such as the TV contest between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage). Their support strengthens our campaigns immeasurably.

Eight months from the General Election, and we are in a fantastic position to make the most of the hard work we have put in over the last few years. We now have a large bank of solid research, campaign wins and high-level connections on which to draw, and you can be sure we will be seeking to maximise their effect.

Our staff team have excelled themselves this past year. Thanks to them, to our Council members, Ambassador Dan Snow, our Advisory Committee members and above all to our members and supporters who play a vital role in our work to build a better democracy.



Katie Ghose
Chief Executive
Electoral Reform Society



Amy Dodd
Chair
Electoral Reform Society

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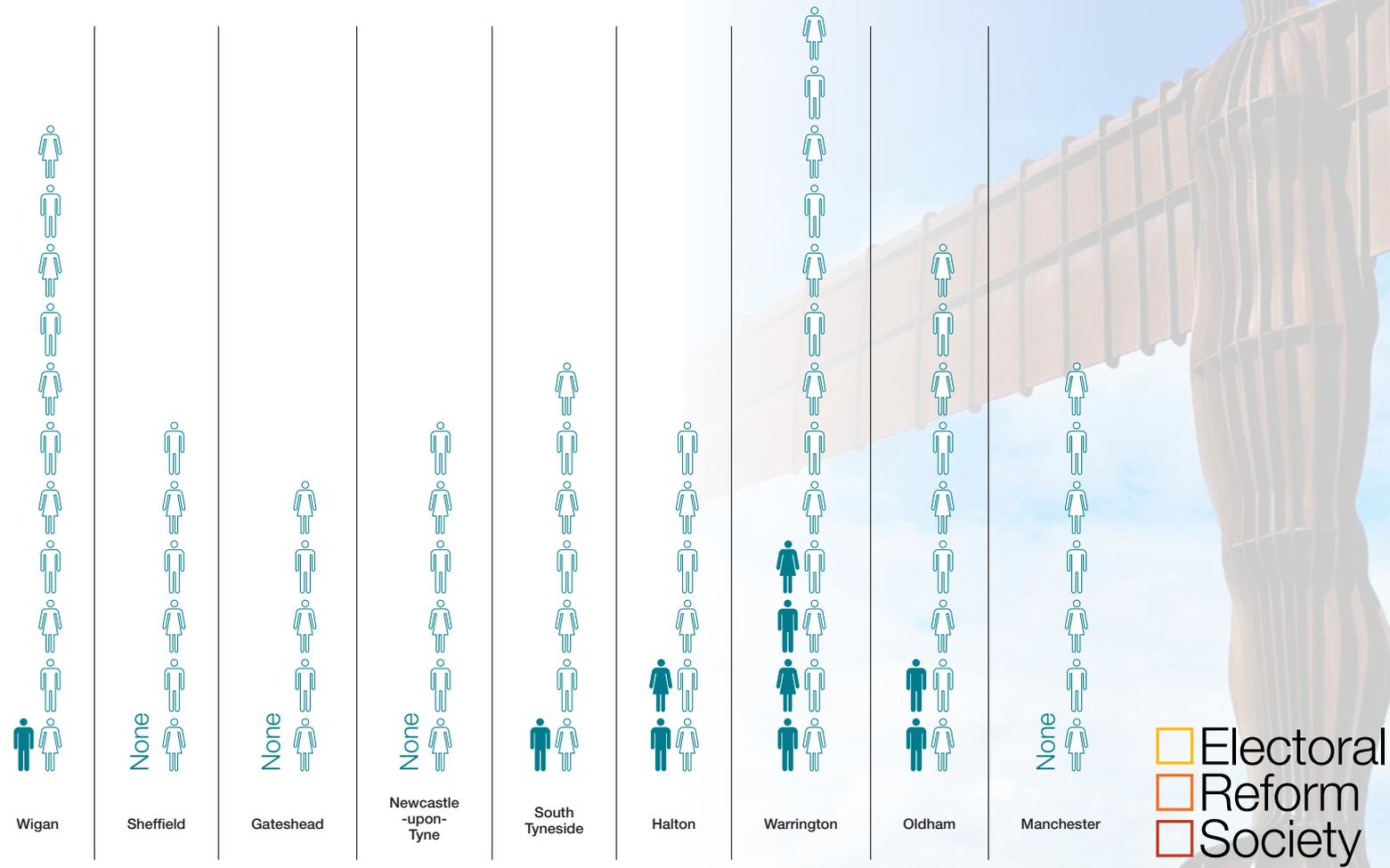
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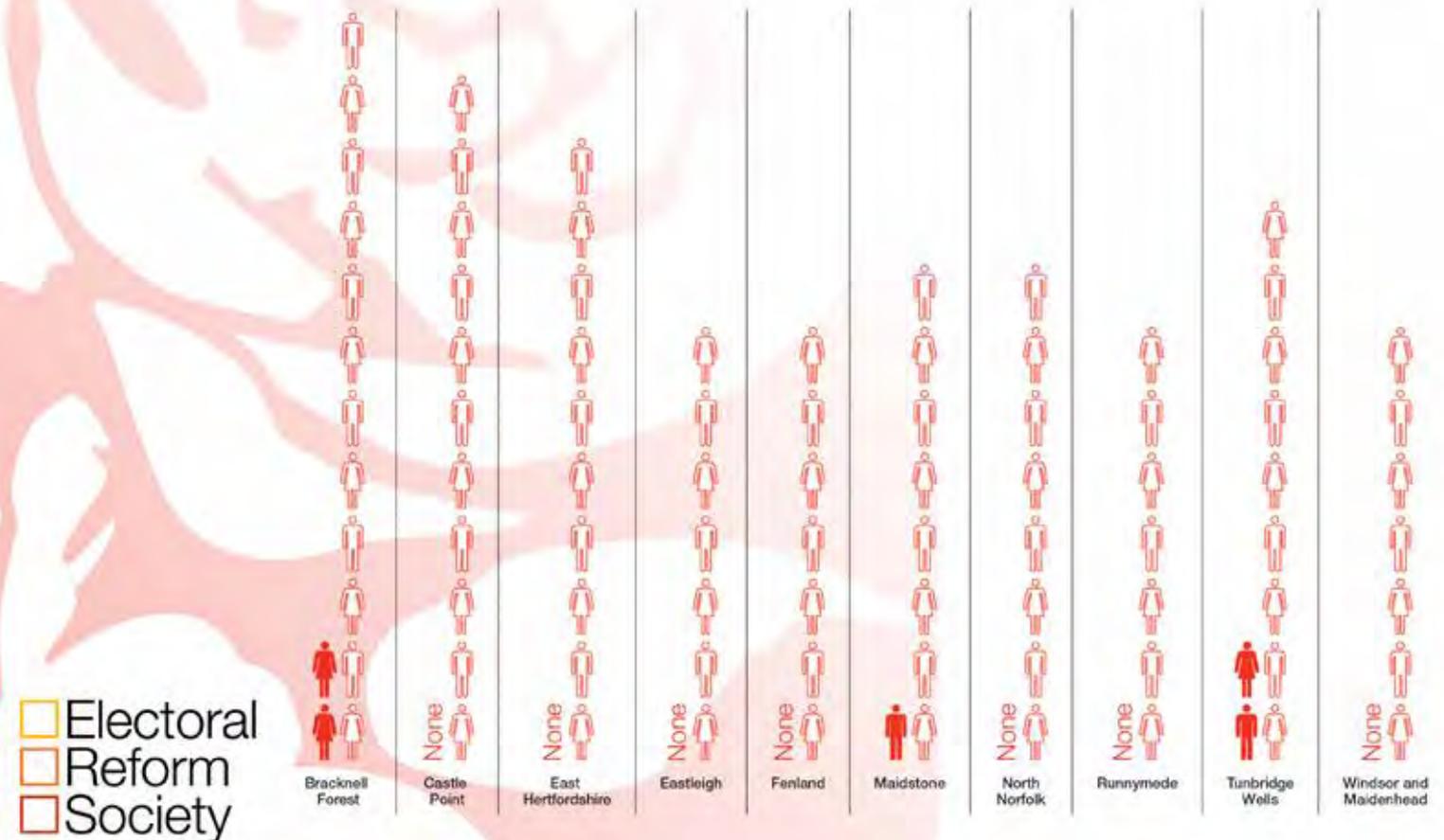
Conservatives in the north: the effect of a fairer voting system

● Conservative councillors 2012 ○ Conservative councillors under Proportional Representation*



Labour in the south: the effect of a fairer voting system

● Labour councillors 2012 ○ Labour councillors under Proportional Representation*



Campaigns

This year has seen the ERS establish itself as the go-to commentator on what needs to be done to build a better democracy.

Our increased profile on a whole range of political reform issues has allowed us to make a powerful case *against* First Past the Post and *for* the Single Transferable Vote at local elections.

Our key achievements in 2013-2014 have been:

■ **High-profile media coverage during local elections, discrediting FPTP**

■ **Establishing ourselves as experts on European democracy**

■ **Building support for local STV through party-targeted research**

As well as the flagship achievements detailed below, we have maintained our leading profile on a whole range of other issues. These include Lords reform (we achieved widespread media coverage throughout the year, and especially when new peers were announced in August), voter registration (we lobbied for a greater effort to ensure people do not fall off the register during this year's transfer to Individual Voter Registration) and the general problem of voter disengagement. We have also continually highlighted the importance of getting more women into politics, both as part of the Counting Women In coalition and through innovative campaigns of our own.

Local democracy

This year saw us both shaping and reacting to the political news agenda in order to push for our key strategic goals of undermining FPTP and achieving local electoral reform. Our work was geared towards two different but equally challenging tasks: to open up the two biggest

parties to the issue of local PR ahead of any coalition talks in 2015; and to exploit openings provided by the 2014 local elections.

What we've done

We published two reports, **Northern Blues** and **Towards One Nation**, making the Conservative and Labour cases (respectively) for local electoral reform. These combined pragmatic political analysis with principled argument, and gave us compelling material with which to make our case. These reports have opened new doors for us inside the two parties. We followed them up with a pamphlet directed at the Liberal Democrats, and continue to lobby hard for local STV in the run up to the 2015 General Election.

In the weeks preceding the 2014 local elections, we successfully highlighted the travesties of uncontested seats and one-party states, winning coverage across the mainstream broadcast and press media. We followed that up with highly effective social media on the day of the election, demonstrating the wide difference between percentage of vote for some parties against the number of seats they won. Our media coverage around the election continued with an exclusive feature report on one-party states in The Times. And we continued to build support for STV at the local level with an online petition signed (to date) by nearly 7,000 people.

Close the Gap

The UK's relationship with the EU is continually in the headlines yet democratic aspects do not always attract the attention they should. There is a genuine "democratic deficit" and as the debate about the future of the UK's relationship with the EU heats up, it's vital that this is examined.

What we've done

Already leading commentators on the gap between citizens and UK political bodies, we

have set out also to establish ERS in the debate on the EU's democratic deficit. This year we published **Close the Gap**, which sets out the nature of the democratic deficit in Europe and offers 12 initial recommendations to address it. Widespread coverage of the report (in the Daily Mail, the Daily Express, on Sky News and on Reuters TV among others) as well as positive reviews from academics established us as players in this area. We subsequently engaged policymakers, holding a roundtable for politicians and academics and presenting our work to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Now we have established ourselves in this area we will identify other aspects of EU democracy where our analysis can illuminate debate.

Tomorrow's Party

Political parties are central to our democracy but citizens are turning away from party politics in record numbers and the old party structures don't seem to fit today's society.

What we've done

At the end of last year we launched a consultation with members and supporters to find out what people really think about political parties. Over 750 people responded, giving detailed comments which helped inform a new publication on the future of the political party. This is due for publication in October this year.

The report marks the beginning of a programme of work looking at how political parties can reform to keep up with changing social and political trends.

Party funding

Another year, another round of party funding

scandals. As cross-party talks on funding broke down yet again, ERS stepped up efforts to help forge a lasting solution and clean up politics.

What we've done

At the start of the year we commissioned new research on attitudes to party funding as part of ongoing work to help build a workable and publicly acceptable solution to donations and funding.

Based on this research, we are in discussion with politicians and advisers to help them understand public feeling on the subject and create new impetus to change. A report on the research will be published at the end of this year.

In the summer, we reacted to a spate of party funding scandals by asking our members and supporters to write to their MPs raising the issue of party funding reform. Over 750 people took this action, helping to bring this important issue back to where it belongs – at the top of the political reform agenda.

Democracy Agenda

This year we established Democracy Agenda, a series of events in which leading politicians from across the political spectrum are given a platform to set out their vision of a good democracy, and how we get there.

Our speakers so far have been **Stephen Twigg**, Labour MP for Liverpool West Derby and Shadow Minister for Constitutional Reform; **Zac Goldsmith**, Conservative MP for Richmond; and **Angela Eagle**, Labour MP for Wallasey and Shadow Leader of the House.

We look forward to welcoming speakers from the other main parties over the next few months.

British voters feel disengaged from European politics

- Electoral
- Reform
- Society

68%

don't trust the EU



IT'S TIME TO CLOSE THE GAP



- Electoral
- Reform
- Society

#CloseTheGap

www.electoral-reform.org.uk/close-the-gap



Work in Scotland

This has been an extraordinary year for Scottish politics and public life, and we have made sure to be at the heart of it.

Missing Scotland

Working with journalist Gerry Hassan, publishers Luath Press and Ipsos MORI, we held a number of focus groups with non-voters in Scotland's lowest turnout constituencies. The findings of those focus groups, and analysis of why non-voters tend to come from Scotland's most disadvantaged communities, were published as **The Missing Scotland** in September, gaining widespread coverage in the run up to the independence referendum.

Indyref

Our key message in the debate has been that whatever the result, we need to have a citizen-led conversation about Scotland's democratic future. Working with a wide array of partners, we have been involved in a huge range of referendum-related activities including debates, roundtables and research. We also joined a number of young people's organisations on a voter registration week in August called 'Ready, Steady, Vote'.

Centre to Community

Last year's Democracy Max inquiry showed us that if we could reclaim local democracy and re-engage people with decision-making in their local communities, that could help transform how citizens relate to politics in Scotland.

We also learnt the value of participative and deliberative techniques, and these lessons led us to hold a second facilitated discussion, this time focusing on local democracy. We called this

discussion **From Centre to Community**. This took place in April 2014.

We examined the suggestions proposed by participants and considered which ones might create opportunities for intervention and timely influence. On that basis we will be taking forward a campaign to embed in legislation the requirement for local and central government to actively promote participation in innovative ways.

Lobbying transparency

A proposed Member's Bill saw the Scottish Parliament's Standards, Procedures and Public Affairs Committee hold an inquiry into lobbying transparency. We submitted written and oral evidence and worked with Unlock Democracy to hold a successful public event, with MSPs and representatives from civil society joining journalists and members of the public in a vibrant discussion.

With the introduction of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act placing limitations on the ability of NGOs to engage in campaigning activity in the run up to elections, and failing to introduce a decent lobbying register, we continue to monitor developments in Scotland and push for a fulsome lobbying register.

Women's representation

We have been working with Engender Scotland to highlight the gender gap in political representation in public life in Scotland, and we welcomed the Scottish Government's consultation on gender quotas for public boards. Alongside Engender we are working with human rights organisations to ensure any future constitutional-type documents in Scotland reflect the right of women to participate in political life.



Work in Wales

Our work in Wales has continued to focus on three areas: strengthening devolution, achieving STV for local government, and promoting diversity in politics.

We have also launched a major body of work called **The Health of Welsh Democracy** to generate ideas for parties' manifestos ahead of the 2016 Assembly elections.

Devolution

Along with our partners at Cardiff University's Wales Governance Centre we have published a major report looking at the capacity of the Assembly. Our report, **Size Matters**, concluded that the Assembly was too small in comparison to other parliaments and was failing to properly hold the Welsh government to account.

The report's main recommendation was an increase in the number of AMs. We have campaigned hard on that recommendation, and secured the support of key figures in Welsh public life including the First Minister and the Assembly's Presiding Officer. We also secured extensive broadcast, online and print media coverage, not only at the launch of the report but throughout the year.

Having successfully campaigned for a Wales Bill in 2013, this year we have been busy influencing its contents. We have appeared in front of the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Select Committee, and have been pushing for STV for Assembly elections as well as advocating other important changes to how elections work.

Local government

The Welsh Government plans to reduce the number of councils in Wales, and we have used

this as an opportunity to renew our call for STV for local elections. We have secured cross-party agreement that the National Assembly should have power over local elections (currently, this is the job of Westminster). And we have been highlighting the practical benefits STV brings, as well as showing why the one-party states created by our outdated First Past The Post electoral system are bad for Wales – as well as bad for democracy.

Diversity

Following last year's **Wales Power Report: Women in Public Life**, we have continued to advocate the need for a more representative form of politics. Our research on Welsh women in Westminster was used by BBC TV, and we were invited to speak at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

We also successfully influenced a Welsh Government-sponsored inquiry which has called on political parties to take action on increasing gender equality. For International Women's Day, we released a video showcasing women in politics making a difference, securing membership sign-ups as a result.

Health of Welsh Democracy

Over the next 18 months we will be holding a series of events and engaging our supporters and members to develop new ideas ahead of the 2016 Assembly elections. We held packed fringe meetings at each of the four party conferences in the Spring, and this Summer launched a roundtable series. Each roundtable will focus on specific areas. The first looked at participation in politics, diversity and political education.

Members & Supporters

Our members and supporters are the foundations of our campaign for a better democracy. We are hugely grateful to all of those who have supported the Society through their membership subscriptions and participation in our campaigns over the past year. Involving our members and supporters with our mission to build a better democracy in the UK is crucial to our success.

Local STV petition

Over just one fortnight in late May/early June over 6,800 people signed our petition for a fairer voting system for local elections. This included over 1,700 people who signed up to keep in touch with the Society for the first time. We will continue to gather signatures to this petition throughout the next year.

Ask Nick and Nigel

Over 1,000 supporters submitted questions to the BBC as part of the Nick Clegg v Nigel Farage debate on TV in April, and one of our supporter's questions on the European democratic deficit was chosen to be asked live on air.

Lobbying Bill

In September 2013, over 2,600 of our members and supporters signed a petition to express concerns about the Lobbying Bill. In October over 1,000 wrote to the Bill's sponsor in the Lords, Lord Wallace, helping to secure important changes to the eventual Act.

Tomorrow's Party

In November we launched our Tomorrow's Party consultation, providing a platform for people from

all parties and none to imagine what a modern, dynamic political party would look like and work out the best route to get there. We had over 750 submissions to our consultation, forming the basis for our first report in this area, due for publication in October this year.

Social media

We have increased our Twitter following by 35% in the year, and our Facebook page likes by 17%. Our ever increasing number of social media supporters have played a key role in our campaigns this year, both taking campaign action themselves and ensuring our messages and activities reach new people.

Improving our systems

2013-14 saw the number of ERS supporters (both those signed up to our email lists and those on social media) grow. Overall ERS membership stabilised following the attrition last year of expired members who signed up during the free two-year membership offer of 2011-12. We are now well into a cycle of paying members renewing year on year. We continue to attract new members and supporters through our campaigning work and on social media, and the launch of our 2015 General Election fundraising campaign saw us recruit 38 new members in just two weeks.

This year saw the inception of our new bi-monthly members and supporters e-bulletins. These emails are a way of keeping everyone up to date with our campaigns, publications, forthcoming events and other activities across the three nations. The reception has been positive and we are looking at a way to roll out the bulletins to those members who do not have email addresses, while managing associated costs.

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 Sarah Allan to the team in May this year as Campaigns Officer. We also welcomed Davina Johnson who has joined us part-time as Finance Officer.

Many thanks to Claudia Laidlaw who left us in January after 18 months as Membership and Campaigns Officer.

Current staff

Katie Ghose
Chief Executive

Campaigns, Research & Policy

Darren Hughes
Deputy Chief Executive
Will Brett
Head of Media
Nick Tyrone
Head of Partnerships & Public Affairs
Jess Garland
Policy and Research Officer
Sarah Allan
Campaigns Officer
Chris Terry
Research Officer

Operations

Kate West
Chief Operating Officer
Stuart Thomas
Operations & Membership Officer

ERS Scotland

Willie Sullivan
Director
Juliet Swann
Campaigns & 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 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 by our membership every other year and serve for a two-year term.

The last elections took place shortly before the last AGM in September 2013, and the next elections to Council are due next year.

Between 7 September 2013 and 13 September 2014, the following members served on the Society's Council:

Amy Dodd, *Chair*
Jess Asato, *Vice Chair (Management)*
Andy May, *Deputy Chair (Campaigns and Research)*
Jon Walsh (*Treasurer*)
Crispin Allard
Chris Carrigan
Clare Coatman
Stephen Curran
Sarah Hyde
Tim Knight
Michael Meadowcroft
Paul Pettinger
Ken Ritchie
Keith Sharp
Damien Welfare

No Council member received any remuneration for services as a Council member during the year.

The Advisory Committee

Our new Advisory Committee draws on a wide pool of highly talented individuals to provide intellectual vitality and advice to our organisation.

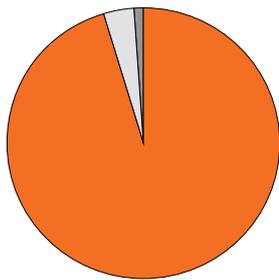
Between 7 September 2013 and 13 September 2014, the following members served on the Society's Advisory Committee:

Billy Hayes, *leader of the Communication Workers Union*
Deborah Mattinson, *Founder of BritainThinks*
Jonathan Porritt CBE, *environmentalist and writer*
Alan Renwick, *political scientist*
Esther Roberton, *Scottish political affairs specialist*

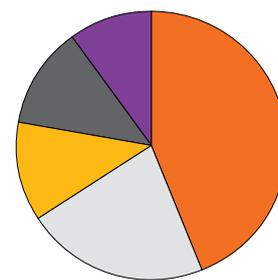
We are also proud to have the historian Dan Snow as our official Ambassador. Dan has done fantastic work supporting ERS and its goals, both online and in our fundraising work.

Finance

Income (2013) £860k



Expenditure (2013) £999k



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

Becoming leaner

The ERS is shaping up as a leaner, more prudent and more effective organisation. In 2013 we cut our office expenses by 20% in preparation for our office move in April 2014. We continue to find savings where we can and to identify ways to best use our resources in order to campaign effectively for change.

Due to restrictive income projections for 2013-2015, and to sustain our level of activity in the run up to the General Election, Council intentionally built a loss into the Society's strategic plan this year and next, which will see us draw on our reserves. This is supported by the sale of Chancel Street, providing us with a cushion until the dividend returns to normal levels next year. We plan to rebuild our reserves to their previous level by end 2016.

Fundraising

The Society's first Democracy Dinner was hosted by our Ambassador Dan Snow in November. 115 members and supporters gathered in London for the event, raising over £4,000 towards the Society's campaigning fund. We're grateful to all of those who attended and to those who kindly hosted tables. Due to the event's success we plan to now make the dinner an annual event.

In May, exactly one year before the 2015 General Election, we launched a major fundraising drive. We were delighted with the initial response which saw over 80 individuals donate to the Society and garnered 38 new members.

We also won a grant from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to jointly pursue research into public attitudes towards party funding reform.

The Electoral Reform Society is campaigning to build a better democracy. This report covers the period October 2013 to August 2014.
