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☐ Electoral  
☐ Reform  
☐ Society

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# 2016 - 2017 Annual Report

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Electoral Reform Society  
*December 2017*



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# Introductions



Darren Hughes,  
Chief Executive,  
Electoral Reform Society.  
Photograph Gus Palmer.

Looking back on 2016, there's a strong sense of achievement at the issues the ERS has been able to raise – and we are equipped with stronger arguments than ever for reform.

It has been an honour to take over from Katie Ghose as Chief Executive in July. Katie reminded me the importance of having a solid organisational basis to pursue our political strategy, and of providing real leadership to the Society. We know she will continue to be a friend to our cause in the years ahead.

Our thanks to all the partner organisations and individuals we have worked with over the year, to those who generously provided funding either through grants or kind donations, and to our members and supporters who remind us why our cause is so important.

A big thanks to those ERS members who have served on the Council over the 2015-2017 term for your commitment, advice and governance of our organisation – and a very warm welcome to those joining the Council for these crucial two years ahead.

Our staff are first rate, and it is a pleasure to work with so many talented people. I'm sure members and supporters would join me in thanking the office teams in Cardiff, Edinburgh and London.

As this report shows, the ERS has responded to the changing political environment with energy and dynamism. The General Election dominated the year, as did the consequences of the Brexit referendum vote in 2016. In addition, we saw local elections in Scotland – the third time the Single Transferable Vote was successfully used to provide voters with more choice and a stronger voice. We are working hard to ensure that the one-party state councils seen in England and Wales are also a thing of the past.

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Our continuing campaign on House of Lords reform remains an important way of demonstrating just how deep the need for change goes – with it all linking in to our wider push for a fairer, proportionally-elected Parliament.

Debates in the House of Commons on voting reform, Votes at 16 and democratising the House of Lords this year offered us the chance to build even better links with Parliamentarians and their researchers, and to identify new supporters.

Our work in the nations of the UK continues to be a strong feature of ERS activity, and makes us a unique voice as democratic commentators. We continued to lift our profile in Northern Ireland, and launched exciting initiatives in deliberative democracy in both Scotland and Wales. We were also partners in a landmark Citizens' Assembly on Brexit held in Manchester in the autumn.

This year also saw us make significant strides in our support among trade unions. We are working hard to translate that support into policy positions, with the aim of winning new allies in the campaign for Labour to back fair votes.

With a refreshed staff team and council, a new visual brand, ammunition from three failed First Past the Post general elections in a row, and work to start a new home for the Society, 2018 is shaping up to be an important year for the organisation and the campaign for a better democracy.

Darren Hughes  
**Chief Executive**

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# Introductions



John Walsh,  
Chair,  
Electoral Reform Society.  
Photograph Anna Gordon.

Even in these challenging political times, the Society is finding new ways to shape the national debate.

Our report on the EU referendum *It's Good to Talk* continues to be a talking point for me about the nature of public discourse - and how the nature of our democracy still leaves so much up to the judgement of the few. Whether it is about how to interpret the narrow decision to leave the EU, or win a seat in Westminster, we should continue to ask 'where are the voices of voters?'.

And I am proud of our work drawing attention to the House of Lords and the need for reform. From 'cash for nothing' to the continuing presence of hereditary peers, our unelected second chamber continues to be a roadblock to genuine democracy in the UK. This year the ERS has led the charge to change that.

All of this work of course continues to open doors and make connections with new allies to pursue our ultimate goal of a more proportional voting system - one where everyone's vote counts and where voters have real choice.

It has been a year of change for the Society, and the strong position we end it in is a testament to the talent and resilience of the staff team.

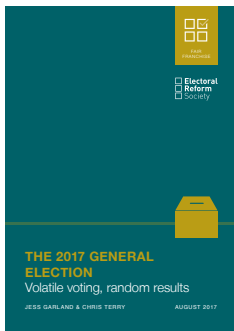
It was sad to lose Katie as Chief Executive, but I feel the standing of the Society now will be a lasting testament to her dedication to our cause. I was encouraged by the quality of applicants for the position of Chief Executive, and after a thorough process we were delighted to appoint the hugely-qualified Darren Hughes.

I know Darren will take the society on to great things - and build the case for a better politics in these interesting times.

Jon Walsh,  
**Chair**

In yet another year in which politics has shocked and surprised, we have continued to make the case for a better, more open, fairer democracy.

We have used the opportunities of this rollercoaster year to highlight where democracy is failing citizens, and to showcase a more hopeful and inspiring alternative. We have pressed for democratic reforms across the board with well-targeted campaigns, backed by original research and matched by extensive media coverage.



**The 2017 General Election Report, Garland & Terry, August 2017**

## General Election: The third strike for First Past the Post

The snap General Election this year gave us an unexpected opportunity to highlight the increasingly dysfunctional and erratic nature of Westminster elections.

During the short campaign, we highlighted the many problems created by the system, with our polling and analysis proving central to the debate on tactical voting and electoral pacts.

We stressed the need for citizens to hear from politicians in TV debates, and for these debates to fairly showcase all the parties engaged in our now solidly multi-party system. We also led the way in highlighting the problems of online campaigning and trends in ‘micro-targeting’ – a new and concerning issue for party and campaign finance.

Our 2017 General Election report *Volatile Voting, Random Results* proved a definitive resource on June’s election. Our in-depth analysis of the results, demonstrated that this election was the third strike for Westminster’s voting system. We looked at wasted votes, tactical voting, and the tiny swings it would take to change the overall results.



Daily Mirror, 21st August 2017



The All-Party Parliamentary Group for

Proportional  
Representation

Branding for the APPG-PR

Central to the report however was that First Past the Post is treating all parties unfairly. We highlighted the continued under-representation of the Conservatives in the North East and Labour in the South East, and the growing geographical concentration of voters and increasing volatility in the system. We also projected the election results under different electoral systems, giving a unique insight into the operation of better electoral systems.

The report was covered prominently in nearly all major newspapers, and saw Darren Hughes interviewed on BBC *Breakfast*, ITV bulletins and radio stations across the country – taking the message for fair votes to new audiences.

We brought this analysis forward to party conferences in the Autumn to make strong partisan cases for supporting change.

### **Movement for PR at Westminster and beyond**

Our Parliamentary focused work this year saw the inauguration of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Proportional Representation chaired by Chuka Umunna. The APPG's launch event brought together Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, and its work will continue next year with a new officer group.

The ERS and others scored a major success this year in getting the Parliamentary petition on PR over 100,000 signatures. It resulted in MPs debating the issue in a Westminster Hall debate in October, providing a key opportunity to keep up the momentum for fair votes.

ERS research and commentary was widely used and cited in the debate, and new faces came out in support of reform. We continue to work in partnership with all organisations supporting electoral reform, to build support within parties and Parliament.

The movement for electoral reform within the trade union movement is also growing. We continued this year to work closely with unions supportive of reform, and have launched a trade union facing project to support policy change. This will be stepping up its work in the new year as an organised platform for democratic reform among trade unionists.

### **Citizen voices**

In June we hosted a one day conference at Westminster 'Power and People in the UK Constitution' dealing with the question of where power lies in the context of devolution and Brexit.

In partnership with the Local Government Association, RSA's Citizens' Economic Council, Involve and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Reform, Decentralisation and



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## CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON BREXIT

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The Citizens' Assembly on Brexit. Photography Cade Hanann

Devolution we discussed the issue of where powers lie within and between the nations of the UK and, one year after the EU referendum, what role there is for the public in shaping the future of UK democracy.

This series of roundtables brought together civil servants, politicians, academics, campaigners and democracy practitioners to consider how we can advance understanding of, and promote good practice in democratic engagement.

Autumn saw the Citizens Assembly on Brexit, a partnership project with the UCL Constitution Unit, Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Southampton and Involve. The Citizens Assemblies brought together fifty randomly selected participants over two weekends to discuss what the UK's post-Brexit relations with the European Union should be.

This project aimed to provide much needed public input into the Brexit process and demonstrate the value of deliberative public engagement on controversial areas of public policy. The Assembly was endorsed by a range of high-profile figures from both sides of the Brexit divide. We will be taking the lessons from this project to politicians across the spectrum to build our calls for citizen involvement in key constitutional questions.

### House of Lords reform

This year saw the ERS take a firm lead on reforming the House of Lords. When the Lord Speaker's Committee on the Size of the House was launched at the start of the year, the ERS responded robustly. The inquiry ruled out submissions which discussed an elected Lords – something the Society were forthright in challenging.

Throughout the summer the ERS conducted extensive research on the House of Lords, focusing on the contributions and expenses claims of peers. We released this in three stages, securing maximum publicity for the campaign – including two Daily Mirror front pages, and diverse broadcast appearances from BBC Parliament to Radio 5 Live.

In November, we published our Audit of the House of Lords, *The High Cost of Small Change*. We revisited the measures of independence, representation, size and cost that we analysed two years ago in our myth busting publication *Fact vs. Fiction*.

We found that despite new legislation supposedly intended to bring much needed accountability to the upper house, the democratic deficit in the Lords continues to create an environment for expenses scandals and inefficiency.

Our report highlighted that over a million pounds has been claimed by peers who made no spoken contributions in the chamber in the last Parliamentary session.

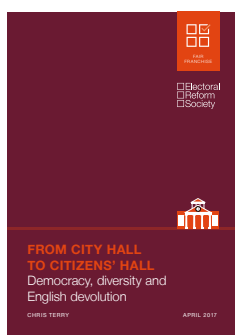


The High Cost of Small Change, ERS, November 2017

Many of those who have not appeared in the chamber have also not voted nor tabled any questions. We find that the bulk of the work of the House of Lords is undertaken by a much smaller number of hard-working peers.

Our partnership with BMG Research meant we released extensive polling, highlighting public calls for real reform and a smaller upper chamber. Support for an elected second chamber has grown over the last two years from 48 percent backing a partly- or fully-elected upper house in 2015, to 64 percent now. This is a testament to the ERS' research and campaigning on this issue.

Finally, we have used our research to argue for far stronger reforms than those suggested by the Lords Speaker's committee, which would see humans on Mars before the upper house moves fully to fixed-terms (2042!). Our work has put the campaign for a modernised second chamber in good stead for 2018.



**From City Hall to Citizens' Hall, Chris Terry, April 2017**

### **Building a better democracy**

In April, ahead of the election of the first six mayors of newly formed city-regions, we released *From City Hall to Citizens' Hall* – an analysis of the structures, power balance, scrutiny functions and diversity of these new democratic institutions. We asked what role citizens have within this latest form of devolution – and found it in many cases lacking.

Votes at 16 returned to Parliament in the Autumn, with a Private Members Bill on lowering the voting age. We continued our lobbying work in this area, briefing politicians on the issue and expanding what is now a considerable body of support. We also submitted evidence to the Lords Select Committee on Citizenship, which is considering votes at 16.

### Local democracy and institutional reform

Working with local community partners, ERS Scotland has furthered work on the 'Act as if you own the place' initiative: a community planning process using deliberative democratic mechanisms. This year 'Act as if' has helped seven local communities embrace democratic innovation to produce plans for their areas.

We have partnered with the Coalfield Regeneration Trust to grow and develop our 'Act as if' process and secured £40k in partnership funding from the Scottish government. The programme has built a network of community activists who we are helping to champion the need for improved local democratic institutions.

We have also campaigned for and secured a commitment to a Local Democracy Review and a government bill in 2018. We will work with this growing network and the example of 'Act as if' to shape changes to local democracy in Scotland.

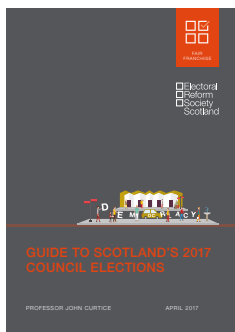
### Trade Unions and electoral reform

We continue to work closely with the Scottish TUC towards a pro-reform PR policy, and encourage those right across the trade union sector in Scotland to move away from First Past the Post. We have now widened this work to include unions from across the country, as part of our specific trade union facing work.

### Elections

Scotland elected its local councillors using the Single Transferable Vote for the third time this year.

We worked with Professor John Curtice to produce the *Guide to Scotland's 2017 Council Election*, an in-depth report



**Guide to Scotland's 2017 Council Elections, Prof John Curtice, April 2017**

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looking at how the system is working and looking ahead to the prospects for parties.

We used the snap General Election to highlight the problems of tactical voting under First Past the Post – the results of which were starkly demonstrated in Scotland. During conference season we used the experience of the Conservatives in Scotland to highlight the value of more proportional systems in maintaining the party's political presence, the fruits of which were demonstrated in the General Election.

### **Lobbying register**

Following our campaign, which passed into legislation last year, for a register of lobbying activity as part of the Scottish Alliance for Lobbying Transparency (SALT), we have continued to monitor its implementation and are watching for the effects of what we think are shortfalls in the legislation. We are also seeking funding for SALT to have some dedicated staff time.

**An Our Democracy – Act As  
If You Own the Place event**



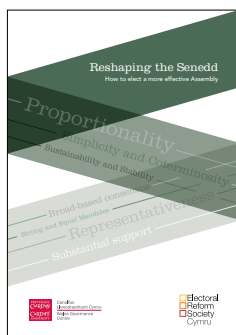
With power over Welsh elections in the process of being transferred from Westminster to Cardiff Bay, there is now significant potential to do things differently in Wales when it comes to elections.

### Local government

May's local government elections in Wales gave us another opportunity to highlight the failure of First Past the Post. ERS Cymru focused our work on these elections on diversity, turnout and disproportionate results.

We had significant traction discussing the barriers stopping women standing and the dominance of white, male councils in Wales. As a result the Welsh Government are establishing a taskforce to look at this issue.

We have also worked closely with the Welsh Government on their consultation ahead of next year's Local Government (Wales) Bill, campaigning for the Single Transferable Vote in local elections and winning commitments from the Government on Votes at 16. There is now a real opportunity for electoral reform in Wales.



**Reshaping the Senedd, Prof Roger Scully, Prof Richard Wyn Jones, Dr Owain ap Gareth, November 2016**

### Assembly reform

Following the release of our *Reshaping the Senedd* report, which looked at the practicalities of creating a larger National Assembly for Wales, the Assembly's Presiding Officer established a panel on Assembly Reform. The Panel's findings were published in early November, and we were delighted to see our hard campaigning pay off, with positive recommendations on Votes at 16, a larger Assembly and STV.



Branding for Missing Voices



A Missing Voices focus group

## Missing Voices

A sizable barrier for the success of democracy in Wales has always been the lack of engagement in Welsh politics by people across the country – an issue commonly referred to as the Welsh democratic deficit. Turnout in Assembly elections has peaked at 46 percent, while local elections this year hit 41 percent turnout. Our research this year also showed us that 350,000 Welsh eligible voters were not even on the electoral register.

As a result of this, we launched 'Missing Voices' in July, which aimed to have a national conversation about the barriers to voting. We are delighted to have received over 850 survey responses, and conducted focus groups across Wales from Cwmbran to Criccieth – hitting 20 out of 40 constituencies and every Welsh region.

Our findings of this work will be published in due course and will form the basis for our work in 2018.

A Missing Voices focus group



# Members, Supporters and the Wider Public

Our paying membership has now stabilised at approximately 3,500 members, following the final phase of a two-year project to ensure that our database is fully up-to-date. Our registered subscribers stand at 143,000.

## Campaigns

This year we helped drive the Westminster Hall petition for PR over the crucial 100,000 signature mark. Off the back of the BBC's *Meet the Lords* documentary we added over 3,000 names to our House of Lords petition, and 1,000 people wrote to their Conservative MP to ask them to lobby for Lords reform in the Conservative Manifesto.

In the run up to the June election, over 1,000 supporters emailed their local candidates, and after the election over 7,000 people found out how many votes were wasted in their constituency.

We had a good year for campaign-based fundraising. Our General Election report was crowdfunded – backed by nearly 300 donors who raised over £4,000 towards the costs of disseminating the report. And we raised a further £4,000 to cover campaigning around the General Election. In addition, 140 donors helped fund our *From City Hall to Citizens Hall* report.

Over 3,000 members and supporters took part in our website user survey, with their feedback going straight into the design process.

## Media reach

The Electoral Reform Society received nearly 4,000 pieces of coverage in the media this year in the UK alone. Much of our major work was also picked up internationally, building our reputation both domestically and on the world stage as the UK's foremost democratic commentator.



Daily Mirror



The Sun



The Daily Mail



The i Paper



Daily Mirror

## Focuses and people

Around 31 percent of our coverage focused on voting systems/ PR, while a quarter focused on the House of Lords, with Lords reform dominating our coverage in the second half of the year. Other key topics included voter ID, votes at 16, and voter registration.

Darren Hughes had a fantastic start to his time as Chief Executive, with nearly 1,500 mentions in the media across the year. Willie Sullivan frequently appeared on BBC Scotland's *Drivetime* show, while Jess Blair secured slots on the BBC's *Sunday Politics Wales* and BBC Radio Wales.

Around half of our coverage was 'General', i.e. with the ERS included in pieces looking at wider issues. However, we achieved a high figure of 26 percent for 'Feature Coverage' – articles focusing solely on the ERS and our publications. Darren Hughes was frequently asked to appear on LBC and TalkRadio, and appeared on Radio 4's *Today* programme, *BBC Breakfast* and ITV's *Good Morning Britain* several times throughout the year.

The ERS had an extensive media impact on a wide range of issues, but it was our landmark publications and research which had the biggest impact.

## Key publications

Our report on the General Election will have a long-lasting impact on how the 2017 vote is perceived. Our verdict on the 'hold your nose election' was covered prominently in all major newspapers, and was picked up by the BBC and the Press Association as the lead story of the day. Darren appeared on *BBC Breakfast* and ITV to show how First Past the Post had created a sea of wasted votes and the scourge of tactical voting.

Our research on the Lords also received blanket coverage, securing two *Daily Mirror* front pages (in September and October) and being billed on page two in most others – all highlighting the need for an elected upper house. This was picked up internationally by *Bloomberg*, *Business Insider* and others, while Darren Hughes was interviewed by the *Wall Street Journal* on it.

We were delighted that both of these landmark pieces of work were welcomed across the media spectrum – irrespective of political persuasion – taking our output to ever-wider audiences.

## Looking ahead

This has been a very strong year for the ERS in terms of its media reach and reputation. We have developed excellent relationships in particular with the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail*,



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and hope to continue to build our links with broadcast outlets and others in the new year.

We look forward to building our communication scope with the hiring of a second member of the press team who will begin in the New Year.

### **Social media**

Our presence on social media has continued to grow, with another 2,000 Facebook likes (taking us to 42,200). Our most popular posts were around the June General Election. Our blog predicting that Donald Trump might win despite gaining fewer votes than Hillary Clinton, due to First Past the Post, reached 130,000 people on Facebook.

Our Twitter audience has grown to 36,500 in the last year. Topics that gave our tweets the best responses were around voter ID trials, boundary reforms, the Westminster Hall PR petition and debate, and the June general election. Our tweet on the number of votes per MP in 2017 reached 150,000 people and was retweeted 1000 times.



Darren Hughes,  
Chief Executive

The Society's team is based in our offices in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff.

This year we welcomed a new Chief Executive and new staff team to Wales. Darren Hughes was appointed Chief Executive in summer 2017, and Jess Blair and Matthew Mathias join us as Director and Campaigns and Projects Officer in Wales. Alice Kinghorn-Gray also joined our team in Scotland as Campaigns Organiser mid-way through the year

Many thanks to Will Brett, Head of Campaigns and Communications, Katie Gallogly-Swan, Campaigns Organiser in ERS Scotland and Eddie Malloy, Democratic Innovations Officer, who left us during the year. Huge thanks also to Owain ap Gareth, who also left us earlier in the year after nearly 10 years at the Society.

Katie Ghose left the Society in June after nearly seven years as Chief Executive of ERS. She left the Society in fine shape after leading it through a period of huge change which saw enormous improvements in our effectiveness and governance. The Society is immensely grateful to Katie for the great contribution she made to the Society and wishes her well in her new role as Chief Executive of Women's Aid.

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## Current staff

### **Chief Executive**

Darren Hughes

### **Campaigns, Research and Policy**

Willie Sullivan,

*Senior Director*

*(Scotland, Campaigns)*

Jess Garland,

*Director of Research and Policy*

Josiah Mortimer,

*Head of Communications*

Chris Terry,

*Researcher Officer*

Doug Cowan,

*Digital Communications Officer*

Charley Jarrett,

*Public Affairs*

*and Policy Officer*

### **Operations**

Kate West,

*Chief Operating Officer*

Stuart Thomas,

*Operations Officer*

Davina Johnson,

*Finance Officer (part time)*

### **ERS Scotland**

Phil Connor,

*Campaigns Officer*

*(part-time)*

Alice Kinghorn-Gray,

*Campaigns Organiser*

*(part time)*

Jonathon Shafi,

*Campaigns Organiser*

*(part time)*

### **ERS Cymru**

Jess Blair,

*Director*

Matthew Mathias,

*Campaigns and*

*Projects Officer*

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

## 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. Elections took place this year and a newly elected Council will take office at the close of this year's AGM on 2 December.

Between 3 December 2016 and 2 December 2017, the following members served on the Society's Council:

- Jon Walsh
- Justina Cruikshank, Vice Chair (Management)
- Sara Hyde, Deputy Chair (Campaigns and Research)
- Clare Coatman, (Treasurer)
- Crispin Allard
- Stephen Curran
- Amy Dodd
- Chris Finlayson
- Lisa French
- Wera Hobhouse
- Paul Pettinger
- Ken Ritchie
- Keith Sharp
- Rob Telford
- Owen Winter

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

## The Advisory Committee

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

The Society's Advisory Committee consists of the following people:

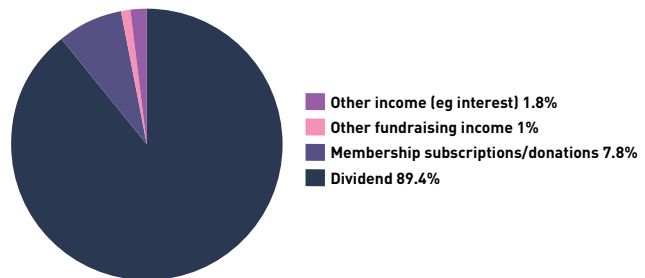
- Billy Hayes, former General Secretary, Communications Workers Union
- Deborah Mattinson, founder of BritainThinks
- Jonathan Porritt CBE, environmentalist and writer
- Alan Renwick, political scientist
- Esther Roberton, Scottish political affairs specialist

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, in print and broadcast media, and in our fundraising work.

## Finance

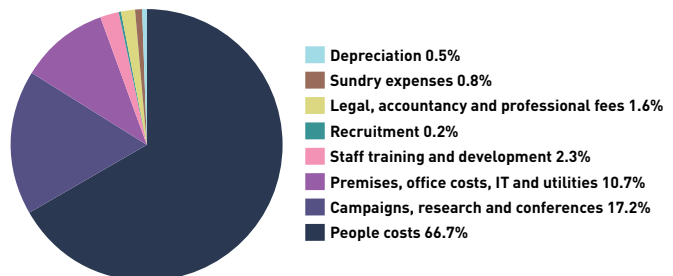
### Income (2016)

£1.29m



### Expenditure (2016)

£1.14m



We saw another rise in membership income and donations from members and supporters in 2017, attracting just over £100,000 in total. We are extremely grateful for the continued support from our members which is invaluable to our work.

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We also received a small amount of project funding from the Economic & Social Research Council to support our constitutional convention work.

We have provided a more detailed breakdown of our expenditure above in response to requests from members at the previous AGM. People costs remain our most significant outlay, with the majority of our campaigns and research work being generated in-house.

### **Our new home**

On 20 July 2016 we used the proceeds from the sale of our building in Southwark, London to purchase a new building in Borough, near London Bridge. The new property comprises an office building arranged over ground, mezzanine and first floors and is in a prime location, just off the highly desirable Bermondsey Street in SE1.

Over the past year we have been working with property consultants, designers, architects and planning consultants at Southwark Council to develop plans to extend and completely refurbish the building, adding two floors to the existing structure. This is a crucial part of our strategy to diversify our future income sources. We intend to occupy a small part of the new building and to sublet the remainder, and are working towards a completion date of mid-2019.

In the meantime, we will be moving to a slightly larger – but more cost effective – serviced offices in London Bridge in the new year while we wait for our new premises to be completed.



Electoral Reform Society  
2-6 Boundary Row  
London  
SE1 8HP

Email: [ers@electoral-reform.org.uk](mailto:ers@electoral-reform.org.uk)  
Phone: 0203 714 4070  
Facebook: [electoralreformsociety](https://www.facebook.com/electoralreformsociety)  
Twitter: [@electoralreform](https://twitter.com/electoralreform)

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