

Annual Report 2019

A group of diverse people is gathered at what appears to be a community event or meeting. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. In the background, there are posters and signs, some of which contain the words 'democratic' and 'evolution'. The overall atmosphere is one of active participation and community engagement.

UNLOCK
DEMOCRACY

Foreword

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Unlock Democracy is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, number 02440899.

Change of address

Our office address is now:
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Another year and the UK remains caught in the maelstrom that is Brexit. The storm that 2016's referendum caused in our political culture shows no sign of abating any time soon – but there is a light on the horizon, as the last year has seen a growing desire for change.

Our polling found that nearly two thirds of the British public (66%) believe that “the old way of doing politics no longer works” and “radical change” is needed.

At Unlock Democracy, this has been a year of consolidation and development. We have been busy building our campaign for

a new constitution that serves and protects us. We have set out a bold vision – not just of the radical change we want to see – but how we will get there.

The next year will see us expanding our staff team and building up our campaigning capacity. We have laid the foundations for a mass movement across the length and breadth of the UK by experimenting with new events and ways of engaging people.

Unlock Democracy is in a strong position to make change – do join us!

Alexandra Runswick, Director



Laying the foundations

In 2018, we began to shape our campaign for a new constitution for the UK.

We've been carefully weighing up Unlock Democracy's past campaign wins, considering the changing political context, and studying successful campaigns from around the world to design an ambitious but hard-headed strategy to win a new constitution in years, not decades.

We started by finding out whether people in the UK were already on our wavelength.

Working with polling experts at YouGov, we found clear evidence

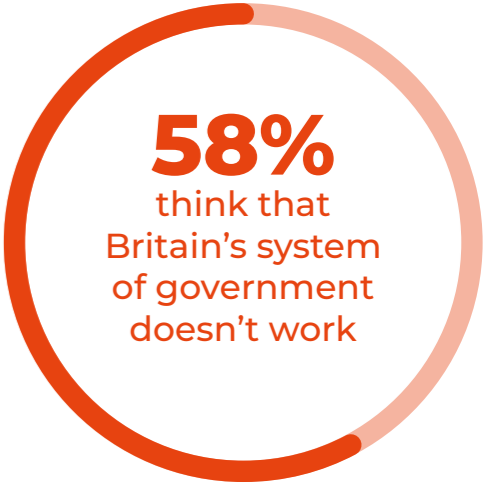
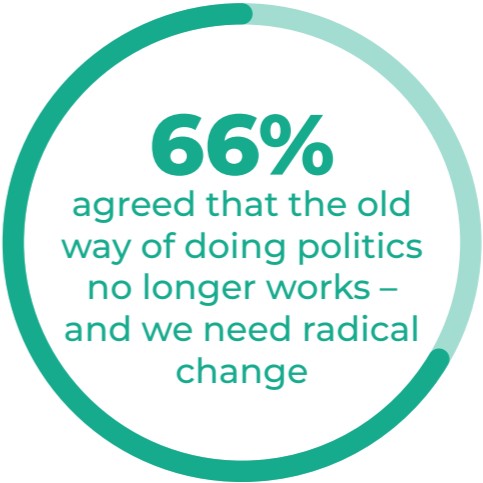
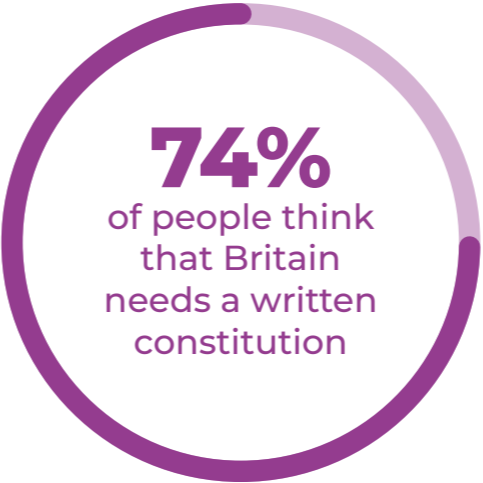
that the British public recognise the need for fundamental political change.

The polling showed us that there is a huge gap between what the people of the UK want from their democracy and what the people with power and control over our political institutions are choosing to do with it. The public might be divided on some issues, but when it comes to how we are governed people on the whole want a deeper democracy, not one that is hollowed out.

This has meant refocusing Unlock Democracy, putting our long-standing demand for a written constitution front and

centre, and making it clear that we can't just write down our current failing system – we need to rewrite the rules of politics, and make a new constitution that works for everybody.

This is an approach that brings together everything we've campaigned on in the past. This kind of systemic change is the best way to win on all of the issues we care about – from winning a fairer voting system and a reformed second chamber of Parliament, to getting dark money out of politics, and beyond, fundamentally rebalancing the political system so that the public is in the driving seat.



Source: YouGov / Unlock Democracy
Percentages exclude don't knows
Full results: <https://bit.ly/2N2hkoe>

Thinking strategically



Achieving a new constitution isn't going to be easy – and we know that, in order to take advantage of this momentous political moment, we need a clear plan and an engaging message.

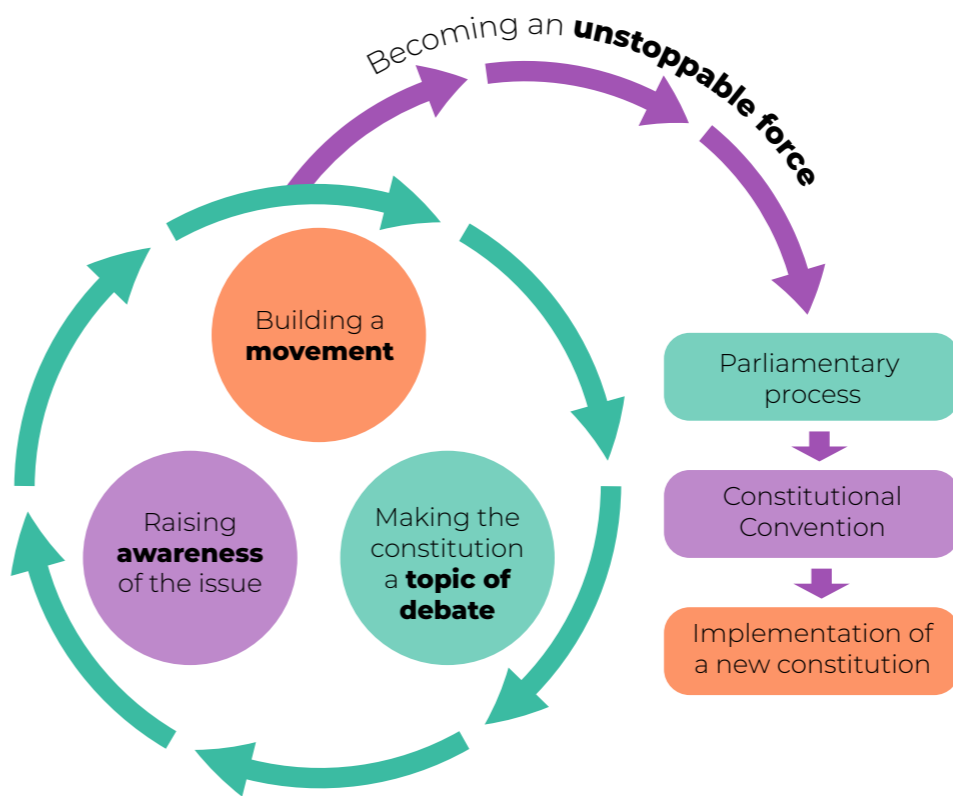
By November 2018, we had a pretty clear idea of the shape of our new constitution campaign. Over the winter, we took that idea and turned it into a strategic plan.

The end goal is clear – but major changes like a radical new constitution don't happen overnight. We started by outlining the procedural path to a new constitution –

a parliamentary process to set the wheels in motion, a constitutional convention to decide the contents, and finally implementation.

To get there, we need to reach a position where the politicians and those with power can't ignore our demands. We can do that by building a movement of people up and down the country, demanding a politics that works for everybody.

We identified three steps we can take, each of which reinforces the others and feeds into making the campaign an **unstoppable force** in British politics.



- The steps are:
- Raising **awareness** of the issue, and how the current constitution stops us building a society that works for everyone.
 - Making the constitution a **topic of debate** – something that everybody feels entitled to a say in.
 - Building a **movement** to stand up against entrenched power.

We've started using these three steps to keep our work focused on that end goal, and make sure our projects help us achieve our ultimate objective – a democracy that works for everyone.

Building a movement



Unlock Democracy isn't alone in the fight for better democracy. Throughout the year, we have worked alongside other organisations which share our values.

Some of the events that we've taken part in and spoken at this year include:

- A fringe event with Social Liberal Forum on the **electoral system** at Lib Dem conference.
- **What Brexit tells us about our crumbling constitution** at Public Law Project's annual conference.
- Our Merseyside & West Cheshire local group's event in Liverpool on **electoral reform, democracy, and fairness.**

- The Woking Debates on **Is our democracy breaking down?**
- TASC's conference on **Thinking Beyond the Ballot Box.**
- Molly Scott Cato MEP's event series **People and Power: Populism, Fascism and how to Defend Democracy** in Swindon and Gloucester.
- The **Rally for a Fair Vote on the Referendum** in Parliament Square.
- Republic's AGM on **the case for a written constitution**
- Extinction Rebellion's occupation of Parliament Square.
- King's College London's event **The Brexit Shock: A Constitutional Perspective** with Professor Andrew Blick.

Making the constitution a topic of debate

Last year we announced that a new constitution for the UK had to be at the heart of serious democratic change. Since then we've been building a bold new campaign, and shining a light on the dark money interests distorting our democracy.

In October 2018, campaigning journalists at openDemocracy discovered that the Metropolitan Police hadn't investigated Vote Leave's lawbreaking during the 2016 referendum. In response, we launched a petition to the Met, and wrote to the Commissioner and various London politicians who could pile on the pressure. We worked with 12 MPs

and MEPs to boost our petition, securing over 10,000 signatures.

We launched our campaign for a new constitution at our AGM. Thousands of supporters signed up to support the campaign and wrote to their MPs calling for a citizens' assembly to solve the Brexit impasse.



When Boris Johnson became Prime Minister, we asked supporters to vote on whether we should demand a general election. After more than 80% voted 'yes', we launched a petition, collecting 3,500 signatures so far. The new government has challenged the most basic features of our constitution, such as whether a vote of confidence actually has any effect.

We recently met with the Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell to discuss our campaign and plan an exciting series of events aimed at influencing key figures in the labour movement.

Raising awareness of the issue

Unlock Democracy continues to push our campaigns into the spotlight by using new media platforms as well as traditional media channels.

Part of living in a democratic society means embracing a plurality of viewpoints about what that democracy should look like. By focusing our communications on video creation and podcast production, Unlock Democracy aims to give a platform to our supporters, activists, and organisations, so that we can create a conversation about how our political system could be improved, and our democracy deepened.

Highlights of the videos we've produced include:



- Interviews with young activists taking part in the Fridays For Our Future strikes, as part of the Youth Strike for Climate Change – how is our broken democracy stifling action on the climate crisis?



- Our thoughts on new Prime Minister Boris Johnson – what does Johnson's ascent to power say about the state of our democracy?



- Extinction Rebellion's occupation of Waterloo Bridge – what does direct action have to do with democracy?



Iteration and experimentation are at the heart of how we work. We ran a new Instagram project, a Different Kind of Politics, in March and April 2019, with the aim of reaching out to new audiences.

This year, our work has been featured in: the *Financial Times*; the *Mirror*; the *Guardian*; BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme; Channel 4 News; BBC Radio London; BBC Radio Scotland; openDemocracy; Vice; The Real Agenda podcast; and the *Washington Post*.

*Sam & Sarah
filming for a video
at the Extinction
Rebellion protests in
Parliament Square*



Building a new democratic settlement

A new look

The autumn of 2019 will see the publication of Unlock Democracy's new pamphlet, *Building a New Democratic Settlement*.

This will underpin our call to the people of the UK to come together to replace the current political system with a new democratic settlement that permanently rebalances power in the UK.

The need for this is clear – there is a crisis of confidence in the UK's current political settlement. Most people believe that the political system is rigged to advantage the interests of the rich and powerful*, and that

their interests aren't being represented**. People are stuck in a bind, caught in a system that isn't working in their interests, but which they don't have the power to influence or change.

This crisis has been a long time in the making. But discontent and disengagement are just symptoms of democratic decay. The cause is the UK's current political settlement, which concentrates too much power in the hands of too few people.

The people of the UK might be divided on some issues, but we are united in wanting to live in a democratic society where

power lies with people and communities, not distant and unaccountable institutions.

That's why we are campaigning for a new, fair, and inclusive democratic settlement, where decisions are made through participation and deliberation. Deciding what this looks like should be done democratically, through a constitutional convention that brings us all together to write a new constitution that sets limits on political power, and defines what purpose that power will serve.

We can only build a new democratic settlement together – will you join us?



In November 2018, we revised our visual identity.

Being able to communicate clearly is central to getting people on board with our movement.

That's why we redeveloped our website and updated our house style, with the goal of telling a clear story about who we are, while keeping it focused, consistent, and accessible.

We also commissioned this series of images to illustrate different aspects of our campaign, and we've used them to communicate our roadmap to a new constitution.



* 63% believe that the system is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful (Audit of Political Engagement 2019)

** 68% of people feel that none of the main political parties speak for them (Hope Not Hate, 2019)

Events

Throughout the year, we've worked on a range of events around the UK. Whether we're talking to activists, academics, or students, our events are designed to get people engaged and involved in the democratic processes that shape our lives.

▼ Brexit, the Constitution, and Policy-making in the UK

We were funded by the Legal Education Foundation to run a conference in September 2018 exploring the impact of Brexit on the constitution and policy-making. Parliamentarians, academics and civil society experts from across the UK gathered for a programme that addressed some of the most challenging legal and policy questions Brexit presents.



The Roots of our Democratic Crisis

This panel event in Parliament was an event held to celebrate the contributions of Stuart Weir, Charter 88 Co-Founder and former Unlock Democracy Council member, to the UK's democratic reform movement.



◀ Rebooting Politics at Sheffield Festival of Debate

In April 2019 we joined the 'Our Democracy' Hub Day at Sheffield Festival of Debate with our workshop exploring how to shake up stale ideas, get big ideas heard, and push for radical change – with a focus on action.

▼ University of Derby students visit Unlock Democracy

Politics students from the University of Derby joined us for our Rebooting Politics workshop in June 2019.



The Brexit Civil Society Alliance

The Brexit Civil Society Alliance is a grant funded project which Unlock Democracy has hosted since 2017. Set up to coordinate civil society's response to Brexit, their focus is to bring the voice of civil society from across the entire UK to Parliament.



New Frontiers conference, April 2019

This year the Alliance travelled across the UK to hear civil society's concerns on Brexit. The Alliance held round tables for local organisations in Penrith, Bradford, York, Birmingham, and Sheffield, and a devolved-nations round table in London for organisations in Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.

In June 2019, the Alliance organised a reception in Parliament bringing speakers from devolved nations together with parliamentarians. As well as representatives from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, speakers included Malene Bratlie, Dominic Grieve MP, and Paul Blomfield MP.

Working with NPC and Lloyds Bank Foundation, the Alliance has organised two free all-day conferences in London and Manchester to discuss what is next for the sector as the Brexit process continues.

Other work has included publishing a weekly e:bulletin to inform and educate people in the sector, and updating the Campaign Toolkit to reflect key legislative changes.

Alliance staff Malene Bratlie and Jacob Millen-Bamford are currently preparing to coordinate a sector response on the impact of a no-deal Brexit on civil society.

Radical Solutions to Fix Broken Britain

What kind of country do you want to see after Brexit? That's the question we asked ten inspiring speakers last autumn.

We ran events at the Labour and Conservative conferences, bringing a panel of speakers together to discuss their big ideas to change the world.

Simon Alcock, Cllr Mete Coban, and Lisa Nandy MP at our Labour fringe event



Each speaker pitched their radical idea for Britain, ranging from **George Freeman MP** talking about building new satellite towns, **Adam Ramsay** calling for the dismantling of the British state, or **Cat Hobbs** calling for public ownership of public services.

The next step was an exciting new approach for Unlock Democracy: launching a podcast. Each week, host Tessa van Rens interviewed one of our of our speakers, exploring their radical ideas in more detail.

With over 2500 plays, the podcast helped bring our message to a new audience.



We'd like to give our thanks to everybody who contributed to the events and to the podcast, including Lisa Nandy MP, John Strafford, ClientEarth, My Life My Say, the Fawcett Society and Sustain.

Our members...

Unlock Democracy could not exist without our members. Our 1400 members come from all over the UK and from many different backgrounds, but are united by their desire to see our political system changed for the better.

As an organisation, we don't just champion democracy – we try to put it into practice in the way we operate day-to-day. That's why our members own Unlock Democracy, elect our Council, and set our priorities through our Annual General Meeting.

Our 2018 AGM took place as part of our annual Democracy Day in London in November. Members were joined by Anthony Barnett, Deborah Chay, and Corey Staughton for a panel reflecting on the

thirtieth anniversary of Charter 88, and voted to support Unlock Democracy working to establish a constituent assembly for the creation of a new constitution.

We've also hosted members' meetups around the country, including Liverpool (September 2018), Birmingham (October 2018) and London (April 2018).

We love to see meetups like these popping up, so if you'd like to organise one in your area then please get in touch.

Members deep in discussion at Democracy Day 2018



...and our Council

Council Members

as of August 2019

Co-chairs

Jack Maizels
Danny Zinkus Sutton

Andrew Blick
Stephen Carter
Debbie Chay
Rachel Collinson
Ian Driver
John Ferguson
John Franglen *
Andrew Manning
Jessica Metheringham
Vicky Seddon
Phil Starr
Mike Trace *

** appointed to vacancy*

One of the most significant ways that members shape our organisation is by electing our Council. The Council is comprised of ordinary members elected for a two-year term and is responsible for the overall strategy of the organisation.

The current Council was elected in 2018. As some members have since stepped down, additional members have been appointed from the candidates who stood for election in 2018.

This year, the Council has considered our new strategic direction and contributed to the development of our campaigns.

Alexandra, Jack, and Danny at the AGM

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to **Sepi Golzari-Munro, Victor Anderson, and Malcolm MacIntyre-Read** for their service in 2018-19.

Our next Council elections will be in spring 2020 and we're looking for members with the passion and ideas to lead Unlock Democracy. If you think you might be interested in standing for election, or if you have any questions about the elections, contact membership@unlockdemocracy.org.uk



Our staff team

From running our campaigns to keeping our finances on track, most of the day-to-day work of running Unlock Democracy is done by our London-based staff team.

This year has been a busy one in the office. **Tessa van Rens** joined us in September 2018 and produced our *Radical Solutions* podcast. Tessa was a great member of the team and we were sorry to see her leave in April.

A big part of our new strategy has been recognising the need to build a strong staff team to support and strengthen our movement.

That's why we've expanded to include four new members of staff this summer, spread across our Campaigns, Membership, and Admin functions. We're delighted to welcome **Rob Abrams, Matthew Hull, Trudie Kee, and Ana Laura Guzmán Ortiz** to the team.

Another big change this year has been moving offices. We left King Street after several years and moved to new offices at 33 Corsham Street.



Director: Alexandra Runswick
Finance Manager: Arti Vyas
Office Manager: Simon Howard
Administrative Assistant: Trudie Kee

Campaigns

Senior Policy & Communications Officer: Sarah Clarke
Campaigns & Digital Officer: Sam Coates
Activism & Outreach Coordinator: Rob Abrams
Digital Communications Coordinator: Ana Laura Guzmán Ortiz

Membership

Membership & Database Officer: Tim Rouse
Membership & Fundraising Assistant: Matthew Hull

Brexit Civil Society Alliance

Coordinator : Malene Bratlie
Project Officer: Jacob Millen-Bamford

Finances

The work that we do at Unlock Democracy wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our members and supporters.

From April 2018 to March 2019, you contributed over £143,000 to our work, including around £32,000 in membership fees. A further £28,000 was received as a legacy. We are enormously grateful to those who choose to remember us in their will.

Other income this year came from our subsidiary property company, Rodell Properties, and grant income, mainly to support the Brexit Civil Society Alliance project.

We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their support:

- Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust
- Barrow Cadbury Trust
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- JMG Foundation
- Legal Education Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

Looking to the future, our ambitious strategy, which includes the expansion of our staff team and campaigning work, has meant that we will be making use of our reserves in the 2019-20 financial year.

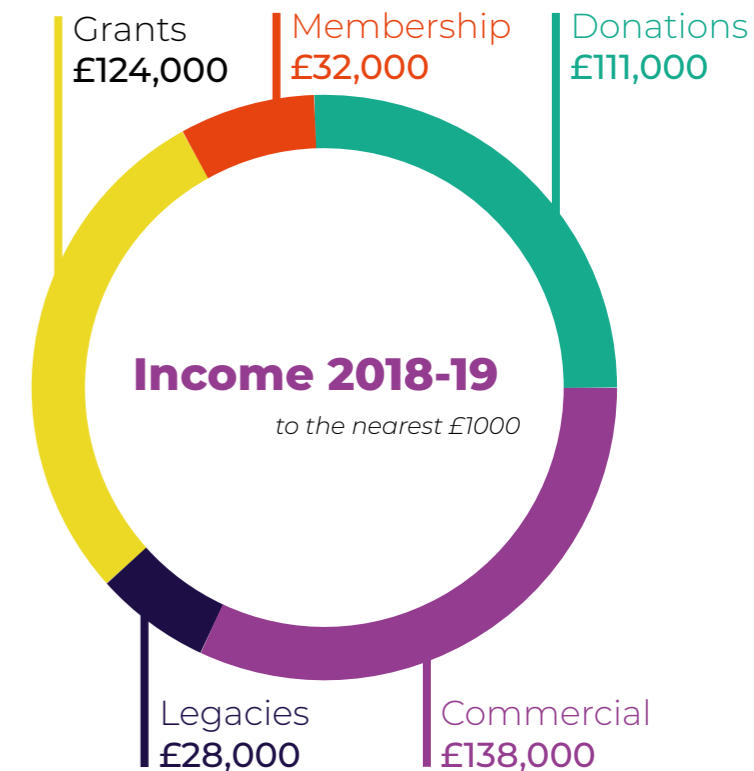
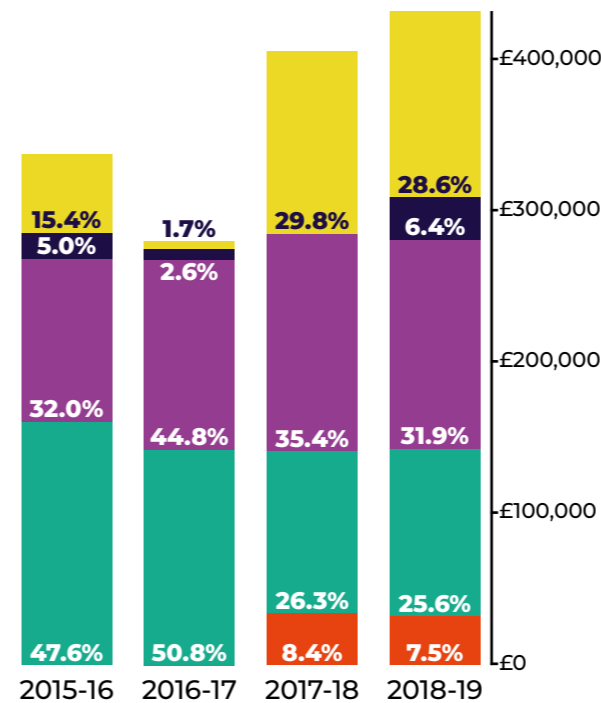
We are confident that this investment is both necessary to take advantage of the current political moment, and sustainable in the long term through increasing our fundraising and grant income.

Our campaign plan is ready to be turned into reality, and our ability to change the UK's politics for the better is only limited by the support you give us.

So to each and everyone who has supported our work this year, financially or otherwise, from everyone at Unlock Democracy, we say:

Thank you.

Income 2015-2019



The full audited accounts will be available in November 2019 in an independent report by our auditors, Berley Chartered Accountants.

Britain's political system remains in a seemingly endless crisis. The only possible answer is radical change – a democratic revolution to sweep away our broken politics.

Unlock Democracy has a plan to deliver that change. Our Annual Report 2018-19 explains what we've been doing to build a movement for democracy and a new constitution for the UK.



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