

# UNLOCK

## DEMOCRACY



### ANNUAL REPORT

# 2018

# From the Director

ALEXANDRA RUNSWICK  
DIRECTOR OF UNLOCK DEMOCRACY

## UNLOCK DEMOCRACY

is the UK campaign for  
**democratic reform**

Unlock Democracy believes politics must work for everyone because currently the rules of democracy aren't fair.

We believe:

- The government is too powerful because we don't have a written constitution that sets out what they can and can't do.
- Big money gives the powerful an inside track to decision making.
- An outdated voting system means politicians don't represent us.
- Politicians are unwilling to make desperately needed democratic reforms.

It is those who don't 'do' politics who end up bearing the brunt of political decision-making, and this can – and must – change.

**Together we will ensure that democracy works for everyone.**



Unlock Democracy, Fifth Floor,  
9 King Street, London, EC2V 8EA  
020 7278 4443



facebook.com/  
UnlockDemocracy



info@unlockdemocracy.org.uk  
www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk



@UnlockDemocracy

Unlock Democracy is a not for profit company limited by guarantee.  
Registered in England and Wales No.02440899

**When we look closely at the democratic process in the UK – at who makes the decisions, who is able to influence those decisions and, of course, who is not – then it is clear that our democracy is deeply flawed and breaking down.**

Over the last year our focus has been stopping Brexit being used as an establishment power grab. Together with our partners in the Repeal Bill Alliance we have fought to protect the devolution settlements and to stop ministers removing our rights or changing environmental standards with the flick of a pen. We have also challenged the role that big money plays in our politics, working with investigative journalists to shed light on dodgy donors.

But fighting to improve specific laws will never be enough. Brexit has pushed our constitution to breaking point. As individuals, we struggle not just to stop the government doing bad things, but also to protect the things that we value, from our rights to the NHS.

We need to fundamentally change how we do democracy and build a politics that works for everyone. This is why we are launching our campaign for a new constitution – new rules for our politics, written by the people not the establishment.



# Brexit & Democracy

When the government published the EU Withdrawal Bill last summer, we called it out as a dangerous power grab, which hands power to ministers to rewrite our laws behind closed doors.

Stopping that power grab has been our major campaign for the past year. We followed the bill as it made its way through Parliament, and we worked hard to improve it at every stage, helping our supporters to have their voices heard on the issues that matter, and putting our pro-democracy perspective forward in Parliament. We have:

- Delivered an open letter from over 9000 supporters to the Lords asking them to stand up to the government power grab.
- Held actions outside Parliament, creating videos to inspire people to run their own events and actions.
- Helped members write to their MPs on a range of issues, including defending the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights.



Sign the petition

It's the Great British Power Grab!



- Mobilised supporters in Scotland & Wales to phone the relevant Secretary of State about the Westminster power grab.
- Produced videos to help people take the next step, calling or visiting their MPs to push the point home.
- Highlighted the dangers of a no-deal Brexit for Northern Ireland, working with local campaigners to organise a petition to save the Good Friday Agreement.

## PARLIAMENT AND THE EU WITHDRAWAL ACT

This year, the European Union Withdrawal Bill – now an Act – has been the only game in town. With little room for anything but Brexit on the government's legislative agenda, we worked with parliamentarians and our partners in civil society to ensure the bill received proper scrutiny.

Unlock Democracy had foreseen many challenges that arose through the bill's passage – such as the controversially broad and sweeping delegated legislation – in our 2017 report, *'A Democratic Brexit: avoiding constitutional crisis in Brexit Britain'*.

Nevertheless, this was a challenging environment in which to influence political debate. The Act is a hugely significant piece of constitutional legislation where MPs and peers were having to deal with complex and technical issues.

This wasn't helped by the government's approach, which, particularly towards the end of the bill's progress through Parliament, was characterised by limiting debate and rushing through the final stages.

Team members spoke at events around the UK as part of the Repeal Bill Alliance, including Belfast, Newcastle, Cardiff and London.

We collaborated with civil society organisations as part of the Repeal Bill Alliance's main working group.

We produced digital briefings and ran briefing events in Parliament to keep parliamentarians and journalists informed of key developments.

# Working together: the Repeal Bill Alliance

**In the summer of 2017, Unlock Democracy was funded by a group of grant-making trusts and foundations to coordinate the civil society response to the EU Withdrawal Bill – and we've succeeded in bringing together over 80 organisations from around the UK.**

Since then, the Repeal Bill Alliance has been working collectively to improve the EU Withdrawal Act to ensure that fundamental rights, standards, environmental protections and devolution are protected as we make our exit from the European Union.

While there are still massive problems with the EU Withdrawal Act, it is now in a better state than in its original drafting – and that is thanks to the strong, collective voice of organisations across sectors and our work with parliamentarians from across political parties.

There is now more parliamentary scrutiny of ministerial powers, a legal requirement to ensure there is no hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, environmental principles are better protected and so are general principles of EU law – principles that UK citizens have relied on to enforce their rights that include vital protections such as human rights and equality before the law.

*Below: Northern Irish civil society groups attend a Repeal Bill Alliance-hosted event in Parliament*

As we have embarked on one of the most complex and constitutionally important pieces of legislation we've seen for decades, the most important part of the Alliance's work is to make sure that civil society has a voice and representation.

That is one of the reasons why the Repeal Bill Alliance has also spent much of the past year working closely with civil society across the UK. We have been to Cardiff, Edinburgh, Cornwall, Rhyl, Newcastle and Belfast, speaking to civil society in the nations and regions about their thoughts and concerns about Brexit's impact on their organisation.

Unlock Democracy have now secured funding for the next two years, to continue to coordinate the Alliance. As the Brexit Civil Society Alliance it will be extending its focus, together with civil society to advocate for maintenance of fundamental rights and standards, open and accountable lawmaking and respect for hard-won devolution settlements as the UK makes its exit from the European Union.



*The Repeal Bill Alliance team at a round-table event in Cardiff*



# The road to a new constitution

At the heart of Unlock Democracy's work is the demand, expressed in the original Charter 88, for political, civil and human rights in the United Kingdom – and, crucially, to secure those rights in a new constitution, protected from the whims of those in power.

All of Unlock Democracy's work ultimately serves that goal of advancing our rights, whether it's our campaigning for a better electoral system, holding the government to account during the Brexit process, or scrutinising the shady work of big business lobbyists and the politicians who court them.

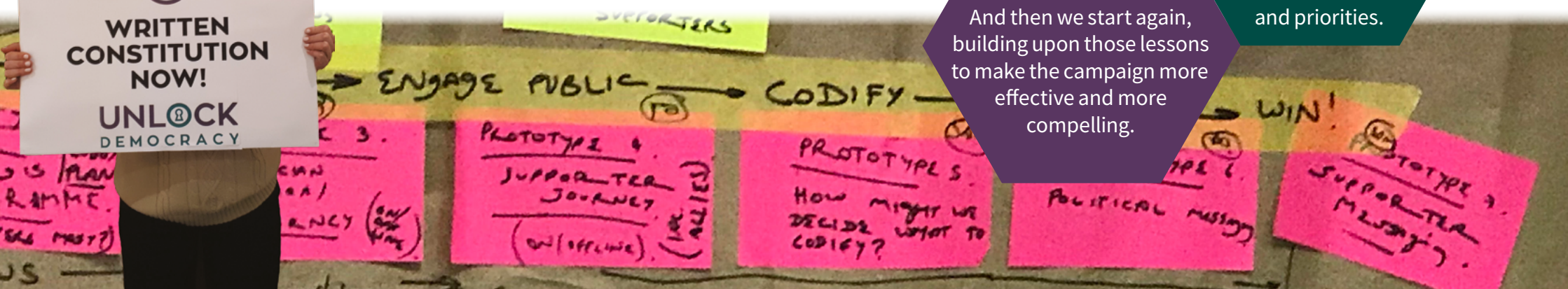
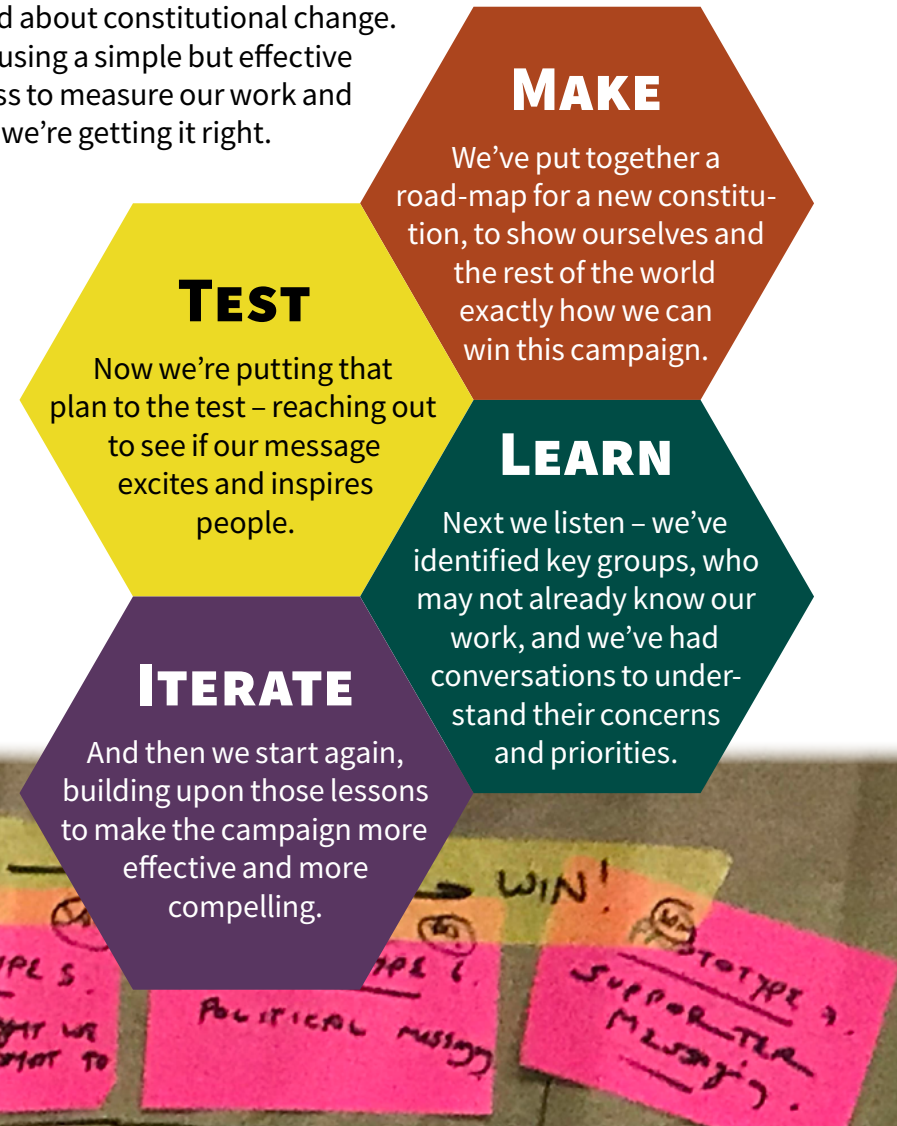
But this year we've taken the first steps to return the call for a written constitution to the heart of our work. We've already been making the case that in the aftermath of Brexit, and the constitutional crisis engulfing the UK, now is the time to reboot the political system.

The debacle of MPs voting away their powers and handing the government extraordinary freedom during the passage of the EU Withdrawal Act showed us how our archaic and unwritten constitution is crumbling under the pressure of Brexit.

**So we're launching a new campaign – for a new constitution for the UK.**

We've been busily planning the campaign and this autumn, we'll be stepping up our campaigning with a push to bring in new supporters, and a series of local events to kick off grassroots action.

This is an ambitious campaign that will need to get new campaigners excited about constitutional change. We're using a simple but effective process to measure our work and check we're getting it right.



# Follow the Money

There's no doubt that a thick wodge of cash can get you a long way with some politicians, and our Follow the Money campaign is our ongoing effort to shine a light on big money in politics. The scandals have continued unabated this year, from evidence of Vote Leave's systematic breaches of referendum spending rules to think tanks selling insider access to ministers.

## SHEDDING LIGHT ON DODGY DONATIONS

It takes significant amounts of work digging through data sources to reveal party donors who are trying to hide from scrutiny of their donations. We have been working with Scottish investigative news site The Ferret on their investigation into the Scottish Unionist Association Trust, who donated £319,000 to the Scottish Conservatives but had no fixed address and didn't publish the names of the donors. Following the publication of the story the Electoral Commission is investigating the donation.

Following the trail of these donations led to us writing to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, calling for an investigation into two MPs whose donations from the Scottish Unionist Association Trust weren't reported properly.

## REFERENDUM SPENDING RULES BROKEN

It's not just dodgy donors who use money to influence our politics, political parties and campaigners are now regularly breaking election spending laws and seeing this as a cost of doing business.

The Electoral Commission has concluded that Vote Leave broke referendum spending laws, and we are still waiting for the outcome of a trial into allegations of overspending in the 2015 general election. Our democracy should not be for sale.

Alex spoke at the Fair Vote Rally when the allegations Vote Leave allegations first came to light demanding urgent reform of our broken electoral laws. We also ran a petition to crack down on big money in politics and give the Electoral Commission real power to act when rules are broken. As always, these issues doesn't stand alone and we've used this as an opportunity to make the case for a new constitution that addresses the whole problem, not just the symptoms.

## THINK TANKS WORKING AS LOBBYISTS

The Institute for Economic Affairs think tank was recently filmed offering donors access to government ministers to 'discuss their ideas'. Our director, Alex Runswick appeared on the BBC's flagship Today programme in July to call for think tanks to reveal who funds them. It's well known that some think tanks work in exactly the same way as corporate lobbyists, but they have the advantage of appearing to be an independent third party. This is why we need a comprehensive lobbying register – one that would include us as well as the IEA.

## THE LOBBYISTS INFLUENCING BREXIT

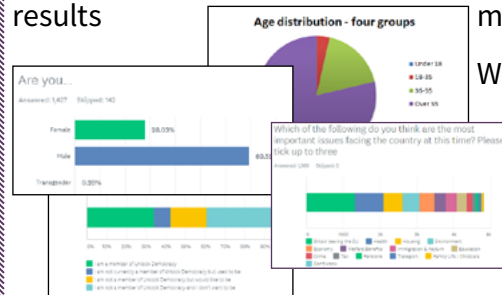
At a time of radical change, such as Brexit, it is more important than ever that we are able to understand who is seeking to influence our politics. We've teamed up with Spinwatch to produce a joint pamphlet in which writer and campaigner Tamasin Cave shines a light on the shady groups of lobbyists who are setting the course of the UK government at a critical time for UK democracy.



# Staying connected with our grassroots

With thousands of supporters signed up to receive our emails, we conducted the first large-scale survey of supporters since 2014 to find out more about the politics, priorities, and backgrounds of our grassroots. The results

showed us that our supporters are active campaigners, care passionately about Brexit, electoral reform, and transparency in politics, and are likely to be members of political parties – and are also disproportionately male, white, and over 65.



We followed this up with phone conversations with nearly 50 supporters to explore their views on the current state of politics and how we are – and should be – responding.

Members of our local group in Birmingham were at the Fair Votes Festival in Birmingham this summer. Tom Pratt spoke about the importance of supporting the movement for voting reform:

“I was privileged to speak at the Fair Votes Festival on behalf of Unlock Democracy Birmingham. It was really important for the local group to show that we are still active, and continuing to think about the big challenges to our democracy, not just nationally, but locally as well. I met several keen and like-minded people who I hope will join me in helping to reform the group. It was also a great experience to speak alongside so many different voices from across the political spectrum, and beyond.”



Including young people in our campaigns is always a priority for us. We’ve recently held an event at our London offices where we invited students to come and tell us their views on the political system. But it’s not all about London – we’ve also visited Halesowen College in the West Midlands and a grammar school in Hertfordshire.

As the EU Withdrawal Bill entered Parliament, we encouraged members and supporters across the country to get in touch with and meet their local MPs and discuss the implications of the Bill for our democracy.

Unlock Democracy member Lisa French went to visit her MP to make him aware of her concerns. After the visit, Lisa said “He listened to my concerns, and he said he’d go away and think about the amendments. I’m not sure which way he’s going to vote, but I do think it was really important I went to speak to him, so he knows this is something his constituents care about.”



# Making the case for change

In autumn and winter 2017, we tried out a new approach to staying in touch with our members and supporters.

Our series of live videos on Facebook gave an opportunity for followers to stay updated on the key topics of the day, with the chance to ask questions and pick the brains of our expert staff. In October, Alex sat down with former MP and veteran



democracy campaigner Graham Allan to discuss what a written constitution would mean for society. Other Facebook live videos included Alex and Sarah explaining the implications of the EU Withdrawal Act.

This was a particularly good way of us updating supporters about key developments with the bill, and making sure they had opportunities to ask questions, as it was a very fast paced campaign.

We've also produced videos of our campaign actions outside Westminster, and a celebration of the Representation of the People Act 1918, the first to extend the franchise to women.



Who reads the paper these days? Over 23 million people in the UK read a paper at least once a week – and that's before you even start to count online news sources. We've rounded up the headlines from some of the news stories that we've contributed to this year.

*Herald Scotland,*  
June 2018

**EXCLUSIVE** 3rd June  
**Lobbying register reveals which multi-national giants have been meeting MSPs**  
Exclusive by Paul Hutcheon

**Democracy undermined on all sides as Brexit starts to take shape**

**Alexandra Runswick** of Unlock Democracy on the abuse of statutory instruments; **Paul Lally** on the politically incoherent

*The Guardian,* December 2017

*Fabian Review,* April 2018

**CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS**

We live in radical times and that calls for radical reform, writes Alexandra Runswick.

**Theresa May set to appoint new peers in bid to avoid further Brexit defeats**

Written by: John Johnston Posted On: 18th May 2018

*PoliticsHome,* May 2018

**A Think Tank Is Charging Thousands To Organise "Behind Closed Doors" Meetings Between Ministers And Private Companies**

Reform has dismissed suggestions that its events amount to cash for access, but opposition MPs and campaigners are demanding more transparency.

Posted on October 6, 2017, at 10:34 a.m.

*Buzzfeed,* October 2017

**Scotland Office used taxpayer funded Facebook ads to 'manipulate voters'**

*The Ferret,* March 2018

**Tory and DUP MPs criticised for 'wining and dining' tobacco firms**

*The Guardian,* December 2017

**House of Lords in fresh expenses row after 17 peers claim £400k despite minimal work**

*MARTIN COULTER* Tuesday 24 October 2017 08:53 | *The Evening Standard,* October 2017

**Electoral Commission probes £319,000 Tory 'dark money' trust**

*The Ferret,* June 2018



# Our Council

Democracy isn't just an abstract concept for Unlock Democracy – it's the lifeblood of our organisation. We're owned and run by our members – and a crucial part of that is having a council that's democratically elected by our members.

Every two years, our members vote to decide who they would like to represent them on our Council, which shapes Unlock Democracy's strategic direction – from the campaigns we run to the policy positions we hold – as well as overseeing our governance.

Over 20% of our members took part in this year's elections to elect the council, which will serve until 2020.

## CO-CHAIRS



JACK MAIZELS

**“The need for a new constitution has never been more urgent or apparent. We're committed to Unlock Democracy leading the charge.”**



DANNY ZINKUS SUTTON

## COUNCIL MEMBERS



VICTOR ANDERSON



ANDREW BLICK



STEPHEN CARTER



DEBBIE CHAY



RACHEL COLLINSON



IAN DRIVER



JOHN FERGUSON



SEPI GOLZARI-MUNRO



PETER HIRST



MALCOLM MACINTYRE-READ



ANDREW MANNING



JESSICA METHERINGHAM



VICKY SEDDON



PHIL STARR

# Funding our campaigns

All of the work that we do at Unlock Democracy is made possible by the generous support of our members.

Between April 2017 and March 2018, our members and supporters contributed **£141,000** to our work – including over **£34,000** in membership fees.

These contributions help us to continue being an independent voice for democracy. We want to thank each and every person who has donated to support our work in the last year, whether by contributing to one of our appeals, by being a member, or through making a regular donation. Whatever the donation, £5 or £5,000, we are extremely grateful for all your support.

Compared to previous years, contributions from individuals have fallen slightly, mostly due to reduced legacy income. We're very grateful for the support of our former members who left us a legacy in their will in recent years. If you'd like more information

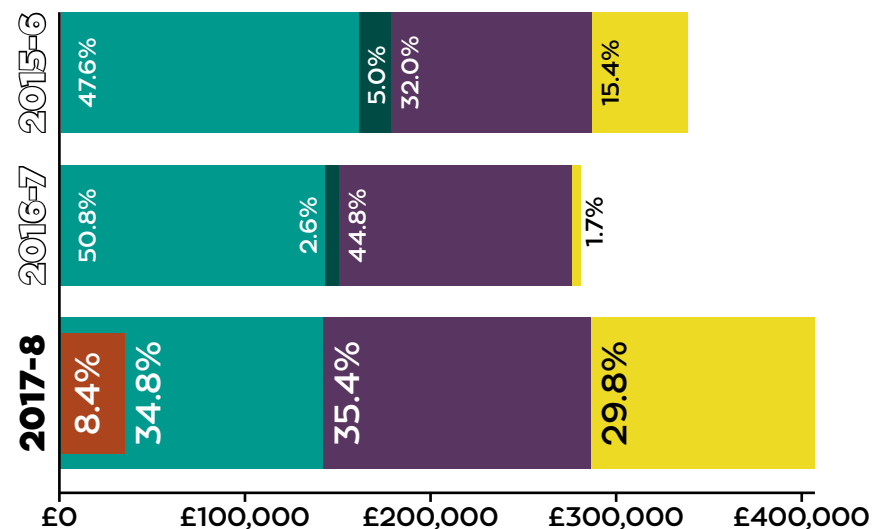
about setting up a legacy, please contact our offices.

Our other main source of income is the commercial income generated by Rodell Properties Ltd, our wholly-owned subsidiary that raises funds through managing property. This provided **£144,000** this year, an increase of £19,000 from the previous year.

This year we also received **£121,000** in grant funding, mostly in connection with our work facilitating the Repeal Bill Alliance.

We would like to thank the following organisations and individuals for their kind support in our work:

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



## Income from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018

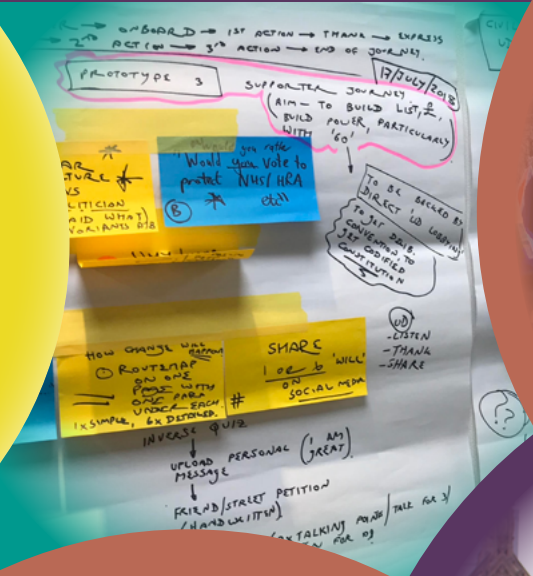
<b>Individual Contributions</b>	34.8%	£141,000
<i>of which</i> <b>Membership</b>	8.4%	£34,000
<b>Commercial Income</b>	35.4%	£144,000
<b>Grants</b>	29.8%	£121,000
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		£406,000

*The Legacy income category was not used in 2017-8*

Our expenditure between April 2017 and March 2018 was approximately **£366,000**.

The full audited accounts will be available in November 2018 in an independent report by our auditors, Berley Chartered Accountants.

We extend our heartfelt thanks for this year's vital contributions to our fight for a fairer democracy.



**Unlock Democracy**  
5th Floor, 9 King Street, London EC2V 8EA  
020 7278 4443  
info@unlockdemocracy.org.uk  
[www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk](http://www.unlockdemocracy.org.uk)