



HM Government

# **Democratic Engagement: Respecting, Protecting and Promoting Our Democracy**

January 2019



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**Chloe Smith MP**  
Minister for the constitution

## FOREWORD

The Democratic Engagement Plan, launched in December 2017, was the first time that government had published a strategy for building a democracy that works for everyone.

One year on from setting out our commitment to democratic inclusion, we have revisited the pledges made in 'Every Voice Matters' and mapped our progress against the prospectus of activity that we laid out for 2018. We have made substantial progress.

As the minister responsible for democratic engagement I am passionate about the real difference that our democracy makes to individual lives and the difference that each individual makes to our democracy. Every elector should have the opportunity to have their say and it is the government's role to ensure that the system as a whole is accessible, secure and inclusive so that they are able to do so. And now, perhaps more than ever, we need to ensure that our democracy is robust, trusted and open so that all those who are eligible can participate with confidence.

The case for democratic engagement is not only one of individual rights but also of collective benefit: we help to secure our democracy by respecting, protecting and promoting it for the greater good.

In future I will be focused on three key elements that are vital to the health of our democracy:

**Respect:** Confidence in our democracy is founded on the principle that every elector's voice matters and is considered to hold equal weight. The government is committed to making our democratic system fairer and one that retains respect.

**Protect:** We must maintain confidence in the integrity of our electoral system and trust in our democracy. Last year the government made it easier for survivors of domestic violence to register to vote anonymously in order to help mitigate the risk of former partners finding out their addresses. Voter ID pilots have given electors confidence that their vote is theirs alone.

**Promote:** We recognise that it is important for confidence and pride in our democracy to make sure every voice is heard. That is why we launched the inaugural National Democracy Week last July, delivered in conjunction with our partners, coinciding with the 90th anniversary of women achieving equal suffrage. This partnership approach has also helped to deliver education projects, make accessibility improvements and improve student registration processes. Reform of the annual canvass is expected to reduce costs by £27 million a year and the Overseas Electors Bill will end the current 15-year time limit on British expats voting in the UK, fulfilling the manifesto commitment on delivering votes for life.

The achievements set out in this report are considerable but we will continue to champion and defend our democracy with vigour.

The Democratic Engagement Plan set out the central role that partners play in our ambition to tackle democratic exclusion. Government has a vital part to play in this endeavour, but we are clear that our responsibilities are distinct from others' and that organisations from local and national governments, civil society and the wider electoral community each have specific contributions to make that facilitate the effective functioning of our democracy.

Democracy in the United Kingdom has faced unprecedented developments over the last few years and will continue to meet new and unpredictable circumstances in future. It is a testament to our democratic system's strength and flexibility that it rises to the difficult and often rapidly emerging challenges with which it is confronted, as recent events have confirmed. From major electoral events such as the EU referendum to the growing influence of social media, we are experiencing a step-change in the relationship between people and power. In an era of fast paced technological, economic and political change it is the responsibility of us all to ensure that our democracy remains relevant to people's lives and at the very heart of our society.

It is essential to work together to tackle these challenges. Over the coming year we will further explore our respective tools, levers, expertise and resources in order to refine our collaborative model for promoting participation. Maintaining momentum and expanding reach depends on continued improvements to our democratic system that government alone can enact, but which are not sufficient in isolation. I hope that all of us with an interest in widening engagement will work together to make our individual contributions greater than the sum of our parts.

**Chloe Smith MP**

Minister for the Constitution

# DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT IN 2018

## The democratic engagement plan

The government's Democratic Engagement Plan, 'Every Voice Matters', was published in December 2017. It charted a course towards a more inclusive democracy by identifying and tackling those barriers that prevent some people - particularly those in under registered groups - from participating in the democratic system.

The plan:

- set out the landscape of inclusion and exclusion, presenting evidence on voter registration patterns and insight into the factors that influence this;
- analysed the major changes to the electoral system in recent years, from the introduction of individual electoral registration in 2014 to the general election in 2017;
- explained the parallel approach to improving processes and enhancing engagement, which includes digital development, modernising the canvass and maintaining electoral integrity;
- pledged action to improve engagement among specific groups such as students, survivors of domestic violence and disabled electors;
- presented snapshots of citizens' experiences of our democracy from across the United Kingdom;
- made commitments to specific democratic engagement activities and products in conjunction with our partners and the wider electoral community; and
- examined the challenges and opportunities for boosting participation and pledged specific actions to increase democratic engagement and voter registration.

This chapter demonstrates our progress against that plan.

## Report card

Action	Progress
<p><b>1. Research and Insight</b></p> <p>In 2019 we will understand more about which groups are proportionally more likely to be under-represented on the registers and why.</p> <p>A review undertaken in 2017/18 by Cabinet Office sought to collect available evidence on barriers to registration, with a particular focus on the following under registered groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people / attainders</li> <li>• Frequent home movers</li> <li>• Ethnic minority backgrounds</li> <li>• People with long-standing conditions or disability</li> <li>• Other vulnerable groups such as victims of domestic abuse or homelessness</li> </ul>	<p><b>Disability access</b></p> <p>In 2018 we ran a Call for Evidence on access to elections aimed at understanding the barriers disabled people face in registering to vote and in voting and how these can be addressed. We received 250 responses from disabled people, charities and organisations allowing us to identify what is working and what needs to be improved to make our elections more accessible.</p> <p><b>Anonymous registration</b></p> <p>In 2018 we changed the law to broaden the range of professionals able to provide an attestation allowing people to register anonymously. These changes came into force in England, Wales and Northern Ireland on 7 March 2018 and in Scotland on 1 April 2018. We have also expanded the list of court orders to include Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Female Genital Mutilation Protection Orders. We have made sure that guidance is in place to clarify how the law has developed and support service users. Cabinet Office also added the link to the form on the homepage of ‘Register To Vote’ to make it more visible.</p> <p><b>Overseas electors</b></p> <p>In 2017 Glyn Davies introduced a Private Members’ Bill on Overseas Electors. Supported by the government, it passed its second reading in the House of Commons in February 2018 and passed committee stage in November 2018. If the Overseas Electors Bill becomes law, it will implement votes for life in parliamentary elections for British citizens overseas who have either been previously resident or previously registered to vote in the United Kingdom.</p>

	<p><b>Student electoral registration</b></p> <p>In 2017 we legislated to ensure that student electoral registration is a core condition of the new higher education framework, as contained in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. Ministerial guidance and Office for Students (OfS) guidance published in 2018 reinforces Regulation 23 of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001 – which requires compliance with EROs’ requests for data – and also obliges higher education providers to promote electoral registration among their student populations. The OfS guidance highlights the importance of the integrity of the electoral register, drawing higher education providers’ attention to the specific challenges of registering students, such as insecure postal arrangements. The government has committed to evaluating the success of the OfS guidance after a sufficient period, to assess whether the ministerial guidance needs to be updated to ensure an even more effective approach to the electoral registration of students.</p>
<p><b>2. Atlas of Democratic Variation</b> An Atlas of Democratic Variation will be developed during 2018.</p>	<p>The Atlas has been developed and will be published in January 2019.</p>



<p><b>3. Reform of the annual canvass</b></p> <p>Proposed changes to the annual canvass will be supported by the Electoral Commission's performance management framework, guidance, training and the right mechanisms to support the sharing of good practice.</p>	<p>The Electoral Commission committed to taking forward changes to its performance management framework in line with changes to the annual canvass.</p> <p>The Electoral Commission, Association of Electoral Administrators and the Scottish Assessors Association each has a role in sharing good practice on effectively delivering the annual canvass. Cabinet Office is working closely with appropriate stakeholders to ensure that changes to guidance and training are aligned with legislative changes that will reform the way the annual canvass of electors is conducted.</p>
<p><b>4. Canvass evaluation 2018</b></p> <p>The Electoral Commission's evaluation of the 2017 pilots will inform future changes to the canvass.</p>	<p>Both the Electoral Commission's evaluation and Cabinet Office's own evaluation of the 2017 canvass pilots were published in 2018. They have been used to inform development of policy on canvass reform, which has now been subject to public consultation. The pilots have shown that there are ways of reducing the costs and administrative burden of the canvass – and improving the citizen experience – while maintaining the volume and quality of data collected.</p> <p>The respective evaluation reports can be found on GOV.UK<sup>1</sup> and the Electoral Commission<sup>2</sup> websites.</p>

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/piloting-alternative-electoral-canvassing-models>

2 [https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/244608/Annual-canvass-reform-pilot-scheme-evaluation.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/244608/Annual-canvass-reform-pilot-scheme-evaluation.pdf)

### 5. Improving inclusion and access 2018

We will make targeted interventions to improve access, whether that is by removing physical barriers, promoting digital options, encouraging democratic education or tackling exclusion arising from lack of awareness.

Over the course of 2018 the government has implemented the pledges in the Democratic Engagement Plan as part of our commitment to make our democracy as inclusive and accessible as possible. In 2018 we have:

- Made it easier to register to vote, for example by enacting legislation to protect survivors of domestic abuse. We have also supported the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland as they have introduced a custom digital service for their electors.
- Improved citizens' experience of democratic processes, developing changes to the annual canvass by piloting approaches with fewer restrictions. In the future local authorities will be more able to focus on targeted democratic engagement activities in their areas.
- Addressed physical barriers, with the members of the government-chaired Accessibility of Elections Working Group reviewing Electoral Commission guidance and training materials to ensure polling stations are accessible.
- Encouraged digital participation through improvements to the register to vote website. These include developing an easy-read guide in partnership with the Royal Mencap Charity which helps citizens with learning difficulties apply to register to vote.
- Enabled citizens from Northern Ireland to use the IER digital service, meaning that it now caters for all home nations and British citizens living abroad.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoted democratic education, engagement and participation through initiatives such as National Democracy Week and the Suffrage Centenary Programme (Annexes A and B).</li> <li>• Defended our democracy, in particular through the evaluation of ID pilots, which will be taken into account and used to shape how the final policy will look when it is introduced.</li> <li>• Run the ‘Your voice is yours alone’ campaign in partnership with the Electoral Commission and Crimestoppers, which aimed to raise awareness of what constitutes as electoral fraud and encourage those who witness it to report it to Crimestoppers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Reducing duplicate applications to register</b></p> <p>We will work to make registration processes more accessible and address customer journeys in order to reduce duplicate applications, building on the success of the IER digital service which has managed more than 37 million applications since its launch in 2014.</p>	<p>During 2018, action aimed at reducing duplicate applications, and the administrative burden they represent for electoral administrators has included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous review of the website before election periods, ensuring information on the site is correctly worded to continue driving down duplicate applications and relieve the administrative burden for election teams.</li> <li>• Exploratory work understanding the impact, scale and cost of processing duplicate applications.</li> <li>• Finding alternative solutions, which could be implemented at a local level to address duplicates.</li> </ul>

<p><b>7. ID pilot implementation</b></p> <p>Pilot schemes ahead of local elections in May 2018 will help to identify how and when it would be best to introduce an ID requirement more widely.</p>	<p>In May 2018, pilots at local elections ran in Bromley, Gosport, Swindon, Watford and Woking, testing a broad range of photographic and non-photographic ID, including poll cards with scannable barcodes.</p> <p>The evaluation, conducted by the independent Electoral Commission, showed that the trials worked well, with the overwhelming majority of people able to show identification without difficulty.</p> <p>The evaluation report can be found on the Electoral Commission website<sup>3</sup>.</p>
<p><b>8. ID pilot communications evaluation</b></p> <p>In 2018 Cabinet Office Communications and the Electoral Commission advised and co-ordinated local authorities taking part in the pilots, including awareness raising campaigns to encourage eligible voters to bring ID to polling stations.</p>	<p>In 2018 the results from the evaluation of the ID pilots showed that nearly 9 in 10 people (86%) of people who voted at polling stations said they were aware beforehand that they had to show identification to vote at their polling station.</p>

3 <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/electoral-fraud/voter-identification-pilot-schemes>

**9. National Democracy Week 2018**

The first National Democracy Week (NDW) ran from July 2 to 8 2018. It is the intention that NDW should develop and grow over the coming years, establishing an effective model for promoting registration and discussion about democracy even in periods where there are no widespread elections.

- A National Democracy Week Council will:
- Advise on the activities and events needed to achieve our aims.
- Take an active role in communicating with and mobilising organisations across the UK.
- Consider how to measure success and reporting back on the week’s activities.

The first ever National Democracy Week took place in July 2018. More than 50 democratic engagement events hosted by partners from local government and the civil society sector ran across the United Kingdom. The NDW Awards recognised winners that have made exceptional contributions to promoting participation.

Media campaigns were undertaken by both the Cabinet Office and partners. Regional press were presented with press notices and case studies. Social media was also used with #talkdemocracy and #NDW10 trending on Twitter.

The NDW Council met three times, planning, developing and evaluating the activities and events which took place throughout the week. Activities included developing materials such as stakeholder packs, judging awards nominations, running events and evaluating the week. Further information on NDW can be found at Annex A.

### **10. Suffrage Centenary Programme**

To engage young people in the story of suffrage and its relevance to democratic processes with the aim of increasing their knowledge of UK democracy and its importance, and their democratic participation.

Three projects were launched and delivered during the 2018 suffrage centenary year:  
Parliamentarian youth engagement toolkit.  
Youth Democracy Ambassadors scheme.  
Women's suffrage secondary schools resource.

The parliamentarian toolkit was launched during National Democracy Week, is available online and has been downloaded hundreds of times.

To date 48 groups have signed up to train a total of 1,035 Democracy Ambassadors. They are from across England and include youth groups, social action projects and after school clubs. We want to ensure that young people from all demographics become democracy ambassadors, including those from lower-socio economic backgrounds, Black and Minority Ethnicity (BAME) backgrounds and those with disabilities.

Over 300 schools have signed up to use the women's suffrage secondary schools resource.

Further information can be found at Annex B.

# OUR DEMOCRACY IN 2019

## Strategic approach

Meeting the challenges that our democracy faces - and reaching the many different groups that it must serve - requires a coalition of partners.

Government works collaboratively with a range of experts across the public, private and civil society sectors to protect, promote and respect our democracy. Together, we are greater than the sum of our parts.

Crucially, every citizen has an active part to play in our democracy.

Government's role is to create an environment for our democracy to thrive, with responsibility for legislation, funding and promoting good practice.

## Legislation

Government, with the UK Parliament and devolved administrations, can change the law to sustain a flourishing democracy. When reforms require legislation - for example, the bill that enabled individual electoral registration or the statutory instruments that amended the rules on anonymous registration - only government can make this happen.

## Funding

Government funds improvements to the electoral system, including modernising registration and ensuring the system is fit for purpose, secure and sustainable. That is why we have funded the introduction of the digital service, have taken steps to secure electoral integrity, and continue to develop canvass reform. This includes action to boost democratic participation through new initiatives such as the Democracy Ambassadors scheme for young people.

## Good practice

Government is committed to facilitating a democracy that works for everyone and has delivered specific interventions to improve citizens' experience. We are well placed to convene the various parts of the electoral community to make best use of our evidence, skills, knowledge, and resources. The Cabinet Office's role includes supporting others' capability to lead (and ultimately act independently) to encourage people to register, to participate and to vote. For instance, the Cabinet Office published details of what works on student registration - a brokering role that government undertook as part of implementing the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

This is distinct from interventions that local, statutory and voluntary partners are best placed to lead, learn from and share. It is a valuable addition to, although no substitute for, the legal duty of Electoral Registration Officers to maintain accurate and complete registers and the legal duty of the Electoral Commission in maintaining performance standards.

### Civil society

**Civil society groups know their audiences best.** Over the last year our joint work with over 40 leading organisations with an interest in democratic engagement has proven that together we are greater than the sum of our parts with hundreds of people taking part in the inaugural National Democracy Week. The success of the week relied on the expertise of our partners in connecting with people in some of the most under-represented groups. Our partners agreed Cabinet Office's convening role was crucial, and we will now work together to explore how we can support building capability, knowledge, skills and networks across the sector.

### Local authorities

**Local authorities are the 'front line' of our democracy.** With local knowledge and relationships with local electors, local elections teams support the Electoral Registration Officer to maintain the electoral register, ensuring it is accurate and complete.

### The electoral community

**The Electoral Commission has a statutory responsibility for our elections and democratic participation.** They work in partnership with bodies such as the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) who each represent their members. For example, the Electoral Commission is responsible for public awareness campaigns around major polls, Electoral Registration Officers' (EROs) performance standards - assessing how effective EROs are in maintaining accurate and complete electoral registers, and annual assessments on the delivery of elections.

### Wider society

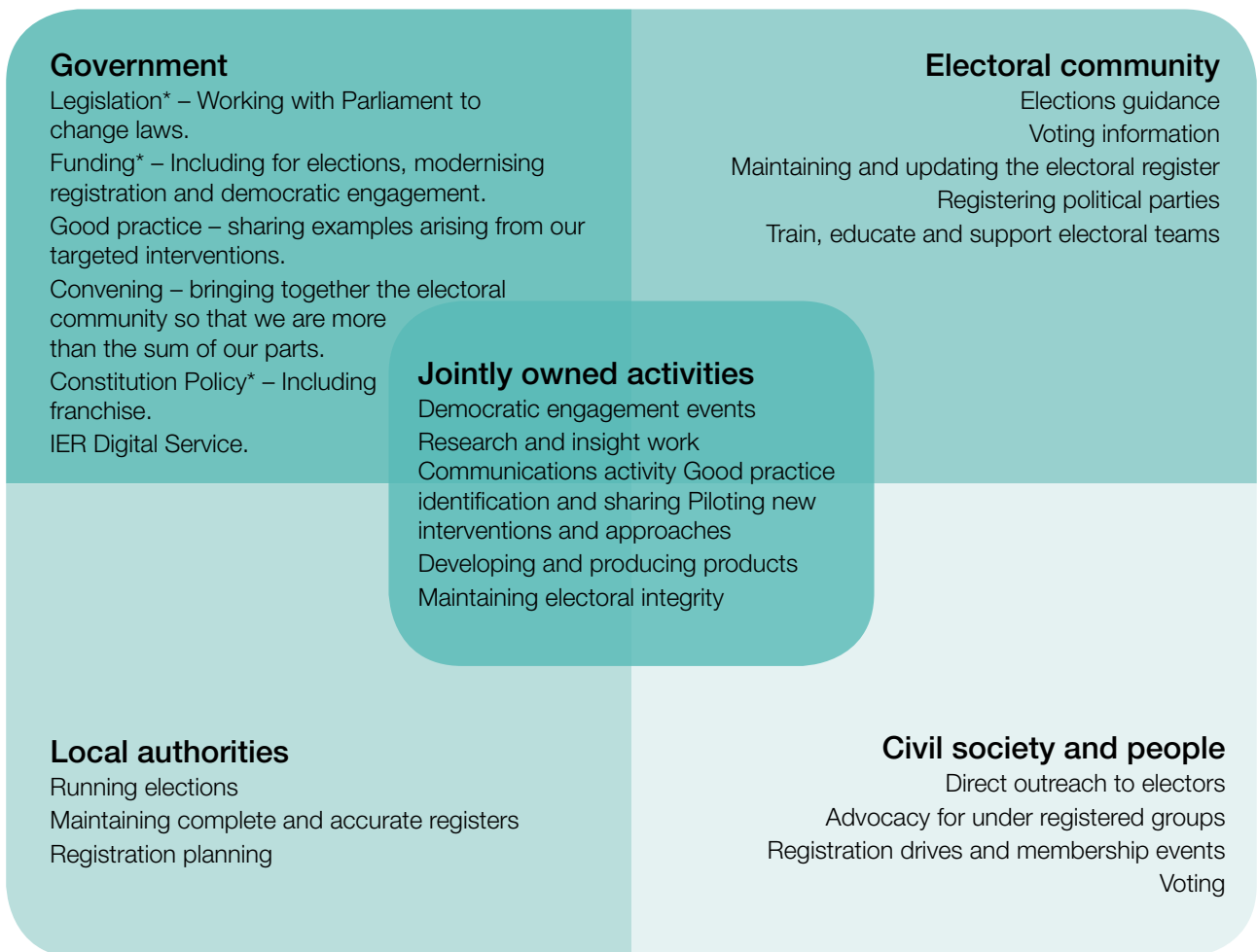
**Businesses, charities, media publications, academic institutions, political parties, social media platforms and many others are invested in our democracy.** In a world of rapidly changing technology and shifting threats, we look to the relevant organisations to work with and support government and our citizens to protect, respect and promote our democracy. Whether it be tackling disinformation, promoting voter registration or explaining current affairs, many outside of government are helping to sustain a flourishing democracy.

### Citizens

**Every citizen owns our democracy, and has an active part to play in it.** Whether it's registering to vote to ensure you have your say, reporting electoral fraud because your vote is yours alone, standing as a local councillor, discussing with your friends, family or students on how government and UK Parliament works, each and every citizen has a role to play to protect, respect and promote our democracy.



**Democratic engagement activity: exclusive and shared responsibilities**



\* Elements are devolved to Scottish and Welsh Governments, for example franchise policy. This report is produced by the UK Government in relation to its responsibilities.

**Planned activity in 2019**

There is a reason why the UK is admired around the world for our democracy. We have worked for centuries to build it and continue to protect it from the ever-changing forces that seek to threaten it.

We inspire countries across the globe not just because of our achievements - we have a record number of people on the electoral register - but also because we demonstrate our commitment to our democracy through action.

Cabinet Office is committed to ensuring an inclusive and accessible democracy, securing democratic processes and running activities to drive engagement, including Votes for Life, canvass reform and National Democracy Week.

Government is acting to promote the integrity of our electoral system, defend it from hostile state activity and disinformation and increase the public's confidence in democracy.

We are committed to making voting more inclusive and fair because we want to preserve the principles that underpin our constitution. We are ensuring everyone can make their voice heard free from abuse, making voting easier and more accessible for vulnerable and under-represented groups, and introducing measures to protect electors' votes.

Building on our 2018 progress, and using the strategic approach set out here, this chapter summarises our plans for 2019.

## 1. Respect our democracy

Having celebrated the year marking 100 years since some women first won the right to vote in the UK and the 90th anniversary of equal voting rights for men and women, we should not forget the sacrifices that got us to this point.

While democracy thrives from robust, healthy debate, we know the risks that come when debate deteriorates into threats and intimidation designed to drive out honest differences. The government recognises that rising intimidation in public life is stopping talented people from standing for election and putting voters off politics. In 2019 the government will publish its response to the consultation, 'Protecting the Debate: Intimidation, Influence and Information' with a view to taking actions forward as quickly as possible. The consultation, which government launched in July 2018, was in response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report 'Intimidation in Public Life' and it sought views on: a proposed new electoral offence of intimidation of candidates and campaigners; clarifying the electoral offence of undue influence of voters; and whether the requirement to have imprints should be extended to digital communications. The proposed new measures aim to protect voters, candidates and campaigners so they can make their choice at the ballot box or stand for public service without fear of being victims of misinformation or abuse.

Confidence in our democracy is founded on the principle that every voter's voice matters and is considered to hold equal weight. That is why the government is committed to making our democratic system fairer and one that retains respect. We are doing this by backing the independent and impartial reviews from the Boundary Commissions, which will deliver equal representation for voters across the UK at the next general election.

## 2. Protect our democracy

There is currently no evidence that interference in UK democratic processes has successfully affected the outcome and our manual counting system is difficult, if not impossible, to manipulate through direct cyber attack. However, government cannot and should not be complacent about the threat and has long undertaken a wide range of activity to defend our democracy from those who wish to undermine or interfere in it.

Key to this will be increasing transparency and accountability. The Cabinet Office are now considering their response to the consultation on 'Protecting the Debate: Intimidating, Influence and Information'. This sought views on proposed changes to electoral law, including the inclusion of imprints on digital campaign materials. The consultation closed on 28 October 2018 and the government is now carefully considering the submitted responses, in order to decide on an appropriate course of action.

The government is grateful to the DCMS Select Committee for the valuable contribution they have made to the public debate about disinformation and other online harms. The committee's interim report highlighted areas of concern to the government, UK Parliament and the public. The government response to the interim report provided a consolidated overview of our activity to tackle disinformation, online manipulation and a range of other online harms identified in the interim report. DCMS, FCO, CO, DfID, MoJ and DfE all contributed. We look forward to the committee's final report and will respond in due course.

The government also thanks the Information Commissioner for publishing her report, which sets out details of the enforcement activity undertaken as a result of her investigation into the use of personal data by political parties, data analytics companies, social media providers and other organisations. The government will consider the report carefully, along with the recommendations raised in the ICO's July report 'Democracy Disrupted? Personal information and political influence'.

We will consider these reports alongside the Electoral Commission's June 2018 report, 'Digital campaigning: Increasing transparency for voters', to ensure that all of these issues are considered in the round.

Voter ID and additional measures to improve confidence in the postal vote process were successfully tested at local elections in May 2018. The government has committed to legislate to ensure that a form of identification must be presented before voting and is working with local authority volunteers to deliver further successful pilots in 2019 to understand how best to roll it out nationally. Working collaboratively with volunteer local authorities we can gain a deeper understanding of how voter ID will work on a wider scale and what will work best for voters.

For 2019 we have a greater number of authorities participating with greater diversity and geographical spread. To verify that voters are who they say they are, each local authority in the 2019 voter ID pilot scheme will test one of four models of voter ID:

- photo ID;
- photo and non-photo ID;
- traditional poll cards; and
- poll cards with scannable barcodes.

Postal voting pilots will also be trialled in two local authorities and a proxy pilot will be trialled in one local authority.

The Cabinet Office is also engaging with a broad range of charities and civil society organisations - including members of the Cabinet Office chaired Accessibility of Elections Working Group - to ensure that the overall policy reflects the needs of all voters in the UK. Local authorities will provide alternative methods of ID to individuals who do not have a specified form of ID, free of charge, to ensure that everyone who is registered has the opportunity to vote.

Voters in Pendle and Woking will be asked to show photo ID before they are given their ballot papers. Broxtowe, Derby, North Kesteven and Braintree will require voters to present either one form of photo ID or up to two forms of non-photo ID. Mid Sussex, Watford and North West Leicestershire will test using poll cards as a means of identification.

In addition, Peterborough and Pendle will run a separate postal vote pilot, looking at the security of postal votes and providing additional guidance in postal vote packs. Proxy voters in Peterborough will also be required to show ID before they can vote. In 2018 Tower Hamlets, Peterborough and Slough piloted measures to improve the integrity of the postal vote process. The pilots issued enhanced information to postal vote applicants about reporting electoral fraud and sampled random postal voters to verify the issue and return of postal votes.

### 3. Promote our democracy

#### (i) Research and insight

In 2018 work began to scope ethnographic-centered user testing and qualitative research projects aimed at enhancing our understanding of barriers to registration to help more people to register to vote. These will focus in particular on people who self-report as from ethnic minority backgrounds, those who move home frequently or live in the private rented sector, and those who are homeless. We intend to use insight from this work to design, user test and pilot interventions to improve registration that could meet local authority and citizens needs.

In 2019 we intend to:

- take an informed and collaborative approach with local authorities and other stakeholders such as the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators;
- conduct qualitative in-depth interviews with local authorities and civil society organisations who represent ethnic minority citizens, in order to identify the characteristics that make some ethnic minority backgrounds less likely to register in some areas; and
- use an ethnographic methodology to understand the day-to-day experiences of those who live in the private rented sector and people who are homeless, so we can adapt interventions to improve registration processes or these groups, so they better fit their specific situations and existing interactions with government services.

In the year ahead, we will provide tools and techniques which aim to support capacity among the electoral community and organisations across the UK, so they can independently use complementary solutions that work for them and citizens in their area.

**(ii) Interventions for frequent movers and homeless electors**

Building on the success of suffrage centenary projects such as the Democracy Ambassadors scheme, parliamentarian youth engagement toolkit and women's suffrage schools' resource, we have launched a new project working with electoral administrators to develop interventions for frequent movers and homeless electors. This project will create and test targeted solutions which may have previously been too time and resource intensive for electoral administrators to deliver.

We will seek volunteers from electoral services teams to pilot these interventions over a two-month period. From this work we hope to provide a tangible body of evidence and effective tools that will help reduce the cost and effort in registering these groups in the future.

**(iii) Disability access**

The Accessibility to Elections Working Group has planned for and is undertaking work to deliver the actions, in reviewing Electoral Commission guidance including the 'Handbook for Polling Station Staff' and training materials for polling station staff to improve the experience of disabled people within the polling station.

In January 2019 the working group will meet at the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). This meeting will include a demonstration of technology that has the potential to improve the support provided to voters with sight loss in polling stations, with first-hand account of the benefits of using the different types of technology provided by blind and partially sighted people.

Following this meeting the working group will undertake a more detailed assessment of the most suitable options to increase the support available. The assessment will include expert insight provided by the RNIB, the Royal Society for Blind Children, and the members of the Working Group who represent the interests of voters with sight loss.

**(iv) Reform of the annual canvass**

The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and UK Government intend to introduce reforms to the annual canvass across Great Britain. As elements of electoral registration are devolved in Scotland and Wales, reforms are intended to be introduced jointly. We have therefore worked very closely with the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales. We have also worked in close partnership with representatives from the Electoral Commission, the Scottish Assessors Association and the Association of Electoral Administrators.

The annual canvass is both expensive and heavily paper based, requiring each property in a local authority area to receive three paper household enquiry Forms, plus a household visit in order to gain a response during the canvass period. This

causes additional burdens on EROs. Having piloted alternative approaches during 2016 and 2017 with a range of local authorities' areas, we have a wealth of evidence that improvements can be put in place to streamline the process, reduce reliance on paper, and target the properties which require activity without reducing the accuracy or completeness of the electoral registers. Together, we have developed a blended model for the reformed canvass by taking the successful elements of each approach and refining the processes.

The new model has a data discernment step (where the electoral register is matched against existing data) using both national and local data, at the start of the canvass. This will enable EROs to identify those households where the individuals living at the household remain unchanged, allowing them to target more resources at those households where changes are most likely to have occurred. The new model will allow a mixture of communication methods (email, telephone and paper contacts) where most appropriate. Greater discretion for Electoral Registration Officers to shape their canvass to activities which best suit their local circumstances are key aspects of the proposals.

We have consulted on the new model proposals and will review them as appropriate in the light of any feedback received during the consultation. Our intention is that these significant reforms can be introduced ahead of the start of the canvass in 2020. Legislation will be required during 2019 in the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales. It will be important for the three governments to continue to work closely together on these important reforms so that electoral administrators and citizens in all parts of Great Britain can benefit.

**(v) National Democracy Week 2019**

The inaugural National Democracy Week took place in 2018. The week aimed to increase the number of people who engage with and participate in our democratic process. This included those who are less likely to be registered to vote, such as young people, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and home movers.

Following an assessment of National Democracy Week 2018 which examined the successes and areas for future development (Annex A), current work is focused on the development and implementation of National Democracy Week in 2019, scoping the project's future design, focus and key areas of delivery. At the heart of this model will be a partner-led approach, putting civil society organisations, local authorities and their respective networks in charge of activity.

Specifically we will work with our partners to develop a capability building plan for democratic engagement activity. This aligns with the government's strategic approach, which is to focus on those areas where it uniquely can add value including, for example, legislation, inter-governmental working, data sharing and convening. We will support National Democracy Week and its future sustainability by investing knowledge and skills in our partners to enable them to undertake those activities that they are best placed to deliver.

**(vi) Suffrage centenary education projects: Democracy Ambassadors**

In 2018, in partnership with the youth charity Young Citizens, we developed a training programme that teaches young people about democracy and how it relates to their lives.

In 2019, the programme will train 1,000 young people across England to become Democracy Ambassadors, with each ambassador being tasked with engaging 100 of their peers in turn. This will create a network of at least 100,000 young people who are engaged with and talking about democracy. The first tranche of 49 delivery centres have already signed up to the programme.

**(vii) Women's suffrage secondary schools resource**

In 2018 we launched a resource for secondary schools to coincide with the centenary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act which allowed women to stand for Parliament. Our ambition is that by the end of the project in March 2019 a large number of secondary schools will have used the resource, with a further 2,000 signing up to teach their students about the history of suffrage over the next five years.

**(viii) Anonymous registration**

We are committed to ensuring that survivors of domestic abuse have their voice heard. With this in mind, we will be monitoring the impact of the new scheme. Developing further awareness of the anonymous registration scheme by reaching out to key stakeholders will help to ensure that more applicants are able to register with the confidence that their details will be secure.

We will also look to develop awareness among those who may have different reasons for not wanting their details to appear on a public register.

Everyone should be able to vote safely, regardless of personal circumstances. These changes are an important step towards achieving this aim, and it is particularly fitting that they were introduced in the year marking the 100th anniversary of the first British women securing the right to vote.

**(ix) Overseas Electors Bill**

The Overseas Electors Bill, a Private Members' Bill supported by the government, passed its second reading in February 2018. The bill passed committee stage in the House of Commons on 14 November. If the Overseas Electors Bill becomes law, it will implement votes for life in parliamentary elections for British citizens overseas who have either been previously eligible to vote or previously registered to vote in the United Kingdom. The government will continue to work hard to secure the implementation of these reforms ahead of the next general election in 2022, subject to parliamentary time.



**(x) Data protection and democratic engagement**

During the passage of the Data Protection Act 2018, concerns were raised that the bill, as drafted, would prevent political parties from undertaking some of their existing activities, which are key to effective democratic engagement. To address this concern, the government introduced an amendment to clause 8 of the Data Protection Bill (now act) to clarify that for political parties to process data from the electoral register for reasons of democratic engagement is in the public interest. The Data Protection Act received Royal Assent on 23 May 2018.

Following the passage of the Data Protection Act 2018, the government is committed to ensuring that the new data protection regime continues to support democratic engagement by political parties and elected representatives, and does not have any unintended consequences. The Cabinet Office is currently considering amending secondary legislation to ensure that it is consistent with the democratic engagement provisions in the Data Protection Act.



## CONCLUSION

2018 was an important year for our democracy as it continues to adapt to new challenges. There's a lot to do in 2019 and beyond.

As set out in this report a number of major projects are on track and will deliver significant benefits before the next scheduled general election in 2022. These changes will be felt throughout the electoral system, from registering to vote to visiting a polling station. They will provide a better experience for the citizen, improve accessibility, offer greater flexibility for electoral administrators and keep our democracy secure.

Since the publication of the Democratic Engagement Plan in 2017, there has been real progress. In a landscape which involves multiple stakeholders, there are competing pressures to navigate and the smooth delivery of elections for citizens is an overriding priority. Finite resources, including scarcity of parliamentary time, encourages us to think creatively. We are finding new ways to help our democracy thrive and are continually searching for innovations that encourage electors from every background and circumstance to get involved.

There remains more to do. We will continue to focus on the practical ways in which government can assist in making registration and voting as simple as possible while maintaining the integrity and security of the process.

Over the coming year we intend to maintain this momentum as we forge ahead with canvass reform, measures to maintain the integrity of our elections, and work to promote inclusion and accessibility. This is something that government cannot achieve alone: our partners have a more important role to play than ever before. Our democratic engagement priority for 2019 will be to pursue these goals on a strategic basis, guided by a clearly articulated understanding of the respective roles of each part of the wider sector. This will include our commitment to supporting the development of the electoral community as part of a collaborative model that will drive targeted, local democratic engagement activity and use best practice to help even more citizens.

# ANNEX A

## National Democracy Week 2018

*“Regardless of who we are or where we are from, we must work together to ensure that every member of society has an equal chance to participate in our democracy and to have their say.”*

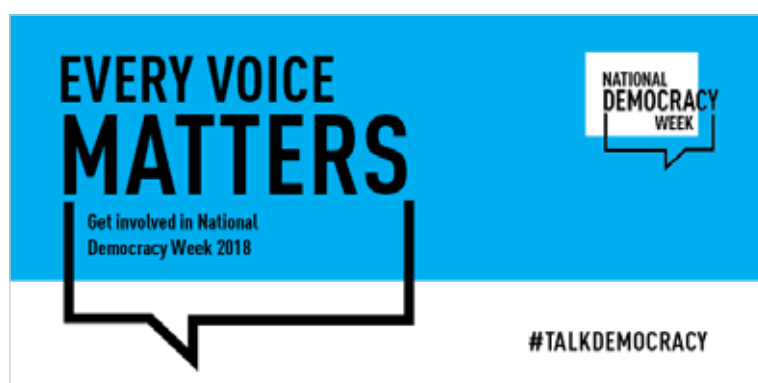
Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP, 2018

National Democracy Week formed a key part of the Democratic Engagement Plan acting as a focal point for promoting democratic engagement as widely as possible. The week was held between 2 and 8 July 2018 to coincide with the 90th anniversary of women achieving equal suffrage. As a UK-wide event it brought together civil society organisations, local and national government and the wider electoral community to celebrate and promote democracy.

The week aimed to engage with under-registered groups, to better understand the barriers they face, and to work with partners to ensure that every member of society who is entitled to do so has an equal chance to participate in the democratic process, ensuring these groups have their say. Partners worked collaboratively to develop events and activities designed to engage all potential electors, in particular under-registered groups who are less likely than others to be on the electoral register.



## Groups targeted in National Democracy Week



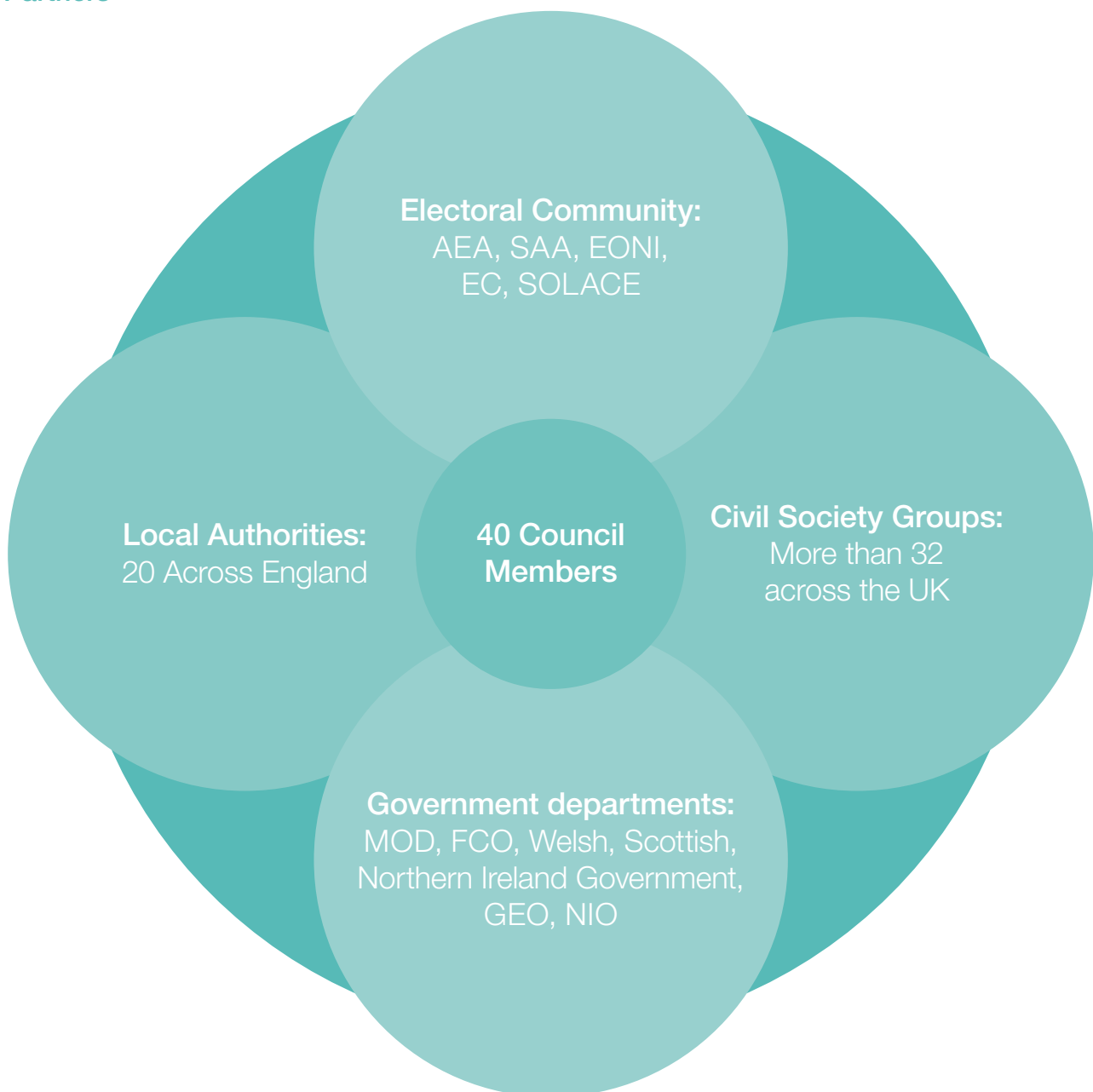
### National Democracy Week

The project was partner-led and so a team of members was set up, known as the National Democracy Week (NDW) Council. The council comprised a diverse range of civil society organisations, from the LGBT Consortium, Mencap, UK Youth and Shout Out UK. The council agreed to deliver a range of democratic engagement activities in the lead up and during the week itself.

**Table 1: List of NDW Council members**

Association of Colleges	Patchwork Foundation
Association of Electoral Administrators	RNIB
Bite the Ballot	Scope
British Youth Council	Scottish Assessors Association
Citizens Advice	Scottish Youth Parliament
Community Organisers	Shelter
Democracy Club	Shout Out UK
Department for Education	SOLACE
Electoral Commission	Step Up To Serve
Electoral Office of Northern Ireland	The Prince's Trust
Elevation Networks	The Faith and Belief Forum (formerly 3FF)
Faiths Forum for London	UK Parliament Outreach and Engagement Team
FCO	UK Youth
LGBT Consortium	Universities UK
Mencap	UpRising
Ministry of Defence	Voice4Change England
My Life My Say	Welsh Youth Parliament
National Care Association	Women's Aid
National Housing Federation	YMCA
National Citizen Service	
Operation Black Vote	

## Partners



In collaboration with partners, local authorities and other Cabinet Office-affiliated groups, five key objectives were developed in order to guide democratic engagements activity during the week. These focused on insights, knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and partner impact.

## Key objectives



### National Democracy Week Council and the electoral community

The NDW Council was formed to encourage stakeholder engagement and to ensure agreement around purpose and objectives of the week, offering the chance for all members to have their say and to shape how NDW operated.

The council was composed of senior figures from across the electoral community, with particular focus on delivery partners within the civil society sector. This includes representation from organisations and individuals with an interest in democratic engagement and expertise in engaging different communities as shown in the diagram on page 29.



### Local authority membership

National Democracy Week also brought to the fore the potential for local authorities to make a direct impact through democratic engagement activities in their area. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) and Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) represented the views of their local authority members on the National Democracy Week Council. Valuation Joint Boards in Scotland were represented by the Scottish Assessors Association and Northern Ireland by the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland (EONI).



The Cabinet Office built on relationships developed through ID pilots to facilitate activity across 20 councils. This approach was welcomed by many of the local authorities. As the 'front line' of our democracy with access to local electors and complete geographic coverage, they have considerable scope for effective engagement work.

## NDW Awards 2018

*The Democracy Awards will recognise outstanding achievements in democratic engagement and the Suffrage Centenary is a great opportunity to highlight the work so many people are doing in this area, often without reward.*

Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith MP, 2018



In July 2018, the Cabinet Office ran the National Democracy Week awards to recognise the outstanding contributions from individuals and organisations that work tirelessly to increase democratic engagement in the UK. The ceremony was hosted by the Minister for the Constitution at the People's History Museum in Manchester, the home of the suffrage movement. The winners were delighted to accept their awards from:

- Minister for the Constitution, Chloe Smith;
- Convenor of the cross-party Centenary Action Group, Helen Pankhurst;
- Greater Manchester Lead for Young People and Social Cohesion, Rishi Shori;
- Director of One Million Mentors, Alveena Malik; and
- Trustee of the People's History Museum, Martin Carr.

### The winners were:

- Young Advocates of the Year – Michael Bryan, Dan Lawes of Youth Politics ([youthpolitics.org.uk](http://youthpolitics.org.uk)) and Rachael Farrington of Voting Counts ([votingcounts.org.uk](http://votingcounts.org.uk));
- Diversity Champion of the Year – Harris Bokhari OBE, Patchwork Foundation ([patchworkfoundation.org.uk](http://patchworkfoundation.org.uk));
- Changemaker of the Year – My Life My Say (<http://mylifemysay.org.uk>); and Collaboration of the Year – The People's History Museum ([phm.org.uk](http://phm.org.uk)).

### Evaluation

The evaluation showed the NDW had a positive impact and provided evidence on how collaboration between a number of partners can promote democratic engagement.

Over 50 civil society groups and local authorities joined forces to run activities and reach audiences across the UK, showing that by working together, we are greater than the sum of our parts.

*“National Democracy Week has helped put a spotlight on our Right to Vote campaign, founded by our survivor ambassador Mehala Osborne, which brought about legal changes to make voting in safety a reality for domestic abuse survivors. We’re delighted that Mehala Osborne was nominated for ‘Changemaker of the Year’ award for her tireless campaigning at the National Democracy Week Awards. By working with National Democracy Week, we have helped send out the powerful message to domestic abuse survivors that their voices matter and their right to vote should never be taken away.”*

**Womens Aid, 2018**

*“Gravesham Borough Council gained from being involved in National Democracy Week by building internal and external working relationships with stakeholders including the Cabinet Office [and] Cohesion Plus.”*

**Gravesham Borough Council**

NDW enabled both civil society groups and local authorities to further understand the barriers which people face to democratic engagement

*“[We] ... gained more ideas on barriers to participation. The events helped to give more insight on learning about target group which helps inform and shape what to do in future engagements.”*

**Royal National Institute of Blind People, 2018**

*“The council has pledged to look into developing different work streams of engagement throughout the year, all focused on ensuring that groups facing barriers to democratic participation are recognised through face to face engagement.”*

**Scarborough Borough Council, 2018**

Partners communicated with their audiences through a range of creative communications ideas, generating debate on social media. This saw NDW's official hashtag #TalkDemocracy trending on Twitter during the National Democracy Week Awards ceremony.



The partner pack – which provided guidance on how to plan, run and evaluate events for NDW – was downloaded over 2,000 times and events took place in all regions of the UK. NDW received widespread positive press coverage, particularly of local events, and parliamentarians from across the political spectrum took part.

The evaluation showed areas for development, including enabling the civil society sector and local authorities to develop their capacity and support one another using the mechanisms of NDW. However, more work can be done to develop future collaboration and engagement projects.

There is no quick fix to under-registration and further work is required to understand the behavioural changes of people and how they engage with the democratic process.

### NDW Council members' engagement

The National Democracy Week Council met three times, (on 19 December 2017, 5 March 2018 and 27 September 2018) to plan, develop and evaluate the week. At the inaugural meeting, council members discussed the National Democracy Week branding, stakeholder packs and award ceremony process. Subsequently, all council members were invited to join a communications sub-group to help develop and shape programmes and activities for National Democracy Week.

At the second council meeting, members discussed planning and preparations for the summer event. The final meeting focused on evaluation of the week. Below are three examples of events undertaken by NDW council members.

#### **Shout Out UK**

Undertook activities which revolved around women in politics and the issues women face within the political space. The engagement activities targeted young people between the ages of 14 and 25 years old, with activities such as panel discussions and Q&A sessions with professional speakers and women politicians – such as the Leader of the House of Commons and the Shadow Leader of House of Commons in attendance.

These sessions offered the opportunity of direct engagement between speakers and participants, as well as the groups themselves collaborating together to discuss barriers to engagement and developing creative solutions which the groups pitched to the audience.

### **Scope**

In collaboration with Cabinet Office, Scope hosted a live webcast Q&A session where members of the public could ask questions to Cabinet Office officials around voter registration, democratic engagement and the decisions behind these policies.

This offered the opportunity for Scope and the Cabinet Office to further develop their understanding of the issues which affect citizens and the barriers which they face to democratic engagement. It also offered citizens the unique experience to speak directly to the people who work to deliver policies which improve their ability to engage in the democratic process.

### **Mencap**

The work undertaken by Mencap sought to directly challenge attitudes, still prevalent today, which assume that people with learning disabilities should not be able to vote. Their work aimed to raise awareness that people with learning disabilities have as much right to vote as anyone else. Mencap promoted the week digitally via Youtube with over 1,000 views and over 22,000 impressions on Twitter. Their campaign also saw over 400 retweets, 40 by MPs.

Their direct engagement activities consisted of events held at the Palace of Westminster where participants with learning disabilities were able to talk directly with ministers about their interaction with the democratic process.

## ANNEX B

### Suffrage centenary programme

#### Education projects

In 2018 we celebrated an important democratic milestone: 100 years since some women first won the right to vote. To mark this historic occasion, in his 2017 Budget the Chancellor announced £5 million funding for a programme of celebratory activity. In the Democratic Engagement Plan, we committed to use the £550,000 of funding allocated to the Cabinet Office to deliver a range of projects to improve knowledge of UK democracy and encourage civic participation among young people, who are under-registered on the electoral roll.

This high-profile work has been intended to promote discourse on democratic participation in the context of marking the centenary itself. It is not only relevant to women, who will identify directly with the campaign to ensure that their voices were heard, but to all groups including those whose exclusion continues in the modern age. The issue of social justice and inclusion goes to the heart of our democratic society and remains a challenge that these activities will help to address.

These activities, aimed at the next generation of voters, centred on:

- providing materials for parliamentarians to connect with and inspire young people to understand how our democratic system and representatives enable change
- provide schools with resources on the history of democracy with specific focus on the suffrage movement, and what this history means in terms of modern day civic engagement and democratic participation
- creating Democracy Ambassadors who inspire their peers to champion democratic participation

#### Parliamentarian youth engagement toolkit

When developing the projects for the educate strand of government's Suffrage Centenary Programme, we identified a gap in the current provision of materials for wider engagement of parliamentarians with young people. Parliamentarians are the ambassadors of our democracy, the embodiment of the principle of representation and a vital connection between people and Parliament, and it is important that young people have the opportunity to meet with them and understand the work they do.



With that in mind, we developed the youth engagement toolkit for parliamentarians to connect with young people in their constituencies. This was launched on the 21 March 2018 to coincide with the announcement of the inaugural National Democracy Week awards (see Annex A).

When developing this resource we consulted with young people aged 13 to 16 to understand the common gaps in their knowledge, and asked how they would like parliamentarians to engage with them. We also convened a group of cross-party parliamentarians to share their experiences of what worked well when working with young people and what they would like to see in a resource of this kind. As a result the toolkit met the needs of both intended audiences, being of practical use to parliamentarians and providing relevant insights from young people.

The toolkit is full of ideas to help teach young people about the important role parliamentarians play in our society. It contains short activities that introduce the key principles of our democracy and how it functions. The resource is not designed to replicate the excellent work that parliamentarians already undertake in this area. It aims to provide useful tools that can provoke conversations with young people, and enhance current engagements.

Every MP has now received a copy of this resource, and it is available to peers on request. We are now evaluating the success of resource, and will look into whether and how it could be improved in the future.

### Democracy Ambassadors

One of the key insights of our work to develop the Democratic Engagement Plan was that peer-to-peer engagement was likely to be an effective approach to promote knowledge of democracy and democratic participation with young people. They are often best placed to talk to their peers as they understand current issues which are important to them. They also know how to inspire people their age to use their voices and make a difference, whether through community action or by exercising their right to vote when they turn 18.

In partnership with the youth charity Young Citizens, we have developed a training programme that teaches young people about democracy and how it relates to their lives. Youth groups, youth councils and schools across England can apply to take part in the programme. Participating groups are sent copies of materials on a monthly basis, which cover a range of different areas in our democracy. These include the importance of voting, how laws are made, how political parties work, and examples of inspiring individuals who have brought about change in their communities.



The programme aims to train 1,000 young people to become Democracy Ambassadors. Once ambassadors have completed their training, they are each expected to go out and talk to 100 of their peers about how they can get involved in democracy, potentially creating a virtual network of young people who are equipped with the knowledge of UK democracy and how to be an active democratically engaged citizen. The programme is particularly aimed at those who are least likely to be engaged in our democracy and there is a focus on recruiting between 15 and 25% of the cohort from young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, around 14% from ethnic minority backgrounds, and 3% who are disabled.

Young Citizens will complete an in-depth evaluation of the programme in partnership with the London School of Economics, to understand whether the programme has successfully met its aims. If deemed to be successful, we will consider the ways in which we can expand this programme in the future.

### Women's suffrage secondary schools resource

We developed a secondary schools resource for 13 to 16 year olds which was launched on 21 November 2018 to coincide with the centenary of the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act which allowed women to stand for Parliament. In partnership with the Historical Association and the Association for Citizenship Teaching the online resource aims to increase knowledge of the history of the suffrage movement. We want schools to use the knowledge base to improve pupils' understanding of UK democracy and how they can participate in our democratic processes. This work will extend teachers' existing work through the National Curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 in history and citizenship. The resource is called 'Women's Suffrage: History and Citizenship Resources for Schools'. It is a free online interactive resource which will include films, articles and podcasts.<sup>4</sup> It can be found at [www.suffrageresources.org.uk](http://www.suffrageresources.org.uk)



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4 Womens Suffrage, History and citizenship resources for schools, launched 21 November, 2018.

Our aim is for 800 state-maintained schools to use the resource in the first year and for over 2,000 state maintained schools to be signed up and teaching their students about the history of suffrage in five years' time.

To measure its success the Historical Association will use online survey tools with students and qualitative interviews with teachers to understand the value of this resource. It will also establish if there is desire and need for more formal education in schools around our democratic processes.

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Find out more at [design102.co.uk](https://design102.co.uk)  
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