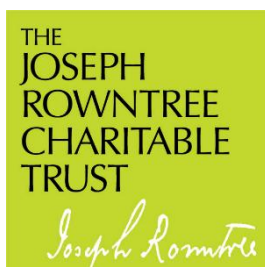




**Response of Democratise Ltd  
to  
The Speakers Commission on Digital  
Democracy**

**ADDITIONAL  
EVIDENCE**



Backing from  
**nominettrust**

[www.nominettrust.org.uk](http://www.nominettrust.org.uk)

[www.digitaldemocracy.org.uk](http://www.digitaldemocracy.org.uk)

Company No: 6911272

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# **Introduction and Foreword by Jonathan Elmer, Director of Democratiser Ltd**

This further submission of evidence to the Digital Democracy Commission is intended to compliment my initial submission and focusses on a small number of issues that are emerging as of importance to the wider consideration of Digital Democracy.

The Digital Democracy platform received funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and then the NOMINET Trust to cover costs associated with its development, piloting and testing. The platform is now complete and associated funding has consequently ceased.

The platform was developed over a number of years in close cooperation with the Durham MP Roberta Blackman Woods and this enabled development of functionality specifically designed to help MPs work alongside their constituents. Roberta's contribution to platform development was extensive and invaluable.

The Digital Democracy platform, unlike other web based tools, is not designed to facilitate confrontational lobbying of MPs. Instead it aims to enable MPs and their constituents to work alongside each other – maximising MPs' ability to target communications to the very people that care about issues within their constituency. Digital Democracy aims to strengthen relationships between MPs and their constituents through enabling discussion and wider appreciation of the complexity of issues.

# List of MPs that have made use of Digital Democracy during piloting

During national piloting of the Digital Democracy Platform in 2011/12 the following MPs made use of the platform to express their position on issues that had been raised by their constituents:

John Randall MP  
Caroline Lucas MP  
Peter Bottomley MP  
Roberta Blackman-Woods MP  
Toby Perkins MP  
Cho Onwurah MP  
Alan Beith MP  
Phil Wilson MP  
Catherine McKinnel MP  
Andy Slaughter MP  
David Burrows MP  
Nick Morgam MP  
Gordon Henderson MP  
Nick Dubois MP  
James Morris MP  
Ian Mearns MP

In addition, the platform has been used by MEPs including:  
Fiona Hall MEP

The platform has also been used by Councillors including:  
Councillor Corry Cashman  
Councillor Bob Ayer  
Councillor Mark Springett

All responses can be viewed at <http://www.digitaldemocracy.org.uk/results/>

## **Key issues addressed by the Digital Democracy Platform**

- Reducing the burden of Email correspondence

Most of the online lobbying and campaigning platforms that have come to prominence over the last few years seek to simplify means through which constituents can directly lobby their MP and generally include a single button that auto generates a personalised Email to an MP. This can result in a high volume of Emails arriving at MPs offices and places a considerable burden on their resources.

The Digital Democracy platform has been designed and tested in an attempt to turn this issue 'on its head'. Anyone is able to initiate an issue on the DDem platform and this auto generates an associated debating chamber. Those engaging with the issue through entering into the debate, or registering their support or opposition are able to click a 'Tell my MP' button. A link is then sent to the MP who is then able to make just one response on the DDem platform that appears at the top of the debate as an official response. The DDem platform then auto-generates a message that is Emailed to all supporters, opposers and discussion participants with a link bringing them directly to the MPs response. In effect, with just one response the MP is able to send their written response, and indeed any other information, to however many people have engaged with the issue. The MP is able to target their communications to precisely the constituents with an interest in the issue.

This approach reduces the number of individual correspondences that need to be made over the same issue, saving MPs time and enabling them to increase their profile in the constituency.

In addition, MPs are able to rank all issues created by their constituents in accordance with the 'support' registered for each issue. This enables MPs to target their involvement to issues that larger numbers of their constituents care about.

- Stimulating a learned debate – a virtual debating chamber

Each time a site user enters a new issue into the Digital Democracy Platform a new virtual debating chamber is automatically created relating specifically to the issue. This enables site users to post messages, technical information, links, and to generally discuss and learn about the issue before making a decision to click either the 'support' or 'oppose' button.

In development of the platform, we considered this facility as fundamental to the wider success of a democratic forum as it enables constituents to develop a fuller understanding of often complex situations before deciding to oppose or support.

- Enabling MPs to work with constituents

As previously identified, most popular campaigning platforms (Change.org, 38 Degrees) are designed to facilitate petitioning of MPs and to enable people to hold their MPs to account with regards a desired cause of action. Such platforms are not spatially sensitive and so an MP is not unable to determine if the correspondence comes from inside their constituency. The adversarial nature of this approach is not conducive to the construction of a positive relationships based on trust and joint working. In development of DDem, guided by feedback from Roberta Blackman-Woods MP who participated in testing, we have put considerable effort into design of platform functionality that enables MPs to work alongside their constituents. MPs are able to make use of discussion forums, post official responses, and work through an issue in cooperation with their own constituents. This enhances both participative and representative democracy, increasing overall levels of trust between constituents and their elected representative.

## Recommendations

1. Rather than investing in the creation of new web based democratic platforms, the commission should instead conduct a review of existing platforms to identify if they are 'fit for purpose' considering:
  - Platform capabilities for enhancing representative and participative democracy
  - Platform capability for enabling MPs to work cooperatively and positively with their specific constituents
  - Extent to which platforms are 'geo-sensitive'
  - Mechanisms through which platforms reduce the burden of excessive Email correspondence
  - Whether platforms are able to facilitate engagement of all UK residents in local and national democratic debate and prioritisation of issues
  - Extent to which democratic platforms and existing social networking platforms are integrated with each other
  - Whether governance arrangements for bodies that administrate platforms include the objective of enhancing democracy and ensure transparency and political impartiality
2. Based on the outcome of the 'fit for purpose' review, the commission should consider disseminating advice to MPs regarding which platforms are 'fit for purpose' with regards facilitating online democratic dialogue between MPs and their constituents.
3. The commission should consider inviting IPSA to present a list of Democratic Forums to all MPs that have been verified as fit for purpose, and inform all MPs that the membership fees involved with their use can be claimed as a parliamentary expense.

The latter of these recommendations would enable the generation of a revenue stream to sustain delivery of the platform.