



YEARS of
mySociety

mySociety

Impact Report

2023

Two decades of mass engagement with democracy

20 years ago...

The year is 2003. The internet is young, and exciting new online innovations are emerging in every sector. There are new, digital ways to shop, to date, to publish...but wait!

Something's missing.

Where is democracy in all of this? Shouldn't we also be using online tools to interact with our elected representatives, to follow Parliament more easily, to engage meaningfully with politics at the click of a button or two?

This frustration was the driving force that brought together a small group of developers and enthusiasts way back in the early 2000s. They built upon earlier work from friends and associates, developing websites that showed how the internet could be harnessed to usher in a new age of digital democracy.

That small group became, of course, mySociety. Back then, no-one was looking ahead 20 years — it was all about meeting the needs of the time with exciting new digital tools. But here we are in 2023, still vital and curious, continuing to innovate.

Our core mission might have remained constant, as has our belief in the potential of the internet to forge a more inclusive, engaged society. But in some significant ways we're not the same as we were back then: it has been by adapting, growing and learning that mySociety has, happily, succeeded in remaining relevant while all around us has changed.

It's no exaggeration to say that we've been the catalyst for some of that change — in successive governments, on the ever-evolving web, and in countries around the world.

We hope you'll enjoy the ride as we look back on mySociety's 20 years of facilitating mass engagement through everyday online democracy tools... and then pick up a crystal ball for a glimpse at the path ahead.

“We recognised that the internet was a two way conversation medium. In the 90s, politics was a broadcast medium.”

Owen Blacker, early and longtime mySociety trustee

“mySociety, the UK's premier purchaser of web domains consisting of combinations of the words ‘Them/They’, ‘Write’, ‘Work’, ‘For’, ‘To’ and ‘You’...”

NTK newsletter, 2006

Today...

Millions of people in the UK and worldwide have used mySociety's services to engage in democracy:

There are **1 million public requests** for information on WhatDoTheyKnow (→ pages 3-4).

We've **changed the way** that institutions interact with citizens (→ pages 9-10).

Our code has been **used by other organisations**, bringing benefits to countries all around the world (→ pages 11-12).

People have sent **more than 3.25 million messages** to their elected representatives through WriteToThem (→ pages 15-16).

TheyWorkForYou has sent **tens of millions of alerts** to help people follow their MP or chosen topic in Parliament (→ pages 15-16).

We've published **thousands of pieces of data** that help people act on climate change (→ pages 17-18).

“Cheap and cheerful open web technology, tipping the relationship between people and government, in favour of the people.”

Michael Cross describes mySociety in The Guardian

We've shared knowledge with **thousands of civic tech practitioners** in a worldwide civic tech community (→ pages 23-26)

And people have reported **4.4 million neighbourhood issues** to their local authorities through FixMyStreet (→ pages 27-28).

It's been a long journey

We've launched scores of projects over mySociety's lifetime, and we've taken many twists and turns as an organisation. The mySociety you see today isn't the starry-eyed group that emerged back in 2003; nor is it the growing non-profit that you would have seen if you'd checked in five, ten or 15 years later.

But every website we launched, every path we went down has led us to where we are now: an established, skilled organisation with a unique

mission. In 2023, we stand as a vital part of the UK's democratic landscape, and an ally to civic tech organisations across the world. Thanks to all we've been through, we have unparalleled experience in building digital tools for the society we live in — and confidence that we'll continue to refine, iterate and develop services for the society that's just round the corner.

Find out more about our plans for the future, on pages 34-39.

1996

Formation of UK Citizens Online Democracy (UKCOD)

A small group come together to explore the democratic potential of the internet.



1999

UKCOD falls dormant



Information belongs to the people

Since 2008, **WhatDoTheyKnow** has shown people how to use the Freedom of Information Act, publishing their requests and the responses they receive. We've normalised the act of asking public bodies for information, and in the process, created a massive online archive of data that is free to all.

→ whatdotheyknow.com

In 2011 we packaged up the open source software that runs WhatDoTheyKnow and called it **Alaveteli**, after the birthplace of Access to Information. This made it possible for anyone, anywhere, to run an FOI site. Thanks to our outreach, support and networking via our AlaveteliCon conferences and online events, people in around 50 jurisdictions around the world have done just that.

Tough information regimes, and the demands of managing a project mean that some of them run for a little time and then close; but a good 20+ are still flourishing.

→ alaveteli.org

This year sees WhatDoTheyKnow's 15th anniversary, and is about to see the processing of our **millionth public request**. There was enthusiastic uptake from the site's beginning, and it has grown exponentially: by 2012, 100K requests had been made through the site; in 2015 the number stood at quarter of a million and by 2018, this had doubled to 500,000 requests.

In 2023, requests come in at an average rate of 364 per day.

1M

public requests on
WhatDoTheyKnow

300K

requests made across
all Alaveteli sites

200M

views of information on
the site since its launch

40K

authorities listed on
WhatDoTheyKnow

2003

➤ Government should set up a 'civic hacking fund'

Article by James Crabtree suggests government should set up 'civic hacking fund'. It inspires UKCOD's revival.

2003

➤ ➤ Tom Steinberg sets up mySociety as UKCOD project ➤

In 2017, we launched **WhatDoTheyKnow Pro**, a service for professional users of FOI which has helped hundreds of journalists, campaigners and researchers to keep track of requests during large scale data-investigations.

WhatDoTheyKnow Pro has helped our users bring to the public eye crucial stories, like the universities receiving funding from major oil companies; the number of disabled people awaiting adaptations in their homes; and the 'postcode lottery' determining eligibility for self-isolation support grants during the pandemic.

→ mysociety.org/darkmoney

→ mysociety.org/disabledpeople

→ mysociety.org/covidisolation

We're building the **ATI Network**, a knowledge-sharing community of people who run Access To Information services across Europe. Our research and longtime experience has shown that no matter which country and what type of jurisdiction you're operating within, there are common challenges to learn from. We can all benefit from sharing our stories, our setbacks and our triumphs.

Many thanks!

We couldn't run WhatDoTheyKnow without our team of specialist and enthusiastic **volunteers**, who do everything from answering users' queries about FOI, to keeping the site running smoothly. Over the years there have been many remarkable people who have given up their time and energy, just because they believe in the value of transparency and the importance of making access to information simple and unremarkable. Thanks to them, it can be, and we are indebted to them all.

27

Alaveteli sites
around the world

WhatDoTheyKnow contains a LOT
of data, all in public:

89K

Excel spreadsheets

660K

PDF documents

4M

emails



2003

James Cronin becomes Chair

2004

TheyWorkForYou launches

But it's not yet a mySociety project!

mySociety's transparency services enable people everywhere to harness the power of information

Getting the law changed in Scotland

The **Give Them Time** campaign used WhatDoTheyKnow to gather evidence; and that evidence helped change the law. From this year on, children in Scotland who aren't quite ready to go to school will benefit, with access to another year of funding for nursery care.

"WhatDoTheyKnow had an absolutely invaluable impact on the campaign," said founder Patricia Anderson, when we spoke to her back in 2021. They used the site to gather data on the number of deferrals across Scotland.

"We realised from the outset that to be taken seriously, we needed hard evidence of national disparities rather than anecdotes, so that's when we started submitting FOI requests to all local authorities across the country.

"This, as well as the actual data provided by the FOI responses, enabled us to successfully lobby the Scottish Government to change the law."

From August 2023, any four-year-old deferring their primary one start will automatically be entitled to a free further year of early learning and childcare.

→ mysociety.org/schoollaw

"WhatDoTheyKnow is an absolutely phenomenal tool to have freely available. It helps the public to use FOI legislation in the way it was intended without fear."

Patricia Anderson,
Give Them Time



2005

WriteToThem launches

2005

Launch of PledgeBank

'I'll do this thing, but only if other people do it too.'

Mapping council property sales across the whole country

Sold from Under You, a 2019 project from **The Bureau of Investigative Journalism** (TBIJ), revealed how much publicly-owned property was sold off by councils across England as a response to government austerity measures. The investigation required a significant amount of data collection via two rounds of FOI requests to 353 councils, complex work that was lightened by use of our WhatDoTheyKnow Pro service.

Stories were run in multiple news outlets, and the project was shortlisted for the Open Data Award and the Sigma Award.

Gareth Davies from TBIJ told us: “Staying on top of more than 700 requests would have proven very challenging. WhatDoTheyKnow Pro made it a lot easier: managing so many FOI requests would have been much harder by email.”

There were tangible results. This investigation led to the Public Accounts Committee setting up an inquiry into the sale of public land. Several councils halted their property investment policies after the coverage revealed how much they had borrowed to fund the purchases.

→ mysociety.org/bureaujournalism

THE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

“I don’t think I would have achieved that without WhatDoTheyKnow Pro and, as a result, the investigation and interactive map we created would not have been as comprehensive.”

Gareth Davies, The Bureau of Investigative Journalism

2005

▶ **Launch of HearFromYourMP**

Lets constituents tell their MPs they want to hear from them, and MPs to send updates in return.

2006

▶ ▶ **mySociety adopts TheyWorkForYou** ▶

When Alaveteli sites collaborate, they can uncover crossborder information

Getting the numbers on missing children

Many projects around the world are run on our Alaveteli codebase, each empowering their own country's citizens to access information. This is no small achievement in itself — but when they come together, their potential is greater still.

Lost In Europe (LIE) was an extraordinary crossborder investigation, involving 24 journalists who filed Freedom of Information requests in 12 different countries. They were researching the numbers of unaccompanied child migrants who go missing at borders — cases in which, sadly, the subjects are often in danger of disappearing into the world of crime, human trafficking and prostitution.

We introduced LIE, who were working out of the Netherlands, to FOI projects in Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Hungary, Belgium, Greece — and of course to the WhatDoTheyKnow team here in the UK.

These experts were able to help them navigate the individual requirements of the FOI regime in each country, pointing toward the relevant authority and translating or refining the wording of the request being made.

The Alaveteli network contacts were indispensable for their ability to answer questions about their local regimes: what law the requests

would go under, what authority to request to, whether people from outside the country were legally eligible to make requests, what the deadlines were for responses and what recourse could be taken if these weren't met.

The information gathered from the various in-country contacts was put together with the preliminary research LIE had done into the availability of documents on child immigration numbers, and the entire investigation was published on an explorer website, along with case studies — and where further investigations continue to be published.

For this far-reaching and important work, LIE won the Investigative Journalism for Europe (IJ4EU) Impact Award 2021.

→ mysociety.org/lostineurope

“We looked at all the Alaveteli platforms and in the end decided to use as many of them as possible.”

Liset Hamming, Lost In Europe project

2006

Work starts on ‘travel time’ maps

2006

Open call for suggestions

The winner: ‘a site for sending FOI requests’

Information released via FOI exerts pressure on institutions

Changing government policy on CCTV equipment

Hikvision is the most common provider of CCTV equipment in the UK, but vulnerabilities have been identified that could be exploited by hackers — and breaches have been noted where cameras were found to be ‘communicating with China’.

Civil liberties campaigners **Big Brother Watch** (BBW) surveyed the use of Hikvision CCTV cameras in the UK, submitting more than 4,500 FOI requests through WhatDoTheyKnow Pro to a range of public bodies — secondary schools, FE colleges, universities, police forces, NHS Trusts, central government departments, the House of Commons and more.

BBW’s Head of Research & Investigations Jake Hurfurt said, “WhatDoTheyKnow’s batch request function and built-in reminders of when it’s time to chase up a response have been useful.” Also helpful was the ability to look at requests others had made in the past, to see what kind of wording had resulted in successful responses.

The campaign got notable results. “We sent our report to MPs and held an event in Parliament. We also got dozens of Parliamentarians to back a pledge to ban Hikvision, and working alongside other NGOs we have been heavily involved in advocacy around a number of Bills to push for this.”

Subsequently, with Oliver Dowden describing them as “current and future possible security risks”, the Chinese cameras were banned from being installed in or on government buildings.

→ mysociety.org/foicctv

“The contact address database is amazing.”

Jake Hurfurt, Big Brother Watch



2006

➤ mySociety builds the petitions website for No 10

2007

➤ ➤ Launch of “Neighbourhood Fix-It” ➤

Soon renamed “FixMyStreet”

mySociety's work brings change to institutions

TheyWorkForYou takes data from Parliament and publishes it in an easy-to-read format. The site has become a fundamental part of the UK's political landscape.

But in its early days, TheyWorkForYou represented a daring act of piracy from its makers. The site scraped Hansard data from the official Parliament website, something that wasn't entirely permissible under crown copyright.

Thanks to mySociety campaigning alongside others such as the Open Knowledge Foundation, transparency and availability of government data became a core topic in the run-up to the 2010 General Election. This resulted in the creation of the Open Government licence and the data.gov.uk portal.

In 2006, mySociety made the **petitions website for Number 10**, opening up the potential for anyone to make, and gather support for, a suggestion for change. The site ran on our open source code until it was replaced after the 2010 election, having gathered a total of 12 million signatures across a range of topics including proposals for road pricing, to a posthumous apology to Alan Turing. It represented a sea change for the country, normalising the concept of direct democracy through the internet among millions of UK citizens.

In 2007 Ed Mayo and Tom Steinberg were commissioned to report on the potential of public data for the Cabinet Office. As the Guardian reported, the resulting review and set of recommendations, published as **The Power of Information**, "had the web 2.0 philosophy ringing through Whitehall", and fed directly into government strategy.



2007

Creation of The Power of Information review...

...by Tom Steinberg & Ed Mayo. Advising the Cabinet Office on the potential of public data.

2008

WhatDoTheyKnow launches

Two of mySociety's founders, Mike Bracken and Tom Loosemore, along with others from mySociety's circles, went on to shape the way the nation interfaces with government services at **GDS**. They took everything they knew about online usability and applied it to everyday tasks like renewing passports and paying taxes online, making them smoother and faster for everyone.

In 2013 mySociety was commissioned to conduct a strategic **review of Parliament's digital service provision**. Through interviews with staff and a public consultation, we arrived at two topline recommendations, both acted upon: Parliament employed a Head of Digital and consolidated its digital functions into a single office.

WhatDoTheyKnow's **publication of FOI requests and responses online** is well recognised these days — so much so that it's easy to forget how much pushback there was from authorities in the early days. Over the years, WhatDoTheyKnow has fought for — and won — the right for email addresses to be considered legitimate forms of contact; and the right for FOI responses to be made public. We've also stood firm in our support for transparency, pushing back on recurring attempts from successive governments to erode it.

Since our early days, we've advocated for **open, structured, joined-up public data**. And sometimes, where it doesn't exist, we've created it. Like our MapIt API, which takes any geographical point as an input and delivers back the boundaries it sits within — and which underpins any number of 'find out who your MP is' websites (including the Scottish Parliament's). Or the 2025 constituency boundaries, one dataset bringing together each separate UK nation's output. Our current research and policy work around fragmented data advocates for the need for better standardised data — especially in the face of the climate emergency.

In a quiet, slow-burning revolution, mySociety's services have **changed the way authorities work**, making transparency and accountability the norm. Thanks to FixMyStreet and WhatDoTheyKnow, authorities have become accustomed to responding to street reports and FOI requests online. TheyWorkForYou showed Parliament how to make its data more accessible, with many features that we pioneered having now been adopted on the official Hansard site.

You can get a full overview of the new challenges facing us, as we continue work to prise open Parliament, in our Repowering Democracy series.

→ mysociety.org/repoweringdemocracy



“We had to take the risk of publishing without a licence because we believe everyone has a right to reproduce what their MP has been saying in Parliament.”

Francis Irving, early Developer at mySociety



2008

➤ **Launch of ReportEmptyHomes**

Crowdsourcing unused properties as an answer to housing shortages.

2009

➤ ➤ **We campaign against MPs being able to hide expenses** ➤

It's successful!

Our code has been used by organisations across the world

87

Projects based on our code over 20 years

Europe

44 Projects

26 running today

Asia

12 Projects

4 running today

Africa

13 Projects

8 running today

Oceania

6 Projects

4 running today

The cultures in which FOI, FixMyStreet and Parliamentary Monitoring sites are being run vary greatly around the world - but we can all learn from common challenges and solutions.

When mySociety's open source code and data is picked up and used by others, the benefit is amplified.

North America
2 Projects

1 running today

Alaveteli

See the list of projects at
alaveteli.org/deployments/

FixMyStreet

See the list of projects at
fixmystreet.org/sites/

South America
10 Projects

5 running today

Our services bring democracy into everyone's reach

TheyWorkForYou has been making it easier to follow Parliament since 2004. It lets you **search Hansard**. It gives every contribution to debates **its own URL**, so it can be easily linked to. If you're **not sure who your MP is**, you only have to know your own postcode to find out. You can **subscribe** so that every time your MP votes or speaks, you get an email — or subscribe to any keyword, as well. As a non-partisan third party, we can **describe and summarise MPs' votes** in a way that Parliament can't, making the actions of our representatives more accessible and transparent. And over time, we've added **all the devolved parliaments** (most recently the **Senedd**) as well as the **London Assembly**.

→ theyworkforyou.com

We originally created **TheyWorkForYou's** email alerts to make it easy for everyone to follow their MP's activity. In time, it became clear that alerts are also extremely useful to other sectors of society. A recent survey revealed that charities, campaigners, researchers, journalists and even staff in MPs' offices use **TheyWorkForYou** alerts to track mentions of topics in which they have an interest. A 2016 GovLab report estimated an economic impact of **TheyWorkForYou** to the third sector, on time saved alone, of £70 million a year.

50K

representatives in
the WriteToThem
database

2,645

people and organisations
subscribed to
TheyWorkForYou's API

2009

ScenicOrNot launched

Crowdsources a beauty rating for every square mile of the country.

2009

Launch of Mapumental

It's what those 2006 maps became.

WriteToThem does three things: it tells you who your elected representatives are, lists what each of them is responsible for, and makes it easy to contact them. The key thing is that, in order to access this information, **all you need is your postcode**. Because, although MPs and councillors now typically have their own websites, social media and email addresses, none of that helps if you don't know who they are or how to search for them.

Our **research team** looks at digital democracy through two lenses: one global, and the other very local. Through the years, we've collected evidence on the ways in which civic tech is put to service by governments and organisations around the world, publishing papers on topics such as participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies and public engagement. At the same time we've been eager to understand the impact of our own services: who uses them, and to what effect? This two-pronged approach has led to a collection of specialised knowledge that is freely open to all who can benefit from it.

→ research.mysociety.org

We're partnering with the organisation **Black Thrive**, whose work addresses the inequalities that negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of Black people. With them, we've developed a dashboard that shows the data around Stop and Search, and then encourages residents to use it as a basis when they contact their MP — through our WriteToThem service, which is handily linked up. Or, if they want to know more, they can do so via an FOI request at WhatDoTheyKnow.

→ pages.mysociety.org/stop-and-search

1 in 3

UK adults have
heard of
TheyWorkForYou

3.25M

emails sent to
representatives
on **WriteToThem**



2010

➤ **Fiksgatami, a FixMyStreet for Norway, launches**

The first project to use mySociety's open source code.

2010

➤ ➤ **MapIt becomes available for public use**

A points-to-boundaries API.

mySociety's Democracy services open the doors of power to individuals and organisations

Campaigning against payday loans with WriteToThem

When people hit problems in managing their finances, they can turn to the UK charity **StepChange** for help. StepChange also campaigns for debt reform, and in 2016 a Parliamentary debate provided them with an opportunity to lobby against payday loans — short term loans with extremely high interest rates that have caused problems for many.

A good number of StepChange's clients have direct experience of the harm such loans can do, and the charity knew that putting their voices in front of MPs before they went in to vote would be the best way to bring about a change in the law.

Peer Lawther, StepChange's Digital Content Manager, explained: "We wanted our clients to talk with their MPs about their experiences of debt. We knew that there was a Private Members' Bill going through Parliament, aiming to clamp down on bad practice around these types of short term loans, and we wanted to see if our clients' stories of problem debt could lend weight to their MPs' decision to vote."

StepChange added WriteToThem's free open source code to their website, styling it to fit in with their own branding. As Peer explained, more than 1,000 supporters responded to their campaign and wrote to their MPs to explain in their own words how payday loans had affected them. Personal testimonies are always effective, and these direct messages will have provided invaluable context for MPs.

→ mysociety.org/wttc campaigners

"There was initially a discussion of trying to find lists of MPs' email addresses, but that was quickly dropped when we found a third party had created something already."

Peer Lawther, StepChange

2010

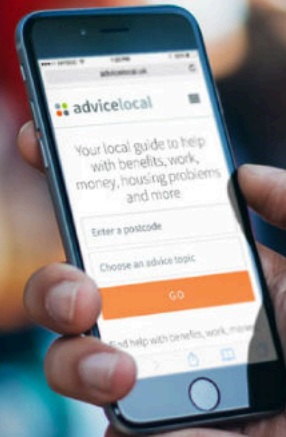
➤ A New Zealand site launches, using our WhatDoTheyKnow software

2011

➤ ➤ mySociety people take jobs that'll see them tackle the digital transformation of government services ➤

Also known as GDS.

Using MapIt to help people understand their right to benefits



The Universal Credit system replaced many other welfare benefits in the UK. It was introduced over a period of six years, via a phased roll-out to different areas of the country — and so, understandably, there was some confusion at any one time over which benefits applied where.

The charity **Lasa**, working with the **Low Incomes Tax Reform Group**, built an online tool, UniversalCreditInfo, to help people see what they were entitled to. Behind the scenes, a key part of it was our MapIt API, which enabled the tool to take a postcode as input and then display information about which benefits applied in that area — and, crucially, where to go for advice.

Lasa also provided the tool as a widget that could be placed onto any website, helping with their remit to support organisations in the delivery of social welfare law advice to the disadvantaged communities they serve.

The Universal Credit rollout is now complete, so Lasa have replaced the tool with more general information about eligibility — but for those six years, it was crucial in providing clear information that couldn't be accessed in the same format elsewhere.

→ mysociety.org/universalcredit

“Advice workers are already expressing their gratitude for the fact that they can have this information at their fingertips.”

Lasa

2011

► FixMyStreet site launches in Sweden

2011

► ► Launch of FixMyTransport

Euston, we have a problem.

We provide data that enables informed climate action

Make no mistake: democratic institutions can play a major part in solving the climate emergency — **particularly at the local level.** Decarbonising means changing how we build houses; how we generate our energy; how we travel and how we organise our towns and cities — and these all sit, to a greater or lesser extent, in the power of our local authorities.

How can mySociety help? Data, democracy and development are all vital to the climate response — and these are areas where we can bring real expertise. But more and more, we're not seeing **climate as a separate strand of our work:** climate is a democracy issue; it's a transparency issue and it's a community issue. It's woven through everything we do.

In 2020, the UK's first **Climate Assembly** was commissioned by Parliament. It brought together more than 100 people from all walks of life, and of all shades of opinion, to discuss how the UK should achieve Net Zero by 2050. mySociety provided the digital platform for this major piece of participatory democracy.

We've also researched into citizens' assemblies more widely, including guidance on the best use of digital tools, and compiling a dataset of all assemblies across the country.

→ climateassembly.uk

→ research.mysociety.org/section/climate

393

councils represented on CAPE, of which 322 have a Climate Action Plan

89

different potential pieces of climate action on which councils are scored, for the Scorecards project

4K

responses from councils to FOI requests as part of the information gathering for the Scorecards project

2011

Launch of the Alaveteli platform

An easier way for others to run FOI sites on our software.

2011

Sites in the EU, Kosovo and Brazil launch, using the Alaveteli platform

In 2022, Climate Emergency UK worked with experts in the field and a huge cohort of trained volunteers, to score each council's Climate Action Plan across the 40+ critical points an effective plan should include. The results were published as **Council Climate Scorecards**, with technical support from mySociety, so that topline and more granular data could be understood by all. Councils who are weak in a particular area could learn from those who were doing well; and the public had a tool by which they could measure their own councils' ambitions. This year, CE UK have published updated Scorecards, this time assessing councils on climate action.

In 2022, we conducted a series of prototyping weeks, taking a condensed design approach. These helped us uncover behaviours and challenges in an area, imagine solutions, then build and test an actionable next step for each. We invited others to join us as we discussed and created trial solutions around topics like council procurement, and energy efficiency in the private rental sector. From these weeks of intense experimentation, two projects emerged as leaders. The results have been the **Local Intelligence Hub**, a tool that gives climate organisations the ability to use data to make local engagement, influencing and organising around climate action more focused, effective and sustainable; and **Neighbourhood Warmth**, which pulls a little inspiration from our now retired conditional commitment tool PledgeBank, encouraging neighbours to explore energy efficiency improvements together.

→ localintelligencehub.com

→ mysociety.org/climate/climate-prototyping

We shouldn't be the only ones providing joined-up open datasets to help citizens, campaigners and governments themselves to tackle the climate emergency. Why can't they be joined up at source? That's the thinking behind our advocacy for better, more standardised public data around climate.

→ research.mysociety.org/publications/unlocking-fragmented-data

57%

of visitors to CAPE are finding out about climate plans for the place where they live

22%

of visitors work around climate, either in local government or elsewhere



2011

ReportEmptyHomes becomes an app...

...to accompany a Channel 4 series. The Great British Property Scandal, presented by George Clarke.

2012

WhatDoTheyKnow processes its 100,000th request

Supporting the local response to the climate emergency

Using CAPE to find counterparts

As councils face the massive challenge of overseeing a transition to Net Zero, they'll need to reskill both their workers and their residents, bringing on board new, low carbon ways to tackle a multitude of daily operations. This is no small task — and it will be easier if councils support and learn from one another.

Luke McCarthy, Senior Green Skills Specialist at Surrey County Council, oversees green job growth across Surrey, ensuring they have the right green skills provision in place to meet employers' needs, and that local residents know about these.

Luke told us how CAPE and Scorecards have been useful in helping with these aims: "The sites helped me find other councils doing good stuff on skills training for residents, and I discovered some example initiatives which we can either bring to Surrey or at least learn from."

"I've contacted councils I identified as doing interesting things on green skills training for residents. I've had a call with someone from one council who was very generous with his time and sharing of information. And another contact has shared some research reports."

"These conversations reassured me that our current thinking on key sectors and issues aligned with their focus and areas of work! I was also able to gain insights into how they'd approached understanding the green skills requirements across different sectors."

Additionally, Luke says he picked up new ideas on how to promote roles in the low carbon/green economy to residents who might not be aware of them: "We are already planning to take steps to improve the provision of careers education, advice and guidance around the green economy."

→ mysociety.org/capecouncil

"The insights from other councils certainly speed up how quickly we will be able to develop solutions, or show that we can do something of higher quality."

Luke McCarthy, Surrey County Council

2012

WhatDoTheyKnow volunteer gives evidence to a Justice Select Committee about FOI

2012

The first AlaveteliCon

A conference for people running sites on Alaveteli.

Informing research on fair transition

Alice Garvey's PhD considers how different regions of the UK can reduce their emissions in a way that is fair, and that recognises the different abilities for councils across the country to decarbonise. Her research reflects both the need for rapid climate change mitigation at scale, and the need to level the UK's significant regional inequalities.

Alice evaluated the potential contribution to Net Zero in the UK, if all local authorities met their emissions reduction commitments.

The project also involved quantifying the capability of different councils to decarbonise, showing that some areas face systemic barriers to developing and delivering climate plans. The UK has exceptional levels of regional inequality, and the changes that are required during the low carbon transition are only likely to exacerbate old, or introduce new, inequalities.

Alice found the Net Zero target dates for councils on the Scorecards site, and used the scores as part of an indicator framework that suggested how ambitious different councils were being, comparing this to an indicator of capability.

Her work will feed into the body of evidence needed for us to fully understand, and improve, both the country's decarbonisation and levelling up processes.

→ mysociety.org/emissionsreduction

“The Scorecards made me think more critically about the drivers of these commitments and declarations.”

Alice Garvey, researcher



2012

➤ **Several Alaveteli sites launch...**

...in Spain, Hungary, Uruguay, Australia, Bosnia and the Czech Republic.

2012

➤ ➤ **FixMyStreet Pro launches** ➤

A fully-integrated service for councils.

Democracy, transparency, community and climate are interwoven

Exposing lobbying that sets back the climate agenda

Journalist **Lucas Amin** describes WhatDoTheyKnow Pro as “a total gamechanger.” Using our FOI service for professionals, he has uncovered vital public interest information around river pollution and airlines.

His exposés are frequently picked up by mainstream media: “Requests made via WhatDoTheyKnow Pro have made it into the Times, Guardian, Observer and Mirror this year alone”, says Lucas.

Through the patient application of FOI requests, Lucas has revealed how water companies lobbied against their responsibilities to clean up rivers; that airlines’ submissions to government contested whether vapour trails contribute to the climate impact of flights; and how airlines lobbied for the cut in Air Passenger Duty on domestic flights, as brought in by Rishi Sunak in the 2023 spring budget.

It’s easy to see the link between the requests Lucas has made, and facts that must be exposed in order for us to have a fully-informed public debate. Without the right to request such documentation, the public would be completely unaware of the type of lobbying going on behind Whitehall doors. This is the true value of FOI.

→ mysociety.org/environmentalinformation

“If you use FOI, WhatDoTheyKnow Pro is the only way to go.”

Lucas Amin, journalist



2012-3

► **Parliamentary information sites launch in Ghana, Nigeria and Zimbabwe**

On our TheyWorkForYou-inspired Pombola codebase.

2012

► **Bafta and Emmy nominations and a Broadcast Digital Award**

For our work on the Great British Property Scandal.

Campaigning for local energy

Power for People are campaigning for small-scale renewable energy schemes, owned and run by people in their local communities.

Corinna Miller explained: “We’re in the midst of an energy price crisis. It’s never been more obvious that we need cheap, clean, home-produced energy.”

Right now, provision is limited to a few big monopolies with profits disappearing into shareholders’ pockets; **Power for People** advocate clearing the path for small sustainable energy projects, with profits that would stay local.

Power for People’s website sends supporters to TheyWorkForYou to find out who their MP is, then provides a list to check against and discover whether or not they already support their aims. Once you know what their stance is, you’re in a far better position to write a persuasive message to your MP, says Corinna, and WriteToThem is the final step on that path.

“We highly encourage back-and-forth communication, so that the MP understands that the campaign is not going to go away until action is taken at a parliamentary level. People care about this issue, and we want MPs to know that.”

Power For People already have the support of 322 MPs from all parties — a figure which includes 128 Conservatives — along with 110 local authorities and county councils.

“Our main call to action continues to be for people to write to their MP, which is why WriteToThem is such a key tool for us.”

→ mysociety.org/massmobilisation

Giving people the data they need to understand climate in their communities

The Climate Tool, an online offering from **Friends of the Earth** (FOE), invites people to tap in their postcode and then shows them how their local authority is performing on a number of measures. These include renewable energy, transport, housing, waste and tree cover.

To perform this magic, the tool uses our MapIt API to discover where the user lives, then surfaces data around key issues that are impacting the climate in their local authority area.

FOE’s aim was to create an engagement opportunity that would drive new and existing supporters to speak up locally — because one of the key drivers of climate action is for communities to put pressure on their local authorities to urgently reduce emissions.

“We collated data from approximately 50 different external datasets”, explained FOE’s Joachim Farncombe. “It was all pulled from open data sources, mostly released by the authorities themselves”. When combined with MapIt, the tool can pull out the data that is personal to the user.

→ mysociety.org/friendsoftheearth

“MapIt has been invaluable. Without it, we’d be unable to connect the user’s location with the datasets we’d collated.”

Joachim Farncombe, Friends of the Earth

2013

FOI Register launches

Software to help councils cut down on duplicate requests.

2013

Poplus founded by mySociety and Ciudadano Inteligente in Chile

An open global federation for sharing civic tech.

TICTeC convenes the global civic tech community

The Impacts of Civic Tech conference

In 2015, researchers, funders and practitioners gathered in London for the first **TICTeC - the Impacts of Civic Tech conference**. The field had matured — enough so that ‘civic tech’ had become its widely accepted descriptor — but the concept of assessing actual impact was a new one to many.

TICTeC cemented the belief that producing innovative new digital democracy tools and releasing them into the world isn't enough — you have to measure whether they're actually doing any tangible good — or even harm.

Over the years, TICTeC has built a global community of people and organisations that work in and around civic tech. Until lockdown, we convened annually, in person, to share experience and knowledge. When the pandemic hit, TICTeC quickly set up camp online, running a series of successful shared learning and sub-granting programmes.

We will be returning to in-person events in the coming year, making them hybrid for wider accessibility by all. Whether we see you online or in person, we're looking forward to it! TICTeC has brought us an incredible network of partners, associates and friends — and the learning that, no matter where we are in the world, when we make and run civic tech services, we face essentially the same fundamental challenges.

→ tictec.mysociety.org

2015 TICTeC London

100 attendees from 24 countries



“We can say that the internet has absolutely had a positive effect on civic and political life.”

Keynote:

Dr Shelley Boulianne



“Mistrust is an amazing and almost infinitely renewable civic asset.”

Keynote:

Ethan Zuckerman

2016 TICTeC Barcelona

140 attendees from 29 countries



“Mobile civic tech can create the platform of communication, but by itself it doesn't make a non-responsive government responsive.”

Keynote:

Dr Guy Grossman



“It's really important to understand that digital exclusion exacerbates other exclusions that people experience.”

Keynote:

Helen Milner OBE

2017 TICTeC Florence

150 attendees from 28 countries



"Informed discussions need to be rooted in evidence."

Keynote:
Audrey Tang



"Women sign many more petitions than men, but men are more likely to create petitions."

Keynote:
Tiago Peixoto

2017 TICTeC@Taipei

270 attendees



"Civic technologists can work with government, which is to be encouraged, but there is also a role for civic technologists to be critical of government."

Keynote:
Stephen King

2018 TICTeC Lisbon

160 attendees from 29 countries



"50% of people said that technology had helped them everyday in their daily lives. But only 12% believed it was improving society."

Keynote:
Martha Lane Fox



"Keywords around accountability are both contested terrain, and terrain worth contesting."

Keynote:
Jonathan Fox

TICTeC Local Manchester

100 attendees



"We need to constantly listen harder to residents, to staff, to community groups."

Keynote:
Alison McKenzie-Folan

2019 TICTeC Paris

200 attendees from 35 countries



"This truly is a moment of great uncertainty; a time when public institutions everywhere face a crisis of legitimacy."

Keynote:
James Anderson

TICTeC Local London

140 attendees



"71% of people feel they have not much or no control over decisions made in their own local area."

Keynote:
Vidhya Alakeson

2020 TICTeC Online

250 attendees from 30 countries



"What's the point of being in a society, if your state is paying more attention to the interests of a corporation than it is to the interests of the citizen?"

Keynote:
Nanjala Nyabola

2021–22 TICTeC Civic Tech Labs

400 attendees

As part of the **TICTeC Labs** programme, mySociety brought together 400 people from the global civic tech sector to identify and discuss the field's biggest challenges at Civic Tech Surgeries; to discuss and decide on solutions to commission at Action Labs; and to provide subgrants to individuals/organisations to produce work to contribute to meeting these challenges.

→ tictec.mysociety.org/tictec-labs/grants-for-solutions/

Resources to help train organisations/ the public in accessing good quality data



#3

Open North Inc developed an online course on data governance and data quality, in French and English.

Improving civic tech's storytelling and reach



#4

Fundación Multitudes in Chile trained civic tech organisations on how to get stories into mainstream channels.

Showcasing public-private civic tech success stories



#1

People Powered created case studies to provide inspiration to other civic tech organisations.

Driving impactful societal change with civic tech



#5

The Demography Project, Kenya, created Maai Makwa, an open water quality and quantity monitoring project.

A toolkit to help the global civic tech community fix common accessibility challenges



#2

Technoloxia in Tunisia showed civic tech practitioners how to incorporate accessibility into their work.

Civic tech in hostile environments



#6

Policy Lab Africa developed the Election Violence Tracker application, to map electoral-related violence in Nigeria.

2014

Launch of SayIt

Making transcripts of public meetings better and easier to produce.

2014

People's Assembly website launches in South Africa

Underpinned by our Pombola and SayIt software.

TICTeC in 2023–2025

What's the future for TICTeC?

We'll be entering a new phase with our **Communities of Practice** initiative, bringing together global participants working in the same fields to engage with each other over an extended period.

We'll be focusing on the three practice areas where we at mySociety can offer the benefit of our own experience: **parliamentary/legislative tech, access to information, and democratic climate action.**

Within these focuses, participants will be able to benefit from deep dives into the gritty details of the work – something that just isn't provided by one-off conference events.

We'll also be bringing back in-person TICTeC conferences (but with virtual attendance options too) in 2024 and 2025.



2013

➤ WhatDoTheyKnow processes its 200,000th request

2013

➤ ➤ Parliament releases our strategic review of their digital services ➤

FixMyStreet empowers citizens to make improvements in their own neighbourhoods

mySociety founder Tom Steinberg used to regularly pass by a London phonebox — one which was forever being vandalised. Each time he saw the damage, he wondered who to report it to: the phone company, the council, someone else?

And that's how FixMyStreet was first conceived - a website for reporting street issues like vandalism, graffiti or potholes, where, crucially, you wouldn't need to know who was responsible for fixing them. That was back in 2007: 16 years and more than four million reports ago.

→ fixmystreet.com

In 2012 we launched '**FixMyStreet for Councils**', later renamed FixMyStreet Pro. This service brought FixMyStreet's super-easy reporting interface to councils' own websites. Since then, we've worked closely with authorities to understand what makes life easier for their response staff. We've added features and functionality under a process of continual improvement — and, in time, set up our **wholly owned subsidiary SocietyWorks** to oversee this successful enterprise. SocietyWorks has since branched out to provide solutions such as WasteWorks for simplifying access to residential waste services, and ApplyWorks for streamlining applications and licensing.

→ societyworks.org

4.5M

public reports on
FixMyStreet

568K

average reports per
year in the last
three years

40

authorities who are, or
have, used FixMyStreet
as their citizen reporting
interface

2014

► PoplusCon conference in Santiago, Chile

2014

► ► Launch of Collideoscope

► Mapping cycling incidents, accidents and near misses.

FixMyStreet can be used for more than just street issues. In essence, it is software that knows where to send a user's input, based on the geographical location and the type of report. And like so many mySociety codebases, its **open source licence** means that it's ready and available for anyone that wants to adapt it. It's been used to help public transport passengers report antisocial behaviour; cyclists to map accidents and near misses; TV audiences to report empty homes (in conjunction with a Channel 4 series) and even Malaysian citizens to report corruption around building schemes.

→ fixmystreet.org

FixMyStreet empowers people to **improve their own neighbourhoods** — and among the millions of everyday reports are some acts of everyday heroism — like the community litter-pickers meeting regularly to clean up their areas and report fly tipping; the councillors monitoring their patch and making sure any problems get resolved; the firemen reporting derelict buildings and fly-tipped rubbish before they become arson risks; or the caring people who report obstructions that make life difficult for disabled pedestrians.

What benefits our council clients also benefits the users of the main FixMyStreet website, since improvements and new features are rolled out across both. Most recently that's been the addition of a **Welsh language version and mapping**, with the help of Mapio Cymru.

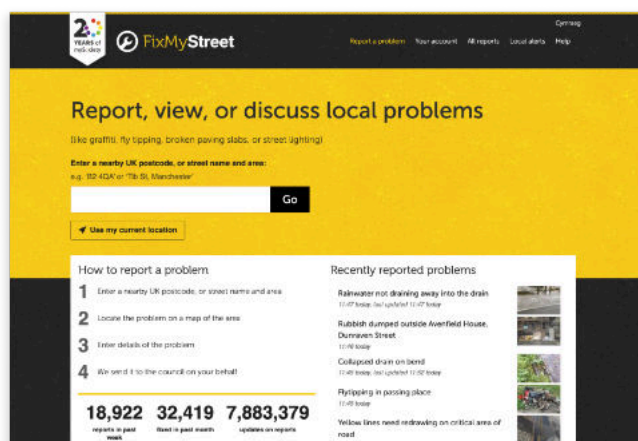
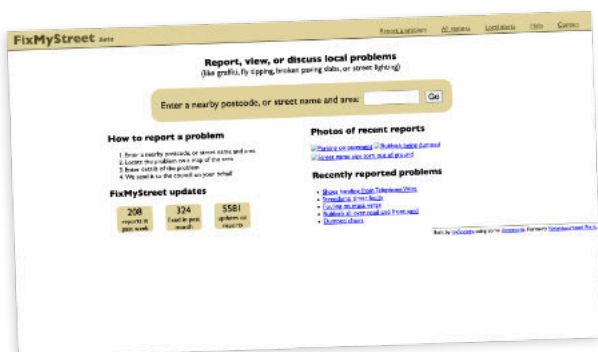


“The great thing about FixMyStreet is its ease of use, and the very visible audit trail.”

Tim Morton, FixMyStreet user

“I’m very positive about FixMyStreet. It’s an excellent app that cuts out all of the fluff, and directs your problem to the appropriate department.”

Matt Davis, FixMyStreet user



2015

➔ 250,000th FOI request processed by WhatDoTheyKnow

2015

➔➔ First ever TICTeC conference

TICTeC stands for ‘The Impacts of Civic Technology’.

SocietyWorks brings change to the relationship between public authorities and citizens

mySociety's beginnings were rooted in a desire to show how government could be using the internet to better communicate with citizens.

That desire took flight when we started working directly with public authorities, providing software as a service.

FixMyStreet for Councils

FixMyStreet.com was built from the user's need outwards. As a result, it's a supremely intuitive interface for reporting issues to the authority responsible for fixing them.

We soon realised that there was a market for a 'white label' FixMyStreet, which would put our user-friendly reporting mechanism onto a council's own website.

Early installations proved this need, and FixMyStreet for Councils — later to be rebranded as FixMyStreet Pro — would become not only a valuable revenue stream, helping to keep mySociety sustainable, but also a means by which to have a direct impact on the accessibility of councils' digital services.

Mutual benefits

As we worked closely with council clients to understand their needs, so the software became ever more advanced — both for the user on the front end, and the council staff receiving and acting upon reports behind the scenes.

Improvements are all reflected on the public FixMyStreet site too, making things easier for users, wherever they choose to make their report.

Taking the first step towards civic participation via the open door of FixMyStreet can give people the confidence to become more involved in their communities and civic life in general. When they choose FixMyStreet Pro, councils are supporting our open source, free-to-use software for the benefit of civil society in the UK and internationally.

SocietyWorks

In 2020, we created SocietyWorks, a separate yet linked commercial unit dedicated to providing user-focused products, service design and discovery to local government and the public sector.

Formed to extend the reach and impact of mySociety, SocietyWorks delivers sustainable profits to distribute back to mySociety and help protect the charity's future.

Together, we are a unique nonprofit, providing public benefit through the development of digital civic services.

2015

▶ **Mark Cridge takes over as mySociety Chief Executive** ▶ ▶

2015

▶ **Launch of EveryPolitician** ▶

Open, standardised data on every politician in the world.

- SocietyWorks envisions — and makes manifest — a world where all citizens can access public sector services with ease through intuitive and simple to use digital solutions.
- We iterate collaboratively with councils, offering solutions that have been designed with the flexibility to adapt to different authorities' needs, and the needs of their users.
- We also undertake research into current trends and produce guidance for the public sector.

→ societyworks.org/research-and-guidance

Beyond FixMyStreet

We're developing additional solutions for public authorities, always guided by the same commitment to facilitating civic action.



WasteWorks makes everything around waste removal easier for both citizens and councils. Councils can easily display collection information, and take bookings and payment for special requests such as the removal of bulky goods.

Waste disposal is an ever more pressing issue during the climate emergency; with WasteWorks we aim to help smooth processes such as recycling, composting and reuse that are a vital component of councils reaching their Net Zero targets.

“WasteWorks offers our residents a level of self-service for our Green Garden Waste subscriptions which has been a long-held ambition.”

Jim Cowan, Bromley Council



Hackney Council collaborated with us to develop this open-source, accessible interface for taking Freedom of Information requests from citizens. It streamlines authorities' FOI workflows by suggesting public records from previous case responses and reducing the amount of correspondence.



Currently in development, ApplyWorks will provide councils with an intuitive system for taking payments for council services. It'll handle one-off requests such as dropped kerbs and scaffolding, to more complex service areas such as market trader pitches and taxi licensing.

Beyond councils

And our clients have extended beyond UK local authorities, too. SocietyWorks currently provides services to National Highways, Transport for London, Zurich City Council, Kier, and the Peabody Housing Association.

2016

➤ **Launch of WhatDoTheyKnow Pro**

A service for professional users of FOI.

2016

➤ ➤ **A government commission on Freedom of Information**

➤ It says that WhatDoTheyKnow's policy of publishing all requests and responses 'should be the norm'.

Our services empower people to make positive changes in their own neighbourhoods

Making crossings safer for blind people

Deaf people can see the light change; blind people can hear the beeps, but how do deafblind people know when it's safe to cross the road?

We heard from friends Lauren and John during lockdown. They'd been using FixMyStreet, during their daily exercise outings, to report any pedestrian crossings with faulty or missing audio, tactile or visual indicators.

John himself is deafblind and explained that pushbutton boxes have a small cone shaped device under them that spins in tandem with the beeping signal. As his guide dog can't make a judgement on when a road is safe to cross, John has to rely on these devices.

The pair say they started reporting any broken pedestrian crossings as a way to make the most of their daily exercise: "We wanted to use our time to do something positive that would make journeys safer for other cane and guide dog users in the local area."

There are several things that Lauren and John look out for and report on FixMyStreet: "We look at all aspects of the crossing, including buttons, lights and the spinner."

John and Lauren say that using FixMyStreet has made reporting problems easy, and they've been impressed by how quickly their council has responded to their FixMyStreet reports: "We have had issues fixed in less than 48 hours, which is great."

→ mysociety.org/blindpeople

"Before finding the website I actually wouldn't have known where or who to report the issues to."

Lauren, FixMyStreet user

2017

➤ Millionth FixMyStreet report

2018

➤ ➤ KeepItInTheCommunity launches

➤ Mapping Assets of Community Value.

Cleaning up the neighbourhood

The **Kings Heath and Brandwood Litter Pickers** are a merry bunch, who use their regular outings not just as a chance to improve their local area, but to have a fine old time while doing so. If they're not throwing 'tactical wildflower seed bombs', they're dancing around in tutus — all while putting their litter grabbers and council-provided bin bags to good use.

For them, litter picking is as much about socialising as it is about keeping things nice. And FixMyStreet plays its part too: as they go about their cleanups, they also make sure to report any fly tipping, broken paving and drain covers that they come across.

"In the email I send to new members, I always suggest they use FixMyStreet to report issues with the council," says Andrea, the group's founder. "I think our team has made a difference to the area and the community — and as we use FixMyStreet, that has too."

→ mysociety.org/litterpickers

"We regularly use FixMyStreet to log issues, and it's extremely useful and easy to use."

Andrea Quigley, litter picker



2018

TheyWorkForYou features in BBC thriller *Bodyguard*

2019

The first TICTeC Local

Focusing on the intersection between Civic Tech and Local Government.

We're starting from here

The pages you've just read show how mySociety services have made a real impact over the last 20 years. We've created easier routes into civic participation; fostered transparency and demanded accountability from institutions in the UK and around the world.

When we hear that people have made a tangible difference, using our tools, it's easy to find the motivation to carry on.

We do this work because we believe that the quality of our democratic and political life matters deeply.

And organisations like us, showing where things could be better, are an essential component of a living democracy.

Democracy doesn't just happen at the ballot box

Most people can give an overview of how democracy works in this country: we choose our representatives, delegate decision making to them, and remove them at the next election if they don't live up to our trust.

But democracy should be about more than voting every four years: it is about collective and collaborative improvement of the society we live in, for the benefit of everyone.

Civic participation on the one side, and the transparency, responsiveness and effectiveness of our institutions on the other — these are the two halves of a whole needed for a healthy and functional democratic society.

The response that people get when they take civic action matters

Political decisions and actions have huge consequences for our collective wellbeing across every aspect of society — they can support people to flourish or they can ruin lives.

Everyone should have an opportunity to feed into such decisions, to represent their views and to argue for what they believe in.

The breadth of use of our services shows that people want to participate; but we also know that in order to do so, they have to believe it makes a difference.

And in order to feed into good decisions, citizens need transparency and good quality information about what has happened between elections.



Democracy is for everyone — now how do we make that happen?

There is a principle of equality at the heart of democracy: equality at the ballot box, but also in access to information, fair representation and voice. That principle is a challenge to deliver on in practice, when individuals and communities face significant barriers to participation, through poverty, discrimination, time, energy, knowledge and interest.

We believe that barriers should be as low as possible for everyone, and that it is vital to support those who act on behalf of the under-represented.

In practice, that requires a flourishing ecosystem of people and organisations playing different roles. This report also reflects that complexity - with our services supporting citizens, journalists, campaigners, charities, community groups, researchers and policy makers.

The publication of open information and the effective and principled use of digital technologies to improve the quality of our democracy are necessary parts of this vision: delivering the right information at the right time and at a low cost lowers the barriers to participation, opens up decision making to a broader range of people, and supports individuals and communities to represent their interests by building their knowledge, confidence and skills.



We know what we have to do

mySociety was founded twenty years ago to help democracy deliver on the raised expectations of the internet era.

This anniversary finds us at another crossroads for society.

Climate change is no longer the story, but the setting in which all stories take place — and that includes the story of democracy, which has at its heart the question ‘how can we live together?’.

The climate crisis puts into sharper focus all the questions we already face about how democracy can work at the scale, speed and complexity we need it to in the modern world. We know that the next 20 years will call on us to come up with the goods, again and again, on a huge set of technological, infrastructural and social changes.

In order to do that fairly, the decisions we are faced with need participation from all kinds of people: we’ll need to work together as we’ve

never done before to reduce the harms and share the benefits of this enormous transition. Our institutions need to evolve to meet the demands of the moment, find new ways of listening to and working with those they represent, and show that they’re worthy of the trust we place in them.

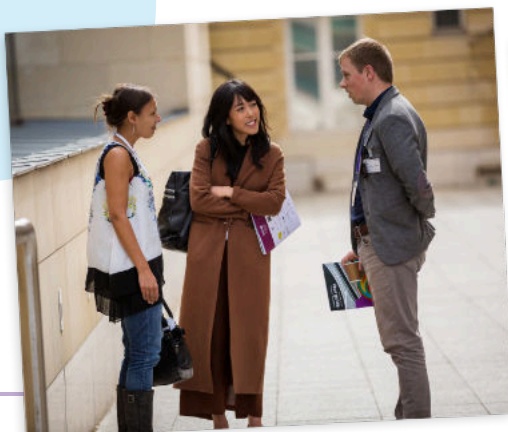
History shows us that this doesn’t happen spontaneously: our democratic processes and institutions change in response to demand from outside. The history of democratic rule is one of ‘mostly small, occasionally major, victories via organising and campaigns and marches and protests and riots and martyrdom and elections and policy changes’.¹



2020

➤ With Tower Blocks UK, we launch FixMyBlock

An online toolkit that helps renters understand and exercise their rights.



2020

➤ ➤ Climate added to our streams of work ➤

So now it’s Transparency, Democracy, Community & Climate.



We will need both open, accountable and responsive governance that can drive the deep changes required for rapid decarbonisation, and empowered communities that can come together to take action on climate.

In the last twenty years, digital services have extended further into our lives than we could have imagined, transforming them for good and ill.

The advent of a new generation of AI-powered tools suggests that we're not at a plateau, but on the threshold of another era of change. We will have new capabilities as well as challenges in the next decades, and how we decide to use those capabilities will be key.

If AI has significant potential to improve services like ours and to provide better value to society, it also raises new questions around the ethical use of the technology and how it might shape democratic engagement over the longer term.



2020

➤ UK holds a Climate Assembly...

...commissioned by six House of Commons Select Committees. We create the digital platform.

2020

➤ ➤ Lockdown! TICTeC goes online ➤

Now let's go and do it

A need for mySociety

Over the past twenty years, we've learned a lot about building civic tools. Our history is one of experimentation and learning, and we'll be taking that approach forward into the future. We'll work with an overarching aim of building on the positive impact we can have for people across the UK, and a set of goals to guide our approach — while knowing that we'll need to continue to learn as we go.



Reach broader audiences, and more kinds of people

We developed our early services because we wanted to. These days, we recognise that there's more to it than that — at the scale at which our services operate, there's a responsibility to ensure they're not just empowering the already empowered.

We want to ensure that the services we build are used by, and useful to, more and more kinds of people, with a particular focus on those who are being under-served by democracy. We're conducting research to understand how we can better support people from marginalised and under-served communities, and developing features and services based around their needs.

Get institutions to meet citizens' needs

The scale and openness of our platforms gives us a unique perspective on the challenges people hit when they try to engage with democratic institutions.

We'll be using what we've learned from our services, and support from the communities that use them, to bring about changes in policy and practice that are directly targeted at those challenges. That way, we're not just helping people work around obstacles, but removing those obstacles for good.

2020

➤ Catherine Brown becomes mySociety's new Chair

2020

➤ ➤ CAPE launches

➤ One place to find every council's Climate Action Plan.

Helping drive the democratic climate transition

We're increasingly recognising climate change as a fundamental issue that cuts across all our areas of focus.

We'll use our expertise in civic data and digital services to contribute to a fairer, faster and more effective climate response — by supporting public participation in climate policy making and action, transparency of decision-making, and government accountability.

We'll give individuals and communities the right information at the right time to participate in democratic processes and come together to take action on climate.

We'll build services that create the open data necessary for different actors — citizens, civil society, researchers, policymakers — to collaborate, coordinate and learn more quickly what's working and what isn't.

We can't create change alone

Partners Our work is best when it's in partnership with others. We've collaborated with organisations and individuals around the world to build digital services that work for the context they operate in. We're now developing partnerships in the UK which will enable us to grow our reach and impact and foster institutional change.

"The future must lie with technologies that empower and uplift, not depersonalise and degrade."

Tom Steinberg in the Guardian, 2008

Peers We've benefitted hugely from the insights and inspiration that comes from TICTeC's international civic tech community. We'll keep bringing together a broad group of experts, practitioners, and supporters in person, while organising focused online communities of practice around our key areas of work, so that we can share and learn.

Volunteers mySociety would not exist without the work of volunteers and supporters of all kinds - our goal now is to establish and maintain more structured supporter and volunteering programmes to gain useful insights, and also create opportunities to experiment with innovative combinations of people power and digital services.

2020

➤ Our commercial arm becomes SocietyWorks

2022

➤ ➤ Council Climate Scorecards launches ➤

We partner with Climate Emergency UK to produce a national assessment of local climate action.

Words from our Chief Executive

I'm very proud of the impact that mySociety has had over the last 20 years. As this report shows, we've helped people in the UK and across the world, inspiring and enabling them to make positive changes for their communities, and to expose and repair injustices in many different areas of life. None of that would have been possible without many people giving up a significant portion of their lives to make it happen.

Now, and throughout our history, we've been incredibly lucky to have been blessed with the time and talents of an extraordinary set of volunteers, staff and trustees, and with the support of partners and collaborators, funders and critical friends. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognise their collective dedication and to thank everyone who has played a part in making mySociety an organisation that has helped change so many lives.

The spirit of mySociety has always been a creative one at heart — our work is at its best when it opens a door into a new possible reality more concretely than a thousand arguments can, just by showing that we can do better.

That spirit of active optimism is needed now more than ever as we face the challenge of the

climate crisis, and a new era of unprecedented change. This change demands a collective response from us — we face an urgent need to find new ways to help people inform themselves and come together to take action in concrete ways that amount to more than the sum of their parts.

I'm excited to take that work forward, because it is a privilege to be doing work that matters, in a moment that matters, and it is a privilege to be part of a collective effort to help shape a future that we all want to live in.



Louise Crow
mySociety Chief Executive

2022

▶ Louise Crow becomes Chief Executive

2022

▶ ▶ We win the Outstanding Contribution to Democratic Change Democracy Award ▶

Words from our Chair

The work of mySociety set out in this report demonstrates something that is often missed in discussions about democracy: the way it is knitted together from individual actions, collective efforts and the accumulation of legislative acts in Parliament. Despite being an organisation focused on technology, what comes through so strongly in the work set out here, is the material nature of democratic engagement.

Democracy isn't a smooth ideal that happens in some detached way in an intangible cloud of public opinion, it's a messy exchange of questions and answers, of faxes, emails, letters, records, petitions and votes. It isn't particularly grandiose. It isn't a monolith. Nor is it best pictured as a statue of one man on a plinth. It is, to use a tech metaphor, pixelated. Democracy is an accumulation of little acts, of small cumulative engagements that in aggregate can make change happen.

And we need that change. As the report sets out, the challenge of climate change is now in everything we do, individually and collectively. It is the background to every one of our everyday decisions. In the foreground, over the next fifteen years, will be changes to our national infrastructure, our industry, our transport system, our working patterns, our jobs, homes and the food we eat. That change must be built up by us, and with us. It must be democratic in exactly this

material way. Because it is material. It is the stuff of our daily lives.

If this report shows us that the barriers to entry can be low, it tells us too that they could be lower still. There is still work to be done to find easier, better and more accessible ways to understand and do the work of democracy, and mySociety is committed to finding those ways to simplify, share information and create opportunities for action. No one should be left out, and everyone has a role to play.

If there is a message that we should take away from the rich and textured set of examples provided by mySociety in these pages, it is that the UK is just that, our society and we make it in our image. If we don't like what we see, then it is up to every one of us to participate in changing it. And to start today.



Genevieve Maitland Hudson
mySociety Chair of Trustees

2022

➤ Gen Maitland-Hudson takes over as Chair

2022

➤ ➤ There are now 27 Alaveteli sites around the world ➤

With your donations we can achieve more

You've seen how mySociety grew: from a vision of digital democracy, to a purposeful, longstanding organisation that, 20 years on, still works to make that vision a reality.

We started with the belief that the internet could play a part in shaping a more accessible, transparent and responsive society. Over the last two decades, we've taken that belief and run with it, through experimentation, development and network-building.

We've stood firm, even through changing times. We've made waves that rippled across the world, empowering millions of people to make change. And we'll continue our agile, responsive work as we strive to repower democracy.

Will you help us do more?

**You can help,
with a regular
donation**

→ mysociety.org/donate

87

projects over
20 years

48

active projects

58

countries around the
world where our code is,
or has been, in use

2023

▶ Around 20 sites have used the FixMyStreet codebase ▶▶

2023

▶▶ Watch this space for the millionth public request on WhatDoTheyKnow ▶

Our funders helped us get here

mySociety's work has been supported by a variety of funders over the past twenty years. We are thankful for their faith in our work; and for their shared belief that civic tech can help forge a better society for everyone.

Today

- **Quadrature Climate Foundation** and the **National Lottery Community Fund** are funding our Climate programme.
- **The Adessium Foundation, Swedish Postcode Foundation** and the **Isocrates Foundation** are underpinning our work to help organisations across Europe to collaborate on access to information.
- The **National Endowment for Democracy** is funding our TICTeC Communities of Practice programme.
- **Porticus** has provided invaluable core funding that supports all of our activities.
- **The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust** is funding our work to make WhatDoTheyKnow more accessible.

Across our lifetime

The following organisations helped us start up, grow and develop, through their support and funding over the last 20 years:

BEIS, The David and Elaine Potter Foundation, the Electoral Commission, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Geovation, Google Inc, Google.org, the Google Digital News Initiative, GovEval, Hivos, Indigo Trust, Involve, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, Legal Education Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, Making All Voices Count, Microsoft, the Ministry of Justice, Nesta, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister e-Innovations Fund, Open Culture Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Paragon Trust, Power to Change, Screen West Midlands, the Technology Strategy Board, the UK Government's Department for Transport and the Department for Constitutional Affairs Innovations Fund, Wellcome, the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Wikimedia Foundation, the Young Foundation, and Channel 4's 4IP fund, Omidyar / Luminate, Newby Trust, NUUG, OGP, David Family Foundation, Access - The Foundation for Social Investment, the British Council, DCMS, UNDP, Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

A huge, heartfelt thank you to everyone who has donated to mySociety through the years. Your support has helped make our work possible.

2023

► It's our 20th anniversary! Right now!

Into the future

► ► What next...? ►

(See pages 35-38 for the answer)

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