



To: Chris Skidmore MP, Minister for the Constitution
From: Sym Roe and Joe Mitchell, Democracy Club CIC

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The polling station finder

- For the general election in June, we covered 62% of local authority areas. This was an improvement on 40% from the May 2017 locals.
- For May 2018, we hope to cover all 32 London boroughs, plus Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Newcastle (the other cities with all-out elections).
- Our process involves writing to every council to ask for data. A few provide it on their websites as open geographic data; most send it through to us as tabular data from the electoral management software. The Electoral Commission helps us chase up stragglers, and thank you for offering to help us out by writing to councils as a last resort.
- In future, there may be ways to automate the publishing and collection, but only if all councils publish this data (and perhaps data on elections, candidates and results) in an open, machine-readable format at a reliable online location.
- If the finder/the aggregate data is to exist as basic democratic infrastructure in the long-term, we will need to establish sustainable funding — or have the project adopted fully by a publicly funded body.

Open addresses

- There are significant positive outcomes to be realised from opening up UK address data. There is existing work of the Cabinet Office, led by Lawrence Hopper, that makes this clear, as does experience in similar countries that have already opened this data, such as Denmark and France.
- Our polling station finder would make full use of open address data. At the moment, we rely on our partnership with the Electoral Commission to avoid paying the £130,000 fee for AddressBase to Ordnance Survey (that's more than our annual budget). This cost could be holding back any number of innovative civic engagement projects that also require address data.
- Open address data would also benefit work done in relation to GDS, DCLG, DCMS, UKTI and other areas covered by the 'Digital Economy'. It also relates to the 2017 Conservative manifesto commitment on open land data. We would be delighted to meet with Matt Hancock to press the case for open address data on behalf of civic engagement projects, if that would be useful.

Political boundary data

- Open data for political boundaries is an absolute minimum requirement of digital infrastructure for democracy. Right now, geographic data on boundaries is being published too late to be useful.
- Currently, the local boundary commissions create the data, Ordnance Survey publish it and the Office for National Statistics assigns GSS codes as identifiers. All this takes time and OS's publication schedule means that the data is *never published before the elections themselves*. So we can't tell people which elections they have — because we don't know if the boundary covers them. OS has sometimes published the boundaries in advance — but only on an adhoc basis that we cannot rely on, and without the ONS identifiers we need.
- Ideally, the local boundary commissions would themselves publish the geographic data and maintain identifiers. This seems a fairly simple change, in keeping with the commissions' constitutional role. This would not preclude OS or anyone else from republishing these boundaries, but the authoritative source should be the commissions.

Registration heatmaps

- We spoke briefly of heatmaps of voter registration and wanted to bring your attention to our June 2016 efforts in London: <http://takepart.london/map/> (screenshot below).
- The map is not perfect, because it relies on the ONS population extrapolations, so the population baseline may be inaccurate. It also ignores the franchise, instead using the total population over 18, regardless of their ability to register.
- The data was used to help people to encourage their friends and family to register to vote. The full website generated an image of the user's area overlaid with the percentage of people registered that they could then share on social media (in theory, benefitting from the social norm pressure of seeing that, e.g., 88% of people in your area are already registered.)
- We could replicate this project for the entire country, if we had a copy of the entire electoral register.

