



TheyWorkForYou: press briefing

A [mySociety](#) project

www.TheyWorkForYou.com

Contact: press@mysociety.org

Overview

[TheyWorkForYou](#) is a website run by the NGO mySociety. It helps people to keep tabs on their elected representatives and understand what's going on in both Westminster and the devolved parliaments.

TheyWorkForYou UK - MPs Lords Debates Written Answers Bill Committees Upcoming Contact

Does your MP represent you?

Your postcode

TF1 8GH Find out →

Democracy: it's for everyone

You shouldn't have to be an expert to understand what goes on in Parliament. Your politicians represent you... but what exactly do they do in your name?

TheyWorkForYou takes open data from the UK Parliament, and presents it in a way that's easy to follow – for everyone. So now you can check, with just a few clicks: are They Working For You?

[Find out more about TheyWorkForYou →](#)

Statistics show that a very low percentage of people know who their MP is, or what they do¹, and TheyWorkForYou attempts to counter that.

By inputting your postcode on the homepage, you can see who your representative is, and check how they've voted on key topics, what speeches they've made, and a wealth of other details such as their parliamentary positions, the number of times they've rebelled, and links to their social media accounts.

The website updates daily with the previous day's activity in the various debating chambers; this content has built up into a fully searchable online version of Hansard — which can also be

¹ 78% of the UK population cannot name their representative in Parliament (Hansard Society Audit of Public Engagement, 2013) (PDF).

explored as far back as the 1930s.

As a further useful function, you can subscribe to email alerts when chosen words or phrases are mentioned in Parliament, or when your MP speaks.

History

The screenshot shows the beta version of the website. At the top, the logo reads 'TheyWorkForYou.com^{beta}'. Below it is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'House of Commons', 'Your MP', 'Glossary', and 'Help'. On the right side of the navigation bar are 'Join' and 'Log in' links. Below the navigation bar is a red banner with the text 'At TheyWorkForYou.com you can:'. This banner contains three main sections: 1. 'Find out more about your MP' with a search box for a UK postcode and a 'GO' button. 2. 'Search everything said in Parliament since 2001' with a search box and a 'SEARCH' button, and a list of popular searches: 'iraq', 'monkey', 'copyright'. 3. 'Comment on yesterday's Debates and Written Answers' with a link to 'Joint Activities with the National Assembly for Wales'. To the right of the banner is a 'What's all this about?' section with a question mark icon, containing a welcome message and a link to 'Public Beta Now Live'. Below the banner is a 'Most recent comments' section with a list of comments from users like 'carrie.hoffmann', 'Carlton Reid', 'James Cronin', and 'Simon Cozens', each with a 'Read comment' link. At the bottom of the page is a footer with links for 'About us', 'Contact us', 'House Rules', and 'Terms of use'.

The beta version of TheyWorkForYou in 2004; the current design was introduced in March 2015.

Launched in 2004 by coders who would go on to become mySociety's earliest employees and volunteers, TheyWorkForYou was one of the first 'eDemocracy' projects (as the field of Civic Technology was then known).

At the time, it was provocative: its progenitors felt that government had not yet understood the opportunities afforded by the then new technology of the internet in allowing for interactive citizen engagement. In creating a website that was easier to navigate, share and search, they hoped to lead by example. Indeed, many of the features introduced on TheyWorkForYou have since been adopted by the national Parliament website.

The site's early years were not without controversy. TheyWorkForYou's content was initially obtained by 'scraping' the official Hansard output from the Parliament website (ie, extracting it daily with automated code). As there was no precedent to this, mySociety put themselves at the risk of prosecution to do so². Now, thanks to the Government Digital Service's push towards

² <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2006/jun/08/epublic.freedomofinformation>

open data, TheyWorkForYou can be populated directly from their daily XML output.

By 2007, MPs were said to be tabling as many contributions as possible in order to up the numbers of speeches recorded on the site³, a state of affairs which led mySociety to decide to discontinue rankings on MP pages.

To this day, TheyWorkForYou is used not just by the UK's citizen population, but also by many Parliament staff, who — we have been told — find it easier to navigate than the official offerings. mySociety sometimes say that their longterm ambition is to retire TheyWorkForYou, when the Parliament offering reaches such a level of excellence that there is no need for an alternative.

[Read more about TheyWorkForYou.](#)

Facts and figures

Launched: 2004

URL: www.theyworkforyou.com

Lead developer: Matthew Somerville

Design: mySociety, inhouse

Remit: The site is politically non-partisan. It is part of the mySociety's wider remit to provide online tools that help the average person to access their civic and democratic rights.

Monthly visitors: Around 150,000 per month, rising to 450,000 at election times.

Press use

TheyWorkforYou can be a very useful resource for journalists. You might use it to:

- check exact wording of parliamentary debates
- research the history of political issues
- check up on individual MPs' activities (but see the caveats below)
- subscribe to alerts on topics that you are researching
- see recent or historic votes

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<http://web.archive.org/web/20070216112003/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article735429.ece>

Statistics and caveats

- We do not currently publish league tables or statistics to show, for example, which MPs speak, or vote, the most. [Find out why.](#)
- Representatives' pages show their voting records within a selection of key topics. These are compiled manually and do not cover every vote. [See how we decide these statistics.](#)

Attribution and formatting conventions

- Include a link to TheyWorkForYou and/or mySociety in any article based on information found via the site.
- You may take screenshots of the site for press use. No permission is required.
- TheyWorkForYou is written as one word, but note the capitalisations.
- TheyWorkForYou 's logo can be found on [mySociety's press page.](#)

Advanced use of TheyWorkForYou

Research representatives

To find your local representative, input your postcode [on the homepage](#). To find any other representative, browse the [MPs](#) or [Lords](#) pages.

From an MP's page you can:

- **Search** all their speeches for any word or phrase. Use Advanced Search (see the arrow below the Search box on the results page) to limit results to specific types (written/spoken), timeframes, etc.
- **Subscribe** to an email alert [whenever they speak in Parliament](#)
- **View their stances on key issues** via the Voting Record tab



- **View topics of interest**, based on what they ask most questions about
- **See which Public Bill Committees Sitings** the representative attended
- **Most recent appearances** – links to debates in which the representative has spoken
- **Browse statistics** – but see Statistics and Caveats, above
- **View their entries on the register of financial interests**
- **Browse expenses** (links to an external site)
- **See which posts** this representative has held
- **See which MPs** held this constituency previously

Research debates

- **Recent debates** are listed [on this page](#). Or browse [the calendar](#).
- **Find debates on a specific subject** Use the search box on the [debates page](#). See the right hand column on the results page for tips on searching more accurately or filtering your results.

When you perform a search, you will also be invited to subscribe to the word or phrase you searched for.

Understand debates

Debates are updated the day after they occur, generally at around 6.30 am, but later if there is any delay from Parliament in preparing the output files.

TheyWorkForYou.com takes the data from Hansard and automatically reformats it for easy reading.

Each statement within the debate has its own section and its own individual permalink, accessed from the top right of the section.

Understand votes

Voting lines for each representative are, unlike much of the rest of the site, produced partially manually. [This blog post](#) explains what we include and how the information is compiled.

Subscribe

We can send you emails whenever a word, phrase or person is mentioned in Parliament. You can even specify who mentions your keyword. When you search the site, you will be invited to set up an email alert or subscribe to an RSS feed – see the top right hand side of the search results page.

You can also set up an alert for future business, to be informed in advance when a given topic will be debated.

Contact

Make contact with the team We are happy to participate in interviews or to answer questions about the site and its history, future, contribution to the political landscape in the UK, etc.

However, we cannot take part in any debate which would compromise our policy of complete political neutrality. For example, we will not give opinions on MPs' expenditure or voting records.

In the first instance, please send all press enquiries to press@mysociety.org.