



Electoral Registration and Administration Bill

Bill No 6 2012-13

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The Bill makes provision for the introduction of individual electoral registration by 2015. Transitional arrangements will allow the use of data matching to verify applications to be included on the electoral register and also allow the 'carry forward' of electors who are not verified so that they will remain on the first register published under the new system. The annual canvass of electors is retained although powers are given to the Secretary of State to amend, abolish or reinstate it at a later date.

A civil penalty is introduced for those who do not apply to be registered when required to do so by the Electoral Registration Officer.

Other electoral administration measures in the Bill include extending the electoral timetable for Parliamentary elections from 17 to 25 days. The Secretary of State is also given the power to withhold or reduce a Returning Officer's fee because of poor performance.

A programme motion has been tabled allotting three days for the committee and remaining stages of the Bill on the floor of the House.

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Research Paper 12/26

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Summary

A system of individual electoral registration was set out in the *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* by the Labour government but the introduction was to be phased. There was a commitment in the Coalition's *Programme for government* to reduce electoral fraud by speeding up the implementation of individual voter registration, so that it would take place before the next general election in 2015.

A White Paper and draft legislation were published on 30 June 2011; further electoral administration reforms were published in July 2011.

The *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill* was presented on 10 May 2012. The Bill provides a legislative framework for the introduction of individual electoral registration; the detailed arrangements will be in regulations made under the powers given to the Secretary of State in the Bill.

The main provisions of the Bill are as follows:

- Electors would be registered individually instead of by household.
- A system of verifying applicants to be included on the electoral register would be established; secondary legislation will make provision about the identification that electors will have to provide in order to be registered under the new system. These will include date of birth, signature and National Insurance number.
- The annual canvass is retained but there are changes to the arrangements. Returning a canvass form would no longer register the people resident at a particular address, instead it would alert the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to who is resident there so that an invitation to register individually can be sent to them.
- The Secretary of State is given the power to abolish, amend or reinstate the annual canvass.
- A civil penalty may be imposed by the ERO on a person who fails to comply with a request to register.
- The Secretary of State is given the power to withhold or reduce a Returning Officer's fee for reasons of poor performance.
- The timetable for parliamentary elections is extended from 17 days to 25 days.
- Parish elections would be allowed to take place on the same day as local elections and a general election.
- Local authorities would be required to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places every five years from 1 October 2013, amending the current provisions for a four yearly review.
- Candidates who are standing on behalf of two or more registered political parties at a Parliamentary election may use a registered emblem of one of those parties.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee recommended the abolition of the edited electoral register in their November 2011 report on the White Paper and draft legislation. The Bill makes no provision for this.

1 Introduction

In order to be able to vote, a person must be eligible to vote and their name must be included on the register of electors.

Electoral registers are compiled locally; there is not a single register for the whole country. A canvass of electors is carried out each year; a canvass form is sent by the local Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to every household in his area. The form has to be completed giving details of everyone at that address who is eligible to be registered. Apart from the introduction of rolling registration in 2001, which allowed electors to notify the ERO of a change of address in between canvasses, the system of registration has remained essentially unchanged since 1949.

The Electoral Commission has repeatedly called for a change in the law to allow for individual registration; this was initially to facilitate a change to e-enabled voting in the future. However, concern about electoral fraud contributed to pressure on the previous government during the passage of the *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* to add a provision to begin a phased implementation of individual registration.

The Coalition Government announced soon after the 2010 general election that it would legislate to speed up the introduction of individual electoral registration.

Opponents of individual registration have argued that its introduction will increase the level of under registration, particularly amongst groups already under represented such as 18-24 year olds, black and ethnic minority groups and private sector tenants.

The Cabinet Office has published impact assessments to accompany the Bill and these are available on its website.¹

The Electoral Commission has published a briefing for the second reading debate, due to be held on Wednesday 23 May 2012.²

1.1 History of electoral registration

The requirement for householders to supply EROs with the relevant information to enable them to create an electoral register for their area dates back to the nineteenth century. The Electoral Commission noted in its report, *The electoral registration process*, that:

The current law on electoral registration is still very much based on that introduced in the nineteenth century with more recent changes grafted on. The household canvass, for example, is a throwback to the lengthy period of history when the franchise was based on property ownership.³

The *Great Reform Act 1832* introduced regulations which established the system of electoral registration. Before 1832 there was no systematic registration of voters in England and Wales. In 1831 the committee which drew up the Reform Bill included in the draft of the bill a requirement that no one should vote unless he had been registered in his constituency in the autumn preceding the election. The initial registers were drawn up by the overseers of the poor who had responsibility for compiling the ratebooks and therefore knew who was resident in the parish and the rateable value of all the houses. These officials could therefore make lists of all those who should be registered as electors. The new system was complex and did not ensure that all those who were entitled to vote appeared on the registers.

¹ <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/introduction-electoral-registration-and-administration-bill>

² Electoral Commission briefing for second reading of the *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill*

³ *The electoral registration process: report and recommendations*, Electoral Commission, 2003, p9

Revising barristers sat once every year in open court to alter the register and deal with disputed claims.⁴ Registration Societies, which were partisan and the forerunners of local party associations, were established to encourage people to register their claims.

There were a number of Acts reforming the system during the latter half of the nineteenth century but it was not until the *Representation of the People Act 1918* that the compilation of the electoral registers was transferred to the Clerks of the Borough or County Councils. This meant that for the first time a public official was given a duty to initiate enquiries in order to prepare an accurate register.⁵ David Butler, of Oxford University, gives further details of the reforms in *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918*:

The names were to be found not from rate-books and claims but by 'house to house or other sufficient inquiry', and the cumbrous machinery of registration courts and revising barristers was abolished. The party agents who, by claims and protests, had been really responsible for maintaining the accuracy of the register were relieved of this burden by the efficiency and simplicity of the new system.⁶

The 1918 Act had made provision for the publication of two registers each year; one (the spring register) for the qualifying period ending on 15 January and the other (the summer register) for the qualifying period ending on the 15 July. This was seen as expensive and an administrative burden for local authorities and the spring register was eventually abolished by the *Economy (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1926*.

In 1939 the outbreak of war led to the suspension of elections and electoral registration. The *Local Elections and Register of Electors (Temporary Provisions) Act 1939*, which provided that no further register should be compiled, and that the one which had just been completed should remain valid, was renewed every year until 1944. In January 1942 a Committee on Electoral Machinery was established and was chaired by the Registrar-General, Sir Silvanus Vivian. The Committee's report suggested that the pre-war system of registration was inadequate to deal with the movements of population during war time and recommended that the register should be based on information obtained from the local Food Offices and that electors would need to have two months residence in the constituency in order to be included on the register (the residency requirement had previously been six months). The recommendations of the Committee (which reported in December 1942) relating to electoral registration were implemented by the *Parliament (Elections and Meetings) Act 1943*.⁷

A Committee on Registration, which was chaired by Mr G H Oliver MP, reported in December 1946.⁸ The Committee had been appointed to look into electoral registration and postal and proxy voting after the end of the war. The *Representation of the People Act 1948* removed a qualifying period of residence from the requirements for registration and two registers a year were reinstated. The *Electoral Registers Act 1949* later removed this requirement but this time the autumn register was abolished.

There were increasing concerns about registration rates towards the end of the twentieth century. The introduction of the poll tax (community charge) in 1990 had meant that local authorities could use the electoral register as the basis for the community charge register. There was considerable opposition to the poll tax and a means to evade it was to disappear

⁴ *The elimination of corrupt practices in British elections 1868-1911*, by Cornelius O'Leary, OUP, 1962

⁵ *Electoral reform in England and Wales* by Charles Seymour, David & Charles Reprints, 1915.
Law and the electoral process by H F Rawlings, Sweet & Maxwell, 1988

⁶ *The Electoral System in Britain since 1918* by David Butler, OUP, 2nd ed, 1963, p8-9

⁷ Cmd 6408

⁸ Cmd 7004

from the electoral register by not responding to the annual canvass. In 1992 Jeremy Smith and Iain McLean published a pamphlet, *The UK poll tax and the declining electoral roll: unintended consequences?* The authors concluded:

There is evidence of a substantial degree of dis-enrolment prior to the introduction of the poll tax in April 1990, especially in the London and metropolitan areas, although non-metropolitan areas also experienced small falls in their electoral register. Following the introduction of the poll tax there were further falls across most areas, possibly due to the under-estimation of the actual poll bill. In total the poll tax, it is estimated, can account for slightly more than one-third of the estimated one million people shortfall between the electoral register and the OPCS estimate of the qualified population.⁹

Following the 1997 general election there were calls for an overhaul of electoral administration generally and for improvements to the level of registration. A working party was set up under George Howarth, Minister at the Home Office with responsibility for elections. This reported on progress in August 1998 and made a number of recommendations including the introduction of a system of 'rolling' registration which would allow people to apply to be included on the register between the annual canvasses.¹⁰ In September 1998 the Home Affairs Select Committee published a report, *Electoral Law and Administration* which also called for an overhaul of electoral law and the introduction of rolling registration.¹¹ In February 2001 the *Representation of the People Regulations (England and Wales) 2001*, made under the *Representation of the People Act 2000* which implemented the recommendations of the Howarth report, introduced rolling registration. Library Research Paper 99/94 gives background to the *Representation of the People Bill 1999-2000*.¹²

2 Under-registration

The Electoral Commission, which had been established in 2000 under the provisions of the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000*, published a report *Understanding electoral registration: the extent and nature of non-registration in Britain* in September 2005.¹³ The Commission analysed registration rates in Britain and the reasons for non-registration and had used a statistical 'register check' carried out on the Commission's behalf by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). According to the ONS:

...the best estimate for non-registration among the eligible household population in England and Wales at 15 October 2000 (the qualifying date for the February 2001 register) lies between 8% and 9%. This compares with 7-9% in 1991. This means that in the region of 3.5 million people across England and Wales were eligible to be on the register at their main residence but were missing from it in 2000.¹⁴

In March 2010 the Electoral Commission published a further report on electoral registration, *The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain*. The executive summary stated that:

⁹ *The UK poll tax and the declining electoral roll: unintended consequences?* by Jeremy Smith and Iain McLean, Warwick Economic Research papers, University of Warwick, 1992

¹⁰ *Working Party on Electoral Procedures: Interim Report*, August 1998

¹¹ HC 768 1997-8

¹² *Representation of the People Bill 1999-2000*, House of Commons Library Research Paper RP 99/94, 25 November 1999

¹³ *Understanding electoral registration: the extent and nature of non-registration in Britain*. Electoral Commission, September 2005

¹⁴ *ibid*

Research into the state of the electoral registers during the post-war period is limited, although estimates produced using Census records in 1950 and 1966 estimated the maximum level of completeness was 95% in Great Britain.

There is evidence of a gradual long-term decline in the completeness of Great Britain's electoral registers between 1970 and 2000. Estimates based on Census records suggest that the completeness of the registers was at 93.5% in 1980, 91–3% in 1990 and 91–2% in 2000.

Evidence available from electoral statistics and surveys of levels of response to the annual canvass of electors suggests that there was a decline in registration levels from the late 1990s to 2006. The same evidence base suggests that the registers have stabilised since 2006, although it is likely that the completeness of the registers has declined since the last national estimate in 2000.¹⁵

However, in its report on the 2010 general election, *Report on the administration of the 2010 UK general election*, the Electoral Commission reported an increase in registration rates just before the election:

At the 2010 UK general election:

- The electoral registers for the UK general election contained just fewer than 45.6 million entries, an increase of 1.3 million since the 2005 UK general election.
- The registers for the areas of England where local government elections also took place on 6 May contained 21.3 million entries.
- The eligible electorate increased by over 700,000 between publication of the 1 December 2009 registers and the close of registration on 20 April 2010. This increase was made up of attainers on the registers who turned 18 by polling day and people who registered to vote after the annual canvass.¹⁶

There were 46.1 million parliamentary electors in the UK in December 2011 and the number of UK local government electors was 47.4 million.

British, Irish and qualifying Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK can register to vote in both parliamentary and local government elections. British nationals living overseas can vote in parliamentary elections for up to fifteen years after they move abroad, but cannot vote in local elections. EU citizens resident in the UK can vote in local elections but not in parliamentary elections, which is also the case for Members of the House of Lords.

2.1 Trends in electorate size

The total number of entries on the electoral register has been increasing year on year since 2004, following a decrease in the number of register entries in the early 2000s. The December figures provided in Table 1 reflect the electorate immediately following the annual canvass undertaken by local authorities each autumn.

The number of entries on Northern Ireland's electoral registers has been particularly volatile. Following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in 2002, the number of register entries fell by 10.5%. A 'carry forward' mechanism was temporarily introduced prior to the 2005 General Election in an effort to address the falling electorate numbers; electors

¹⁵ *The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain*, Electoral Commission, March 2010

¹⁶ *Report on the administration of the 2010 UK general election*, Electoral Commission, March 2010

who failed to respond to the annual canvas would remain on the register for one year before being removed. As a consequence, the registered electorate increased by 10.3% in 2005 but dropped again in 2006 when the 'carry forward' ceased to apply. The last annual canvas was conducted in 2006 after which it was replaced by a system of 'continuous registration'. Between 2007 and 2011 the electorate of Northern Ireland grew by 8.3% compared to growth of 2.3% for the UK as a whole.¹⁷

Table 1: Parliamentary electors by country at 1 December: 2001 to 2011

	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
<i>Parliamentary electorate at 1 December</i>					
2001	37,296,327	3,966,801	2,235,666	1,196,970	44,695,764
2002	37,179,095	3,887,059	2,225,599	1,071,600	44,363,353
2003	36,991,118	3,857,997	2,219,973	1,067,564	44,136,652
2004	37,043,608	3,857,852	2,233,467	1,045,537	44,180,464
2005	37,151,991	3,861,207	2,236,808	1,153,409	44,403,415
2006	37,588,775	3,872,901	2,243,244	1,070,265	44,775,185
2007	37,817,466	3,887,571	2,257,474	1,120,343	45,082,854
2008	37,912,549	3,885,148	2,261,769	1,134,983	45,194,449
2009	38,129,082	3,869,700	2,261,269	1,160,757	45,420,808
2010	38,443,481	3,928,979	2,281,596	1,190,635	45,844,691
2011	38,654,024	3,941,592	2,298,569	1,212,967	46,107,152
<i>% change on previous year</i>					
2001 ^a	0.5%	-0.9%	-0.1%	-0.7%	0.3%
2002	-0.3%	-2.0%	-0.5%	-10.5%	-0.7%
2003	-0.5%	-0.7%	-0.3%	-0.4%	-0.5%
2004	0.1%	0.0%	0.6%	-2.1%	0.1%
2005	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	10.3%	0.5%
2006	1.2%	0.3%	0.3%	-7.2%	0.8%
2007	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	4.7%	0.7%
2008	0.3%	-0.1%	0.2%	1.3%	0.2%
2009	0.6%	-0.4%	0.0%	2.3%	0.5%
2010	0.8%	1.5%	0.9%	2.6%	0.9%
2011	0.5%	0.3%	0.7%	1.9%	0.6%

(a) Percentage change between February 2001 and December 2001

2.2 Reasons for non-registration

The Electoral Commission concluded in its report *The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers*, that

6.5 Incompleteness and inaccuracies on the registers are strongly associated with population movement. For this reason, there is a clear decline in the registers between the annual canvass periods. In the most densely populated urban areas, the completeness and accuracy of the registers may decline by as much as 10–15 percentage points over the lifetime of the registers. It is not surprising, therefore, that under-registration is closely associated with those

¹⁷ Electoral Commission, *Electoral registration in Northern Ireland, Summary of research, October 2006 and February 2007 updates*

social groups who are most likely to move home; this includes young people and those living in private rental housing.

But the Commission also found other reasons for a decline in registration:

6.6 Recent social, economic and political changes also appear to have resulted in a declining motivation to register to vote among specific social groups. Electors have more options than ever open to them to register: in addition to the canvass, electors can take advantage of rolling registration; many can confirm their details through text or internet; and public awareness materials highlight the importance of registering to vote. However, as this report shows, a combination of factors may have reduced registration rates. They appear to be associated with both registration practices (changes in the approach to the annual canvass after 1998) as well as matters of individual choice and circumstances (such as a decline in interest in politics). However, more detailed research on non-registered electors is required to understand the relative importance of these, and other, potential factors influencing registration.¹⁸

The Cabinet Office funded additional research by the Electoral Commission into the completeness and accuracy of the register. This research was undertaken in 2011 and published on 13 December 2011.¹⁹ An extract from the key findings of the report is given below:

- The completeness estimates are in line with the Commission's 2010 report and other data collected on the registers, which indicate a decline in the quality of the registers in the early 2000s with a subsequent stabilisation, but not recovery, from 2006.
- The April 2011 parliamentary registers were 82.3% complete; the comparable figure for the local government registers was 82.0%.
- This equates to approximately 8.5 million unregistered people in Great Britain as of April 2011. However, this does not mean that these registers should have had 8.5 million more entries, because many, but not all, of those not registered correctly may still have been represented on the registers by an inaccurate entry (for example, at a previous address).
- The estimates provide a snapshot of the state of the registers at a particular point in time. Previous research has shown that the completeness of the registers generally declines after the registers are published on 1 December. We would therefore expect these April estimates to be lower than previous national estimates, which have been based on registers published immediately following the annual canvass.
- Using data gathered during the study, rough estimates of the completeness of the December 2010 registers were produced. These estimates indicate that the completeness of the December 2010 registers was somewhere in the range of 85–87%. This is lower than the December 2000 estimate for England and Wales, which suggested that 91–92% of people were registered.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#), Electoral Commission, 13 December 2011

- These estimates suggest that the number of unregistered people in Great Britain has risen from approximately 3.9 million¹¹ in December 2000 to at least 6 million in December 2010.
- A high proportion (44%) of those not on the registers in April 2011 incorrectly believed that they were registered.
- April 2011 completeness levels were noticeably higher (89%) among those who had not moved since the time of the 2010 annual canvass. Only 14% of those who moved into their home since the 2010 canvass were on the registers in April 2011.²⁰

3 Electoral fraud

There have been many allegations of electoral abuse since the introduction of postal voting on demand in 2001. Following an election petition in the wards of Bordesley Green and Aston in Birmingham after the local elections in 2004, an election court was convened in February 2005. Richard Mawrey QC delivered his judgments on 4 April 2005 and found that “corrupt and illegal practices have extensively prevailed at the election of the authority for which the election was held”. Judge Mawrey was scathing in his comments on the system of postal voting and said that the evidence of electoral fraud he had heard “would disgrace a banana republic.”²¹

The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* increased the security of postal voting by making it an offence to falsely apply for a postal vote but there have continued to be allegations of electoral fraud. On 28 April 2008 the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust published a report, *Purity of elections in the UK: causes for concern*. The report concluded that there had been a decline in public confidence in the electoral process and that there is a widespread view that “a fundamental overhaul of UK electoral law, administration and policy is urgently required”.²²

In another case in 2008 Richard Mawrey QC found Conservative councillor Eshaq Khan guilty of corrupt and illegal practices at the election court in Slough. Khan’s election was declared void and he was banned from holding office for five years after being found guilty of vote rigging by using postal ballots in the names of hundreds of ‘ghost voters’. Mawrey noted in his judgement that “there is no reason to suppose that this is an isolated incident. Roll-stuffing [packing the electoral roll with fictitious voters] is childishly simple to commit and very difficult to detect. To ignore the probability that it is widespread, particularly in local elections, is a policy that even an ostrich would despise.”²³

For further information about electoral fraud see the Library Standard Notes 3667 and 6255 *Postal voting and electoral fraud* and *Electoral offences since 2010*.

The *Impact Assessment* published with the Bill indicated that individual electoral registration was expected to reduce financial fraud as well as electoral fraud.

By increasing the accuracy of the electoral register IER will also reduce financial fraud by making it harder for fraudsters to both steal identities and register false identities on the electoral register... there is evidence of a significant amount of financial fraud which is based partly on the electoral register. Intelligence shows that individual criminals and organised crime groups exploit electoral registration to increase the apparent robustness of

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ See Standard note 3667 , *Postal voting and electoral fraud*, for further details

²² *Purity of elections in the UK: causes for concern*.by Stuart Wilks-Heeg, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, 2008

²³ ‘Postal voting cheats are threat to May elections’, *Times*, 19 March 2008

false identities, which in turn enable a range of criminal activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, mortgage fraud, fraudulently applying for banking products and/or passing credit checks, and fraudulently gaining access to state benefits. Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and National Fraud Initiative data match analysis of 29,000 strands of identity data found on forged and counterfeit documents collated under Operation AMBERHILL (such as names, addresses) showed that 13,214 (45.6%) of these were positive matches on electoral roll entries and could potentially be used to facilitate fraud. The lack of robust verification processes for electoral registration, make it an area of activity for criminals of high reward and low risk. According to CIFAS (2010), the UK's fraud prevention service, 217,385 frauds were recorded to the National Fraud Database by CIFAS member organisations, 47% of which were identity fraud. The estimated value associated with these 217,385 frauds is £707m, with £191m associated with those where checking against the electoral roll helped to confirm the fraud. While this is not in any way an indication of fraud within the electoral roll, it is evidence of the reliance that is placed on the accuracy of the electoral register. Illustratively, if the amount of fraud detected and prevented is a linear function of the electoral register then increasing the accuracy of the electoral register under confirmation would lead to a drop in financial fraud of £1.5m 2015/16, rising to a fall of £17.5m in 2029/30. This figures should be considered to be indicative only however because the mathematical relationship between the accuracy of the electoral register and fraud is imperfectly understood. This reduction in fraud may not occur until 2014/15 however because the strong carry-forward provision will stop Electoral Registration Officers from removing entries unless they have evidence to do so.

4 Current system of registration

At present registration is a combination of annual household registration and 'rolling' registration, that is, changes of personal details can be registered during the year on the initiative of the individual elector. There is no central electoral register; registers are compiled and maintained locally by EROs who are required to compile registers of electors for their area for Parliamentary and local elections.

In England, Scotland and Wales an annual canvass form is sent to each household by the local council between September and November. The householder (or a named person) is required to complete and return the form on their own behalf and on behalf of anyone else who lives in the household and who is eligible to vote. The completed form must contain details of those resident and eligible to vote on the prescribed date, 15 October.

Since February 2001 the introduction of a rolling register has provided a voluntary means by which an individual can amend his or her registration details. To do this an individual needs to complete an application form and return it to his new ERO. The applicant needs to state his previous address and the ERO is required to inform the previous ERO as soon as practicable. The previous ERO may take the applicant's name off the register at the old address, unless there is sufficient evidence for the applicant to be registered in two places at once. Applications can be for addition, deletion or amendment. If the application is made in the first half of the month the name is added to the register at the beginning of the following month. There is no monthly update during September, October or November during the annual canvass period when all households are required to register; changes notified during this period are added to the register when it is published on 1 December.

4.1 Duty of the ERO to ensure a complete and accurate register

EROs are required by the *Representation of the People Act 1983* to take all steps that are necessary to maintain the registers of Parliamentary electors and local government electors for their area. They are also required to maintain a register of those citizens of European Union member states who are entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections. It is an offence not to comply with a request from an ERO for the information he requires to compile the register. At the annual canvass the householder (or owner or occupier) of the premises must supply the details of everyone who is eligible to vote at that address; the penalty for not providing the relevant information is a fine, currently £1,000. However, there are very few prosecutions for not completing the canvass form. On 26 October 2010 a Parliamentary Question sought information about the number of prosecutions:

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): How many prosecutions for failing to complete the registration form for the electoral register there were in 2009.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con) [answering on behalf of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission]: The Electoral Commission informs me that, in March 2010, it published data based on returns from 351 electoral registration officers showing that, in Great Britain, a total of 67 prosecutions were initiated in relation to a failure to provide information in response to the 2009 annual canvass. The commission does not hold data on the outcomes of those prosecutions. No such prosecutions were initiated in Northern Ireland in the same year.²⁴

The *Representation of the People Act 1983* was amended by the *Electoral Administration Act 2006* which added a new Section 9A; the section sets out the steps that must be taken by EROs to identify people eligible for registration as electors. Section 9A (2) states that the steps include:

- (a) Sending more than once to any address the form to be used for the canvass under section 10 below;
- (b) Making on one or more occasions house to house inquiries under subsection (5) of that section;
- (c) Making contact by such other means as the registration officer thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in a register;
- (d) Inspecting any records held by any person which he is permitted to inspect under or by virtue of any enactment or rule of law;
- (e) Providing training to persons under his direction or control in connection with the carrying out of the duty.

The Electoral Commission's guidance for EROs provides further advice about the requirements of Section 9A.²⁵ The Commission has also published performance standards for registration officers.²⁶

²⁴ HC Deb 26 October 2010 c166

²⁵ [Managing electoral registration in Great Britain: guidance for Electoral Registration Officers](#), Electoral Commission. See Section C

²⁶ [Performance standards for Electoral registration Officers](#), Electoral Commission

5 Individual electoral registration

The Electoral Commission has called for the introduction of individual voter registration since its report *The electoral registration process* was published in 2003.²⁷ The key recommendation in the report was that the basis of registration should move from the current system of a combination of household registration and ‘rolling’ registration to a system based entirely on individual registration. The Commission initially saw the change as being an essential ‘building block’ for e-enabled elections but individual registration was later seen as an important measure to guard against electoral fraud. The Commission published a further report in June 2003, *Voting for change: an electoral law modernisation programme*, which brought together recommendations from a series of policy papers, including those on registration issues. The Labour Government responded to the report in 2004 and said it was sympathetic to the principles of individual registration but it did not implement the Commission’s recommendations, mainly because of concern about the effects on levels of registration if a system of individual registration was introduced. When individual registration was introduced in Northern Ireland by the *Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002*, the numbers on the register there initially fell by 10.5% although the legislation was seen as successful in reducing electoral fraud (see Section 6 of this Paper).²⁸

5.1 The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009

The *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* made provision for the phased implementation of individual registration although this had not been in the original bill and was added during committee stage in the House of Lords after pressure from the opposition parties.

The new clauses which were added to the *Political Parties and Elections Bill* made provision for implementing a system of individual registration of voters under a statutory timetable. Electors’ personal identifiers (date of birth, signature and national insurance number) would be collected on a voluntary basis before 2015 after which it would become compulsory for new voters to provide them. The final move to compulsory individual registration would not take place until 2015; the Labour Government said that a phased approach would allow progress to be monitored at each stage to ensure that registration rates would be maintained. The Electoral Commission would be required to publish annual progress reports and to make a final recommendation in 2014 on whether the change to individual registration should take place.

In June 2010, the Electoral Commission issued a document setting out its proposed approach to the monitoring of the introduction of individual registration and said that any proposal to speed up the process would need to be considered by Parliament.²⁹

The Coalition Government announced in July 2010 that it would speed up the introduction of individual registration.³⁰

5.2 Statement on IER on 15 September 2010

The Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, Mark Harper, made a statement on individual electoral registration on 15 September 2010 and said that the Government would bring forward a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny:

²⁷ *The Electoral registration process: report and recommendations*, Electoral Commission, 2003

²⁸ For further information see Section XI of *Library Research Paper 05/65, The Electoral Administration Bill 2005-06*

²⁹ *Monitoring the introduction of individual electoral registration: our proposed approach*. Electoral Commission, June 2010

³⁰ [HC Deb 14 July 2010 c797W](#)

It is widely recognised on both sides of the House that the current arrangements for electoral registration need to change. At present, there is no requirement for people to provide any evidence of their identity to register to vote, which leaves the system vulnerable to fraud. Household registration harks back to a time when registration was the responsibility of the head of the household. Access to a right as fundamental as voting should not be dependent on someone else. We need a better system of keeping up with people who move house or who need to update their registration for other reasons. Individual registration provides an opportunity to move forward to a system centred around the individual citizen.

[...]

Although proven electoral fraud is relatively rare, we should be concerned about the impact that such cases have on the public's confidence in the electoral system...it is right that we take steps to make the system less vulnerable to fraud, because tackling that perception is an important part of rebuilding trust in our democracy, which is why this Government are committed to speeding up the implementation of individual registration.³¹

Mr Harper said that the new system of individual electoral registration would require each person to register themselves and provide personal identifiers; date of birth, signature and National Insurance number, which would allow registration officers to verify a person's identity. The Minister added that there would be no new databases and that EROs would be able to check information held by the Department of Work and Pensions to ensure that applicants to register were genuine. The personal identifiers provided by applicants to register would not be published in the electoral register.

The Government proposed that individual registration would be made compulsory in 2014, but gave an assurance that no one who failed to register individually would be removed from the register until after the 2015 general election.

Mr Harper also announced that there would be pilot schemes to trial data matching with other public databases to find people eligible to vote but who are not on the register:

The aim is to tackle under-registration among specific groups in our society and ensure that every opportunity is available to those currently not on the electoral register. These pilots will enable us to see how effective data-matching is and to see which data sets are of most use in improving the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. If they are effective, we will roll them out more widely across local authorities on a permanent basis to help ensure that our register is as complete as possible. The Electoral Commission will also play a key role in assessing and reporting on the pilots.³²

5.3 Data-matching pilots

At present Electoral Registration Officers are allowed to use local authority databases to assist them in the compilation of the register, but they are not able to access national databases. The Government announced on 15 September 2010 that there would be pilot schemes to test whether access to databases such as those of the DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency) and DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) would also help EROs in compiling an accurate and complete register.

³¹ [HC Deb 15 September 2010 c883](#)

³² *ibid*

The prospectus for the data matching pilots gave further information about the schemes:

The purpose of these schemes is to gather evidence on whether access to additional data held by public authorities will be useful in helping Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to maintain and improve electoral registration rates. The schemes may also support EROs by targeting currently underrepresented groups and identifying people who are eligible to be registered but are not currently on the register or for whom the details on the electoral register are inaccurate.³³

Annex A of the prospectus gave details of the databases that the Government wanted EROs to test :

- DVLA provisional licence database
- Child benefit database
- National insurance and PAYE recording system
- DWP customer information system and housing benefit
- National pupil database (NPD)
- Royal Mail national change address update
- MOD joint personnel administration system³⁴

There were 22 pilots which took place throughout Great Britain and these covered a range of demographics and data sets; the pilots are listed in the schedule to the [Electoral Registration Data Schemes Order 2011](#).

Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, the author of the Electoral Commission report, *The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain*, gave evidence to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on 8 September 2011.³⁵ During the evidence session he was asked about data-sharing and he suggested that the extent to which EROs checked other records held by their local authorities varied considerably:

... in fact EROs do have quite significant powers, in terms of being able to request information from other sources. Some of them choose to use it; some of them don't. Some of them say they have difficulties accessing that information because of their own fears and also the fears of other bodies about data protection. But certainly, EROs at the moment routinely are -or at least they should be-looking at things like council tax records and other records held by the local authority. They should be getting notices from the Registrar of Deaths, and so on. I can't think of a local authority that doesn't do that. They also have the capacity to request information from registered social landlords, even private landlords, residential homes, universities, university halls of residence. The extent to which they currently do this varies enormously, and that is the crucial point, I think.

³³ Cabinet Office Electoral Registration Transformation Programme : Data Matching Schemes

³⁴ *ibid*

³⁵ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual electoral registration and electoral administration*, HC 1463, evidence 8 September 2011; <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmpolcon/1463/11090802.htm>

The Electoral Commission was required to assess the results of the pilot schemes and published a report in March 2012.³⁶ The Commission's evaluation considered to what degree the data matching schemes assisted EROs in improving the completeness and accuracy of their registers. Ten databases were due to be tested in the pilots. These were:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Centric database
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) Driver database
- Student Loans Company (SLC) database
- National Pupil Database (NPD) (through the Department for Education)
- Individual Learner Record (ILR) (through the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills)
- Citizens Account (CA) database (through the Improvement Service in Scotland)
- Ministry of Defence (MoD) Joint Personnel Administration database and Anite housing database
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) student database
- Royal Mail change of address database³⁷

However, not all databases were tested to the same extent and the Commission noted that there were difficulties in accessing the HEFCE database and Royal Mail data.

The Commission's conclusions were that on the whole the pilots did not prove very effective at getting people on to the register; despite the efforts invested by local authorities in the pilots very few additions were subsequently made to the register.³⁸ However, better results were achieved where the local authority was able to begin their pilot follow-up activity before, or at a very early stage of, their annual canvass. The Commission also noted that:

...the low number of registrations does not mean that the principle of data matching is without merit, and many local authorities were clear that they still see potential in the principle of data matching. However, refinements to the matching process such as an improvement in the currency, quality and compatibility of the data provided would need to be in place before this objective could be fully tested.³⁹

The Commission concluded that the pilot schemes were both time consuming and costly:

Some of the resources required to run the pilots were more extensive than those required if data matching was to be rolled out permanently, but on the basis of these schemes there is little evidence that data matching is a cost effective and manageable alternative to current registration processes.⁴⁰

³⁶ [Data matching schemes to improve accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers – evaluation report](#), Electoral Commission, March 2012

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*, p93

³⁹ *ibid*, p93

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p96

The Commission recommended that further pilots would be required before data matching could be rolled out across Great Britain:

Further testing of national databases by local authorities would need to be undertaken in order to establish whether data matching is made available for use to all local authorities.⁴¹

The Commission also recommended that there was a need for more evidence to support the Government's proposal that data matching could be used to confirm the identity of people on the register during the transition to IER.

5.4 White Paper and draft legislation

On 30 June 2011 the Government published a White Paper and draft legislation, *Individual Electoral Registration*.⁴² The White Paper set out how the Government planned to accelerate the introduction of individual electoral registration. Mark Harper, gave further details:

Individual electoral registration [IER] will bring greater protection against electoral fraud and modernise our electoral system. IER will ask each person to register themselves, rather than by household, and provide information which will be cross checked by registration officers before a person is added to the electoral register.

Learning from the experience in Northern Ireland we have put in place arrangements to help people manage the transition to the new system. Any electors who do not respond to the initial invitation to register under IER in 2014 will be carried forward unless the registration officer has concerns the registration is ineligible. An individual registration would be required for new registrations and for any elector who wishes to use an absent vote.

The White Paper also considers how else the system of electoral registration could be modernised, making it easier and more convenient to register to vote. Reforming the system also provides the opportunity to take steps to tackle the problem of under-registration. The UK's registration rate compares well internationally but evidence suggests that a significant number of people are missing from the register. This year data-matching pilots will allow registration officers to compare their electoral register with other public databases to identify people missing from the register or entries on the register that are inaccurate or fraudulent. If data matching proves effective, we will consider rolling it out more widely across the country.

It should be made absolutely clear that no new national databases will be created and that no additional information will be placed on the electoral register as a result of the changes to the system.⁴³

5.5 The 'opt-out' provisions

The Government proposed in the White Paper that there would be provisions in the Bill to allow people who did not want to be registered to indicate on the IER canvass form that they did not wish to be chased:

This will enable the ERO not to ask them to register again during that canvass period. It will not be possible for an elector to declare that they do not wish to

⁴¹ *ibid*, p98

⁴² Cm 8108

⁴³ HC Deb 30 June 2011 c59WS

be registered on a permanent basis. This approach will ensure that people are not repeatedly asked to register during a canvass period when they have no intention of doing so and that EROs direct their resources to finding eligible electors who want to be registered.

75. Eligible electors who inform their EROs that they do not want to be chased up and invited to register will have their details held on a temporary list for the purpose of ensuring that no further contact is made within a specified period, such as during the annual canvass. This list will not be made available for inspection, will be created solely for the purpose of ensuring that the person's wishes are respected and will be destroyed within a specified period.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee examined the Government's proposals for individual electoral registration and published a report on 4 November 2011.⁴⁴ During the Committee's inquiry the issue of the 'opt-out', met with some opposition. The Electoral Commission gave evidence to the Committee on 15 September 2011 and Jenny Watson, the Commission's Chair, made a number of comments about the effects of such an 'opt-out':

The register performs an important civic function, beyond enabling us to vote, and those functions are also important in a democracy. It ensures the public are counted for purposes of representation and drawing boundaries. It ensures that political parties and candidates can contact electors and try and persuade them to vote, and of course it is the register from which potential jurors are drawn. It is also used in law for the purpose of credit reference agency checks and for detecting fraud. Therefore the Government's position on the opt-out may lead to unforeseen consequences, which the Committee may want to explore. For instance, it would be logical to suggest that those who don't vote in elections may not see the point of registering to vote and it is possible, therefore, that the register could go from around a 90% completeness that we currently have to around, say, a 60% completeness, 65% being the most recent Westminster general election turnout. I think that would be something that would concern us all.⁴⁵

John Turner, the Chief Executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, expressed a similar view:

There is also the question of the voluntary nature of the new system, where the Government have said that there is no intention to make this compulsory. Indeed, they have hinted in the White Paper that there could be the opportunity for people to opt out, and given the almost anecdotal evidence that some people do not like registering, for a variety of reasons, I think there is a fair chance that advantage will be taken of that opt-out.

If you think around some of the uses of the register that might dissuade people from registering and the fact that you are going to be able to say, by ticking a box, "I do not wish to be canvassed. I do not wish to register", there seems to me a sort of pervasive logic that gets us to a position where people will drop off the register, for reasons that have very little to do with voting, politics or even engagement with the democratic system. They would be persuaded for other reasons, such as jury service, not wanting to receive unsolicited mail, wishing to remain anonymous—for all sorts of security and perhaps other reasons. That

⁴⁴ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual electoral registration and electoral administration*, 4 November 2011, HC 1463

⁴⁵ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual electoral registration and electoral administration*, 4 November 2011, HC 1463, [Evidence](#), 15 September 2011

has a knock-on effect that potentially we will not see until we have gone through two iterations of the registration process, the first important one being after the next general election.⁴⁶

There were a number of press reports which raised concerns about the effect on the accuracy and completeness of the register if the Government introduced the 'opt-out' for people who did not wish to be included on the register. The Deputy Prime Minister responded to questions about this on 11 October 2011 and indicated that the Government would look again at these provisions:

...I do, however, have sympathy with the concerns expressed by the Electoral Commission and others about the opt-out proposal, and I am minded to change these provisions when we bring forward the final legislation.⁴⁷

When the Electoral Commission's full response to the White Paper was published on 14 October 2011 the Commission welcomed the Deputy Prime Minister's decision to look again at the opt-out provisions.

The Government's response to the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee's report acknowledged the concerns raised by the Committee and others about the possible impact on registration levels of an opt-out, but there was no final decision about the policy. The Government also stated that it was considering the introduction of a civil penalty for people who failed to comply with the ERO's invitation to be registered under the new system.

The Bill does not make provision for an 'opt-out' but it does make provision in Schedule 3 for a civil penalty for a non-response to an invitation to register. The details of the new penalty will be set out in secondary legislation.

5.6 Responses to the White Paper

The Electoral Commission's response

The Electoral Commission's full [response](#) to the White Paper was published on 14 October 2011.⁴⁸ In a [press release](#) Electoral Commission Chair, Jenny Watson, said:

We support the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration which should improve the security of electoral registers and make individuals responsible for their own vote. We have long called for it and are pleased the Government are now taking it forward.

The most important principle about IER is that it should be introduced in a way that ensures the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register is maintained. To help ensure that, we are recommending that the Government improve their proposals by reinstating an annual canvas in 2014. We are pleased that the Government has responded to our concerns and indicated it is minded to look again at the 'opt-out' provision. We look forward to seeing the legislation in due course and will continue to scrutinise the proposals to ensure our concerns are met.

This is the most significant change to the way we register to vote since the introduction of the universal franchise in 1928 and it is important that it is implemented in a way which puts the voter first."

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ HC Deb 11 October 2011 c166

⁴⁸ [The Electoral Commission's response to the Government's White Paper and draft legislation on Individual Electoral Registration](#), 14 October 2011

The Commission also pointed out that electoral registers are used for purposes other than establishing someone's right to vote; they form the basis for other important civic functions such as drawing constituency boundaries and selecting juries, which could lead to wider consequences if voters are allowed to 'opt-out' of the register year on year.

The Association of Electoral Administrators' response

The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) also published its response to the White Paper on 14 October 2010.⁴⁹ The Association said it had long argued for the introduction of individual electoral registration but warned that "security and integrity must also be balanced with accessibility if participation in and acceptance of the new system is to be achieved".

The AEA also suggested that there was

...general concern that the proposed processes set out in the White Paper are overly complicated and bureaucratic and present risks in terms of both the effective administration of electoral registration and the accessibility and take-up of the new system by eligible electors.⁵⁰

The Association made detailed comments in its response on the various aspects of the proposed system and also made suggestions for potential solutions. It also pointed out that the registration process had to be considered within the context of other electoral administration processes and

account must be taken of the impact of individual electoral registration on those other processes, in particular postal voting and the election timetable. Whilst we would want to see the continuation of the ability for voters to register close to an election, we have serious concerns about the practicability of retaining the deadline for registration applications at eleven days before the poll (-11) under the model of individual electoral registration contained within the White Paper.⁵¹

5.7 The Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee's inquiry

The Committee published its report on 4 November 2011.⁵² The Committee concluded that there was broad agreement on the principle of individual electoral registration but very differing views on how it should be implemented; the main findings of the Committee are listed below:

- There was welcome for the Government's acknowledgment that 'care needs to be taken not to make it too easy for people to opt out from what is still regarded as a public duty, even under the Government's current proposal that failure to register to vote should not be a criminal offence' and the Committee urged the Government to take the necessary steps in this direction in the Bill.
- The Government should reconsider its decision not to hold a full household canvass in 2014:

We have heard serious concerns that the Government's current proposals will miss an unacceptably large number of potential electors, and calls from many

⁴⁹ [Formal response to the UK Government's White Paper Individual Electoral Registration Association of Electoral Administrators 14 October 2011](#)

⁵⁰ *ibid*

⁵¹ *ibid*

⁵² Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual Electoral Registration and electoral administration*, HC 1463, 2010-12

of our witnesses for a full household canvass in 2014 to address this problem. We believe, given the unique circumstances of the change to IER, that the Government should reconsider its decision not to hold a full household canvass in 2014.⁵³

- It should initially be an offence to fail to complete a voter registration form although this could be reviewed after five years of operation of the new system ‘by which time registration levels may be high enough and a culture of individual registration sufficiently embedded for compulsion no longer to be necessary’.⁵⁴
- The Committee was concerned that the electoral registers in December 2015, which will be used for the next boundary review ‘will be particularly varied in their levels of completeness’ and recommended that the registers to be used as the basis for this review should be the registers as they were on or before polling day in May 2015.
- The evidence received suggested that data matching would be of limited effectiveness, especially in identifying potential electors. The Committee therefore recommended that the Electoral Commission should publish its evaluations of the data-matching pilots before the second reading of the Bill and that the Government should ‘explore ways of improving the sharing of information between local authorities, especially where potential electors move house’ to identify duplicate entries on the registers’.

The Committee made a number of other recommendations which included a proposal to drop the requirement of a signature as a personal identifier to cast a postal vote once the new system of IER was well established; a call for the edited register to be abolished and a recommendation that the Government should ‘ensure that the funding it provides to support local authorities with the transition to IER is ring-fenced for this purpose’. The Committee also suggested that there was a strong case for the Electoral Commission to be given powers ‘to intervene where EROs consistently fail to meet agreed performance standards’.⁵⁵

5.8 The Government’s response

The Government published a [response](#) to the Committee’s pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation on IER as a Command Paper on 9 February 2012.⁵⁶

The response set out areas where there had been key changes since the White Paper:

4. We have listened to the feedback expressed about elements of the Government’s proposals, not least the perceived risks to the completeness of the electoral register, and are proposing to make a number of key changes to the proposals included in the White Paper. The major changes to the policy position are as follows:

Over the past year we have carried out a series of data matching pilots, comparing electoral registers in twenty-two areas with a range of data from public authorities. While the final evaluation is still being concluded, the evidence so far suggests that comparing entries on an electoral register with information held by the department for Work and Pensions (DWP) allows us to confirm as accurate a significant majority (an average of two thirds for that data set alone in the pilot areas) of entries on the registers concerned.

⁵³ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual Electoral Registration and electoral administration*, HC 1463, 2010-12, [Conclusions and recommendations](#)

⁵⁴ *ibid*

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ [Government response to pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation on Individual Electoral Registration and Amendments to Electoral Law](#) Cm 8245 February 2012

Subject to the results of the full evaluation, and further testing this year, we are therefore minded to build on this to simplify the transition to IER for the majority of electors. It is now our intention that the names and addresses of all individuals currently on an electoral register will be matched against the data held by public bodies such as the DWP and local authorities themselves. If an elector's information can be matched, the individual will be automatically placed onto the new IER register and would not need to take any further action to be registered under IER. Only those people who cannot be confirmed automatically will be invited to provide identifying information to be verified. This should simplify the transition process for the majority of electors, reducing the number of people required to provide personal identifiers and will also allow EROs to free up resource to target the smaller group of people whose information cannot be matched and those who are currently missing from the register.

We have listened to concerns that there is no full household canvass in 2014. To ensure that a more accurate and up to date register is used as the basis of the new register we are also planning to delay the annual canvass in 2013 to the early part of 2014.

We have made other changes to try and simplify the administration of IER, including altering the proposal to issue a Unique Identifying number (UIn) to activate online registrations, and changing the policy so that the alternative verification methods will only be available to those who are unable to provide a national Insurance number

The Government also published with its response an implementation timeline which set out the key stages of work across the transition to IER (see Appendix).

6 Individual electoral registration in Northern Ireland

Comparisons are often drawn with the experience of Northern Ireland in moving to individual electoral registration. Northern Ireland has had a system of individual registration in place since 2002. Electoral fraud was a long-standing problem there and, following the 1997 general election, recommendations for change were made by the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee and the Northern Ireland Office review *Administering Elections in Northern Ireland*. One of the main problems was registration of people not actually resident at the address given. A White Paper was published in March 2001, *Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland*, which proposed that the elector's date of birth and signature should become required information on the electoral registration form.

The *Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002* implemented the White Paper's recommendations and required people registering to vote to provide their personal details including a National Insurance number and signature. The legislation specifically allowed for the cross checking of the NI database. In Northern Ireland a single Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) carries out the functions of an electoral registration officer, which in Great Britain are delegated to individual officers in local authorities. Moreover, there is a long standing three month qualifying period of residence before registration is allowed.⁵⁷ Rolling registration has been in force since the *Representation of the People Act 2000*. It remains a criminal offence to fail to complete a registration form when asked to do so.⁵⁸

The immediate effect of the new system was a major fall in the number of people registered. The legislation required each register to have a 12 month life, with no automatic carry-forward of names to the next year. (Carry-forward is where the relevant electors who have not responded to a canvass have their names carried forward onto the new register

⁵⁷ See [FAQs on Registration](#) Electoral Office of Northern Ireland

⁵⁸ See Regulation 24 of the [Representation of the People \(Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2008](#)

nonetheless).⁵⁹ The first new register was issued in December 2002 and the number of names had fallen by 10.5 per cent since December 2001. This represented about 125,000 potential electors. Registration continued to contract in the following years, but at a slower rate.⁶⁰

The Government brought forward legislation in the 2004-5 session, the *Electoral Registration (Northern Ireland) Act 2005*, to reinstate carry-forward as an interim measure ahead of the local government elections in 2005. These elections were combined with the general election of 5 May 2005. In November 2005 the Electoral Commission's report into the elections in Northern Ireland found that the 2005 Act had reinstated onto the register just over 70,000 people who had failed to re-register in the 2004 autumn canvass.⁶¹

The Government published a consultation paper in August 2005, *Proposals on the future of electoral registration in Northern Ireland*, which proposed a system of continuing registration, abolishing the requirement for individuals to register on an annual basis.⁶² This was supported by the main political parties. The paper also proposed more extensive data-sharing powers.

The *Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006* implemented these proposals. Section 3 made provision for a canvass to be held in 2010 and every tenth year afterwards. There were also provisions to allow for additional canvasses where the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) requested one and the Secretary of State was satisfied that the public interest required a canvass. The CEO was given a duty under section 4 to meet certain registration objectives in maintaining the electoral register and to assess whether those objectives had been met in his annual report.⁶³ A revised register was to be published on 1 December annually. The provisions were in force for the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in 2007. The subsequent report from the Electoral Commission found that the number of people registered to vote had increased by 43,000 since the 2003 elections.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life looked at individual registration in Northern Ireland during its [review](#) of the Electoral Commission published in January 2007. The Committee noted:

In Northern Ireland the introduction of individual registration in 2002 resulted in the number of names on the new register dropping by nearly 11 per cent compared to the previous register under household registration. The Government is on record as saying that this drop owed to a combination of inaccuracy resulting from weaknesses in the household-based system and the withdrawal of the 'carry forward': previously individuals on the register, who did not re-register during the canvass, were kept on the register for a further 12 months. The Electoral Commission agreed and, following detailed research, commented that the fall did indeed reflect the removal of the carry forward which had the effect of removing inflationary factors from the register. The Commission also observed that the introduction of individual registration had a positive effect on restoring integrity to the registration process.

⁵⁹ Carry forward was abolished in the *Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2002*

⁶⁰ See Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee report HC 131 2004-05

⁶¹ *Election 2005: Northern Ireland* Electoral Commission December 2005 para 4.9

⁶² See Library Research Paper 06/14 *The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill* for background

⁶³ Section 9(2)

In the event, no canvass was held in December 2010, as the CEO advised the Secretary of State that a full canvass would reduce the number of eligible voters.⁶⁴

Electoral registration in Northern Ireland has not been subject to any major change since 2006. For its report into the 2011 Assembly elections, the Electoral Commission noted how the early despatch of poll cards had helped to prompt individuals to register when the campaign commenced. 17,124 changes were made to the register before polling day comprising approximately 11,500 new registrants and 5,623 updates of information such as address or name changes. Rates of registration remained high:

2.39 The total number of people eligible to vote was 1,210,009. This was an increase of 94,038 from the 2007 Assembly election and an increase of 114,458 from the 2003 Assembly election. It represented the largest number of people registered to vote at an election in Northern Ireland since individual electoral registration was introduced in 2002.⁶⁵

The report also noted that there had not been a door to door canvass in Northern Ireland since 2006, and that secondary legislation had enabled the Chief Electoral Officer to access the details of 16-17 year olds in secondary schools and further education establishments.⁶⁶ The Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for 2010-11 noted that the number of electors registered on 1 December 2010 was 86.7 per cent of the estimated eligible population, compared with 85.2 per cent for December 2009.⁶⁷

7 International comparisons

EURIM (the Information Society Alliance) published a study paper *Individual Voter Registration: Lessons from Overseas*, in March 2011 which was updated in May 2011. EURIM's study focused on the issue of the mechanics of electoral registration and how it is administered in a number of other countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands. The terms of reference excluded electronic voting and the organisation and logistics of polling. EURIM's conclusions are given below:

1. Some of the countries we surveyed put in place sophisticated systems long ago to enable them to capture details leading to a very complete and accurate electoral roll. Compared with these countries, the UK's system is overdue an overhaul, and EURIM welcomes the news that legislation is in preparation.
2. Compulsory registration does not in all cases yield registration rates notably above those achieved in countries without compulsory registration.
3. Proof of identity for registration purposes (although not for voting) is the norm, certainly in our second sample group.
4. Online access may not be a pressing objective today, but the government should recognise that in due course it will be expected as an option for an increasingly IT literate nation provided the security issues can be dealt with effectively.

⁶⁴ Chief Electoral Officer Annual Report 2010-11 para 3.29

⁶⁵ Report on the Northern Ireland Assembly Election 5 May 2011 Electoral Commission http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/141222/NIA-election-report-final-web-no-embargo.pdf

⁶⁶ *Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2008* and *Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2010*

⁶⁷ Chief Electoral Officer Annual Report 2010-11 para 3.22

5. When online registration is eventually implemented, use of digital certificates by the registering elector should be the norm.
6. Data matching or data sharing with other public bodies, online or offline, should be done securely, comply with data privacy laws, and be covered by formal agreements.
7. Where electoral data matching is done online, thought should be given as to how to secure the data.
8. Similarly, if data is shared offline by means of CD or memory stick, the government should apply lessons learnt in the numerous reviews conducted into data loss incidents in recent years.
9. The Government should consider the advantages or otherwise of data matching with private sector databases.
10. To encourage registration of expatriate electors, the government might consider using the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's consular facilities to encourage and facilitate registration overseas.
11. To improve the registration of 'lost' voters, the government might consider linking electoral registration to the application for benefits or to registration on other public databases.
12. Management of electoral data must comply with data privacy laws.
13. ISO 27001 should be adopted in as an information security management system standard.⁶⁸

The Equality Impact Assessment published with the Bill gave some details of comparative research carried out by the Cabinet Office:

20. Internal research involving international comparisons with Australia, Canada and Northern Ireland showed that an effective publicity campaign is essential to the success of capturing most electors in the initial period of change in electoral registration. In both Northern Ireland and Canada, the change of the electoral registration system was not effectively advertised and caused a significant impact on the registration rates of particular social groups; in both cases this had a disproportionate impact on young people. It also showed that there needs to be effective mechanisms in place to stimulate electoral registration amongst under-registered groups – an example of this working effectively is the school outreach programmes in Australia and Northern Ireland. An analysis of the countries considered showed that the accuracy of the electoral register can be improved by data sharing. The report concluded that a complex set of factors affect registration rates and therefore a number of options need to be in place to combat declining levels of registration. We will continue to explore lessons learned from comparable countries.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ [Individual Voter Registration: Lessons from Overseas](#), EURIM (The Information Society Alliance) March 2011, updated May 2011.

⁶⁹ [Equality Impact Assessment](#), Cabinet Office, 2012

Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg undertook an electoral registration literature review for the Cabinet Office and this has more information about registration systems in other countries.⁷⁰

8 The Electoral Registration and Administration Bill 2012-13

Part 1 of the Bill makes provision for the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER) and sets out the framework within which the Secretary of State will make regulations to implement the new system.

Clause 1 inserts a new section 10ZC into the *Representation of the People Act 1983* which requires a registration officer to include a person on the register if the ERO is satisfied that the person is who they claim to be, that they are entitled to be registered and that they have made the application themselves. **Schedule 1** to the Bill adds further sections 10ZD and 10ZE to the *Representation of the People Act 1983* which make new arrangements for making alterations to the register (changes of name and /or address) and to removing a person's entry from the register. Clause 1 and Schedule 1 require registration officers to have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State about determining applications to register. This guidance will cease to be in effect five years after it comes into force, once the new system is well established.

Clause 2 amends Schedule 2 to the *Representation of the People Act 1983* to allow the Secretary of State to make regulations to establish a system for verifying the eligibility of applicants and people already registered to be included on the new IER register. Subsection (2) allows for secondary legislation to authorise an ERO to require a person to provide the evidence determined by the Secretary of State to verify their identity.

Clause 3 changes the arrangements for **proxy voting**. A person who wants to act as a proxy must in future be registered as a voter under the new IER system or the existing system in Northern Ireland. Previously proxies just had to be eligible to be registered to vote. The clause amends Schedule 4 of the *Representation of the People Act 2000*.

Clause 4 requires EROs to continue carrying out **annual canvasses** in Great Britain, but there are changes to the canvass arrangements. Returning the canvass form will no longer be an application to be register as the canvass will just be a means of finding out who is eligible to be registered but is not on the register. EROs will then invite people to register under the IER system once they have been identified by the canvass. Regulations will be made about the conduct of the canvass and these may confer specific duties on the Electoral Commission, such as designing the canvass form.

Clause 5 inserts a new section 9E into the *Representation of the People Act 1983* concerning the maintenance of the registers. The Secretary of State may make regulations about the sending of invitations to register by the EROs to unregistered people of whom they are aware (identified by means of the annual canvass or by any other means). EROs may subsequently require these people to register and the new section 9E allows the ERO to impose a **civil penalty** on a person who fails to comply. **Schedule 3** inserts a new Schedule ZA1 into the RPA 1983 and this schedule makes further provisions about the civil penalties although the detailed provisions will be set out in secondary legislation.

Clause 6 gives the Secretary of State the power to make an Order to amend the provisions relating to the annual canvass; to abolish it and to reinstate it if it has been abolished.

⁷⁰ [Electoral registration in the United Kingdom: a literature review for the Cabinet Office Electoral Registration Transformation Programme](#) by Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, University of Liverpool, February 2012

The framework legislation for IER therefore keeps open the question of whether the annual canvass should be retained. **Clause 7** requires the Electoral Commission to prepare a report if the Government consults it about amending, abolishing or reinstating the annual canvass in Great Britain.

Clause 8 allows for the piloting of changes to the annual canvass in a particular area. If a pilot scheme is undertaken, the Electoral Commission is required to prepare a report assessing the pilot. The Bill also allows for the piloting of changes to electoral registration in **clause 9** so that the provisions in clauses 1 and 2, and in Schedules 1,2 and 4 can be tested before they are rolled out across Great Britain. Electors who have registered individually under a pilot scheme will not be required to register again when the new IER system is launched nationwide.

The Government has published a draft Order, the [Electoral Registration Data Schemes Order 2012](#). The [Explanatory Memorandum](#) gives details of the proposed new pilot schemes:

This Order gives effect to proposals by local electoral registration officers to run data matching pilot schemes. It allows registration officers in 17 areas in England, Wales and Scotland to use data sets kept by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (including data kept on behalf of the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) to enable them to improve the accuracy and completeness of their electoral registers. It is intended that one way in which this will be done is by comparing those registers against the data held by DWP to confirm existing electors who appear on those registers. Depending on the outcome of these pilot schemes, the Government intends that this process of data matching will be used by electoral registration officers throughout Great Britain to ease the transition to Individual Electoral Registration in 2014. For that reason it is important that these schemes take place during the summer and early autumn of 2012 so that any necessary business processes and digital and IT arrangements can be put in place in time. The Order also sets the date by which the Electoral Commission must evaluate the pilot schemes.

The Electoral Commission has commented on the draft Order:

This wave of pilots will test the proposal of using national data to verify the identity of electors in order to simplify the transition to the new registration system. We understand that the proposal is for the spring 2014 electoral registers to be cross-matched against trusted public data sources. Any elector whose entries match will be confirmed on the register and need take no further action. Those individuals who cannot be matched will be required to supply their date of birth and National Insurance Number for verification purposes.

9. We stated in our evaluation report that there is a need for more evidence to support this proposal, given that this was not an objective of the first round of pilots. Therefore, we welcome the introduction of this Statutory Instrument to allow for piloting of the use of national data to verify identity.⁷¹

⁷¹ [The Electoral Commission's response to the UK government's consultation on the Electoral Registration Data Schemes Order 2012](#), May 2012

8.1 Cost of Individual Electoral Registration

The Electoral Commission estimated in its response to the White Paper on IER that approximately £83m a year is spent on the present electoral registration process.⁷²

Further information about the costs of electoral administration can be found in the Commission's report *The cost of electoral administration in Great Britain: financial information survey 2007-08 and 2008-09* published in June 2010.

The Explanatory Notes to the Bill give details of the financial effects of its provisions:

139. A total of £108m was allocated at the Spending Review in 2010 to meet the cost of implementing Individual Electoral Registration. This includes £ 85m resource funding in 2014/15 to fund registration officers to make contact with each potential elector individually and invite them to register in 2014 with the potential to use data matching to confirm existing entries during the transition.

140. It is estimated that after the move to Individual Electoral Registration is complete, the annual ongoing cost of electoral registration will be an additional £13m per annum; although any future decision to stop the annual canvass as provided for in the Bill can be expected to bring costs down significantly (it is too early to say whether there would be any net savings as the running costs of a replacement for the annual canvass – which could be based on data matching - are as yet unknown). These costs will need to be factored into the next spending review.

141. With regard to the electoral administration clauses in Part 2 of the Bill, the provision to extend the electoral timetable should result in efficiency savings by facilitating the production of one poll card for both local and UK Parliamentary elections, when these are combined. The Bill provides for two additional updates to the electoral register to be produced by EROs in the run-up to a poll and where, as a result, Returning Officers determine that additional batches of postal votes are printed to allow for their earlier issue, higher printing costs may be incurred. Requiring EROs to inform electors whose postal vote identifiers (PVI) failed (after a poll) will also have limited resource implications for electoral administrators and their staff. However, the package of electoral administration provisions in Part 2 of the Bill should result in efficiency savings for the taxpayer and local authorities overall.⁷³

9 Administration and conduct of elections

Part 2 of the Bill makes provision for changes to the administration and conduct of elections.

9.1 Electoral timetable for Parliamentary elections

Statutory electoral timetables for both general and by-elections are laid down in the *Parliamentary Elections Rules* appended to the *Representation of the People Act 1983*. The timetables were last amended by the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*.⁷⁴

The Electoral Commission has called for the general election timetable to be lengthened to 25 days (to bring it into line with the local election timetable) since 2003.⁷⁵ The Commission's

⁷² [Electoral Commission response to the White Paper, *Individual Electoral Registration*, Cm 8108](#)

⁷³ [Explanatory Notes to the *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill 2012-13*](#)

⁷⁴ [Electoral Administration Act 2006 \(Commencement No 2, Transitional and Savings Provisions\) Order, 2006. SI 2006/3412](#)

⁷⁵ [Electoral Timetables in the United Kingdom](#), Electoral Commission, July 2003

reasoning was based on the increasing practice of combining local and general elections. The electoral timetable for local elections is 25 days and is set out in the *Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) Rules 2006* made under the provisions of Section 36(2) of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*.

The Electoral Commission's proposals relating to the timetable formed part of a package of reform to electoral administration set out in its report, *Voting for Change: an electoral law modernisation programme*, published in June 2003. The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* subsequently included many of these recommendations in its provisions but not an increase in the length of the Parliamentary election timetable.

In July 2010 the Association of Electoral Administrators published a report, *Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK*. The AEA welcomed the new coalition Government's proposal for fixed-term Parliaments and suggested that this would provide an opportunity to lengthen the electoral timetable for Parliamentary elections. The AEA said that this would 'bring significant benefits to electors in terms of being able to register to vote in the election and to make applications for and then receive absent votes.'⁷⁶ The AEA recommended a standard electoral timetable for all elections of 30 working days.

For further information about election timetables see Library Research Paper [09/44](#), *Election timetables*.

In his statement on 13 July 2011 Mark Harper noted that the very limited time available for the postal vote process in the current 17 day timetable 'compromises effective participation in elections by certain types of voter, particularly overseas and service voters.' Extending the timetable to 25 days will increase the time between the deadline for nominations (which will remain Day 6) and polling day thus allowing administrators to begin printing ballot papers earlier.

Model general election timetable

This is the current general election timetable:

Proclamation summoning new Parliament, dissolution of old Parliament and issue of writ	Day 0
Receipt of writ	Day 1
Last day for publication of notice of election (4pm)	Day 3
Last day for delivery of nomination papers/withdrawals of candidature/appointment of election agents (4pm)	Day 6
Statement of persons nominated published at close of time for making objections to nomination papers (5pm on Day 6) or as soon afterwards as any objections are disposed of	
Last day for requests for a new postal vote or to change or cancel an existing postal vote or proxy appointment (5pm)	
Last day to apply to register to vote	

⁷⁶ *Beyond 2010: the future of electoral administration in the UK*, Association of Electoral Administrators, July 2010

Last day for new applications to vote by proxy (except for medical emergencies)(5pm)	Day 11
Last day for appointment of polling and counting agents	Day 15
Polling Day (7 am – 10 pm) Last day to apply for a replacement for spoilt or lost postal ballot papers (5pm)	Day 17

For the purposes of the timetable, Saturday, Sunday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Good Friday, other bank holidays and any day appointed for public thanksgiving or mourning are disregarded. Maundy Thursday is no longer disregarded following the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*.⁷⁷

For a May election, under the current timetable, postal votes are issued as soon as possible after Day 6 (the final day for nominations and postal vote applications) for those who were on the electoral register as published on 1 April (in practice the cut-off date for this is mid March). Further packs are sent out for those electors who applied to be on the electoral register after the cut-off point five working days before polling.⁷⁸ However the parliamentary election timetable is 7 days shorter than for local elections, putting more pressure on electoral administrators who need to deal with last minute registration applications at the same time as sending out postal ballots. For background on the decision to allow later registration without altering the overall length, see [Research Paper 05/65 Electoral Administration Bill 2005-06](#).

Increasing the length of the timetable

Clause 13 makes provision for Parliament to be dissolved 25, rather than 17, working days before the next UK Parliamentary general election, by amending section 3(1) of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011*. The clause also amends the Parliamentary Election Rules (Schedule 1 to the *Representation of the People Act 1983*) to extend the timetables for Parliamentary by-elections and for polls which are re-run due to the death of a candidate. The *Explanatory Notes* give further details:

50. *Subsections* (2) and (3) amend the Parliamentary Elections Rules (Schedule 1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 (“the 1983 Act”)) to also extend the electoral timetable for UK Parliamentary by-elections. The Rules as amended by this provision will provide that polling day will take place between 17 and 19, rather than between 9 and 11, working days after the last day for delivery of nomination papers, thereby allowing an extended timetable which retains sufficient flexibility for the Returning Officer to set polling day on a Thursday, in keeping with convention.

51. *Subsection* (4) amends rules 61(9), 63(9) and 64(6) of the Parliamentary Elections Rules to extend the electoral timetable for polls which are re-run due to the death of a candidate. The rules as amended by this provision will state that the fresh poll will take place between 21 and 27, rather than between 15 and 19, working days after the day on which the election writ is taken to have been received.

⁷⁷ S 20 of the *Electoral Administration Act 2006*. Brought into force by the *Electoral Administration Act 2006 (Commencement No 2, Transitional and Savings Provisions) Order, 2006*. SI 2006/3412

⁷⁸ See Annex D1 to Cabinet Office [Impact Assessment for extending the electoral timetable for UK Parliamentary elections](#)

52. *Subsection (5)* amends rules 61(9), 63(9) and 64(6) of the Parliamentary Elections Rules to extend the electoral timetable for polls which are re-run due to the death of a candidate. The rules as amended by this provision will state that the fresh poll will take place between 21 and 27, rather than between 15 and 19, working days after the day on which the election writ is taken to have been received.

Since the last day for the delivery of nomination papers is fixed by the Returning Officer at between Day 6 and Day 8 after issue of the writ, in theory the by-election timetable could extend to working 27 days, although in practice most Returning Officers would choose a shorter timetable. The Cabinet Office has published diagrams with the new and existing timetables for general and parliamentary by elections, showing the impact on the issuing of postal voting packs.⁷⁹

The Impact Assessment published with the Bill noted the cost benefits as follows:

Aligning UK Parliamentary elections to the normal 25 day election timetable will allow joint poll cards for simultaneous elections to be produced more easily, leading to a potential saving of around £2m (2012/13 price terms) at each general election. An extra 8 working days will also reduce the pressure that exists in the timetable. This will reduce overtime and allow more checks to be made during the process, reducing the risk of errors and the resultant extra costs being incurred⁸⁰

In practical terms, EROs will have the opportunity to send out more than one postal ballot pack:

Under our proposals, administrators will now be able to send their first tranche of postal ballot packs after the 19th working day before the poll, because the deadline for the close of candidates' nominations will be moved from 11 to 19 working days before the poll. This should ease the pressure in the system. They will now also be able to send an additional tranche of postal ballot packs, if it is practicable to do so, before the final tranche are sent after the 5th working day before the poll.⁸¹

The introduction of two interim publication dates of the electoral register in Clause 15 (see below) creates the first on Day 6, last day on which nomination papers can be delivered and the second before the fifth or sixth day as determined by the registration officer.

Timetable for the 2015 general election

The *Fixed Term Parliaments Act 2011* fixes the date of the next general election as 7 May 2015, and provides for five year intervals between elections. Draft timetables for the 2015 election are set out below; the first under the current 17 day timetable and the second under a 25 day timetable. Parliament would need to dissolve on Monday 30 March 2015 for a general election on Thursday 7 May, given the need to take account of the bank holidays at Easter and the beginning of May. Under the current timetable, dissolution would take place after Easter, on 13 April.

⁷⁹ <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/2012-04-26-Annex-D1-Existing-timetables-for-UK-Parliamentary-elections-and-by-elections.pdf>
<https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/2012-04-26-Annex-D2-Proposed-extended-timetables-for-UK-Parliamentary-elections-and-by-elections.pdf>

⁸⁰ <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/2012-05-09-Elections-Bill-IA-Extending-the-electoral-timetable-v27.pdf>

⁸¹ *ibid*

17 day timetable

Day 0 Dissolution and issue of writ	Monday 13 April
Day 1	Tuesday 14 April
Day 2	Wednesday 15 April
Day 3	Thursday 16 April
Day 4	Friday 17 April
Day 5	Monday 20 April
Day 6	Tuesday 21 April
Day 7	Wednesday 22 April
Day 8	Thursday 23 April
Day 9	Friday 24 April
Day 10	Monday 27 April
Day 11	Tuesday 28 April
Day 12	Wednesday 29 April
Day 13	Thursday 30 April
Day 14	Friday 1 May
	<i>Monday 4 May is Bank Holiday and therefore not counted for the purposes of the timetable.</i>
Day 15	Tuesday 5 May
Day 16	Wednesday 6 May
Day 17 – Polling Day	Thursday 7 May 2015

25 day timetable

Day 0 Dissolution and issue of writ	Monday 30 March
Day 1	Tuesday 31 March
Day 2	Wednesday 1 April
Day 3	Thursday 2 April
	<i>Friday 3 April and Monday 6 April are Bank Holidays (Good Friday and Easter Monday) and therefore not counted for the purposes of the timetable.</i>

Day 4	Tuesday 7 April
Day 5	Wednesday 8 April
Day 6	Thursday 9 April
Day 7	Friday 10 April
Day 8	Monday 13 April
Day 9	Tuesday 14 April
Day 10	Wednesday 15 April
Day 11	Thursday 16 April
Day 12	Friday 17 April
Day 13	Monday 20 April
Day 14	Tuesday 21 April
Day 15	Wednesday 22 April
Day 16	Thursday 23 April
Day 17	Friday 24 April
Day 18	Monday 27 April
Day 19	Tuesday 28 April
Day 20	Wednesday 29 April
Day 21	Thursday 30 April
Day 22	Friday 1 May
	<i>Monday 4 May is Bank Holiday</i>
Day 23	Tuesday 5 May
Day 24	Wednesday 6 May
Day 25 – Polling Day	Thursday 7 May 2015

The *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* introduced a new expenditure limit for candidate spending - the pre-candidacy expenditure limit which applies to general election candidates where there is more than four years and seven months years from the previous general election. The pre-candidacy limits were used from 1 January 2010 for the May 2010 election. In addition, candidate expenditure limits apply during the formal election campaign, that is the period from the dissolution of Parliament to the general election. These may need to be adjusted if there is a longer time period between dissolution and polling day. At present, the

election expenses limits are calculated at a flat rate and then multiplied by the number of electors on the register. A candidate can spend £7,150 plus:

- 5p per Parliamentary elector in a borough/burgh constituency
- 7p per Parliamentary elector in a county constituency

Limits are adjusted by means of a statutory instrument laid by the Secretary of State, last made in 2005.⁸² Since the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000* (PPERA) the advice of the Electoral Commission in respect of the appropriate limit is sought. For further information see Library Standard Note 5282 [In Brief: General Election: candidates' spending limits](#).

9.2 Parish elections

Clause 14 repeals Section 16 of the *Representation of the People Act 1985* which makes provision for the automatic postponement of parish and community council elections in England and Wales when a Parliamentary or European Parliamentary general election falls on the ordinary day for local government elections. This will allow polls at parish and community council elections to be combined with polls at other elections.

9.3 Alteration of electoral registers pending elections

Clause 15 allows for two interim publication dates on which notices of alteration to the electoral register must be published when an election is pending. The Explanatory Notes give further details:

58. New section 13AB is concerned with the alteration of registers pending certain elections in Great Britain. Where a registration officer is satisfied that an entry should be made in, or removed from, the register *new section 13AB* requires that on the interim publication date the registration officer must publish a notice specifying the appropriate alteration in the electoral register. The alterations would be those required as a result of the circumstances covered by *subsection (1)* of section 13AB. *Subsection (3)* states that the alteration takes effect from the beginning of the interim publication date.

59. *Subsections (4), (5) and (6) of new section 13AB* establish that there are two interim publication dates. The first interim publication date is the last day on which nomination papers may be delivered to the returning officer. The second interim publication date is to be determined by the registration officer but it must be in the period after the first interim publication date and before the appropriate publication date. The appropriate publication date is the date on which the final version of the register (to be used for the poll) is published. This appropriate publication date is defined in *subsection (5)* of section 13B of the 1983 Act, and is either the fifth or sixth day before the poll as determined by the registration officer.⁸³

9.4 Reviews of polling places

A **polling district** is the geographical area which is a sub-division of a constituency, ward or division within which a **polling place** is situated. A **polling station** is the room or building where the poll takes place. The designation of polling places is a matter for the relevant local authority whereas decisions about polling stations are made by the returning officer.

⁸² *The Representation of the People (Variation of Limits of Candidates' Election Expenses) Order 2005*, SI 2005/269

⁸³ [Explanatory Notes](#)

The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* had amended section 18 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*, to make it a duty for local authorities to review polling places. The first review under this legislation had to take place by the end of 2007 and local authorities are currently required to carry out a further review every four years thereafter. The main purpose of this change to the legislation was to ensure that local authorities improved the accessibility of polling stations for disabled people.

The Electoral Commission has issued guidance for Returning Officers about reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations but it does not directly oversee the reviews; the Commission only becomes involved if representations are made to it that the review process was not conducted correctly (this has to be done within six weeks of the publication of the review).

Clause 16 amends Section 18C of the RPA 1983 which requires local authorities to carry out a review of polling districts and polling places every four years. This will now be changed to every five years in the light of the provisions of the *Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011* which sets parliamentary terms to 5 year periods. The change will also bring the reviews into line with the five year cycle for UK Parliamentary boundary reviews established by the *Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011*. Local authorities must carry out and complete a review of all polling districts and places in their area within 16 months of 1 October 2013. The Boundary Commissions have to make their final reports of the 2013 review of Parliamentary constituencies by 1 October 2013; Returning Officers will therefore be aware of the new constituency boundaries when they commence the review of polling districts after this date. Local authorities are still able to review some or all of their polling districts or places at other times if they think this is necessary.

9.5 Emblems on ballot papers

The style and content of ballot papers is prescribed by statute and set out in the relevant set of election rules. The *Registration of Political Parties Act 1998* amended the Parliamentary Election Rules to allow candidates to make a request to the Returning Officer to use their party's registered emblem (or one of the registered emblems) against their particulars on the ballot paper.⁸⁴

In 2010 the Electoral Commission identified a problem with the legislation concerning the use of emblems by candidates who were jointly nominated by two or more registered parties. This particularly affected candidates who stood for election as the Labour Party and Co-operative Party candidate and who wanted to use the Labour Party emblem on the ballot paper. The Electoral Commission's opinion was that candidates standing on behalf of two parties could not use an emblem on the ballot paper. The Commission offered the following advice for Returning Officers:

4. The Electoral Commission is of the opinion that the legislation as drafted does not entitle a candidate using a joint description on a ballot paper to request an emblem to appear on the ballot paper.

5. **Rule 6A(1)** of the Representation of the People Act 1983, Schedule 1 states that a nomination paper may not include a description of a candidate which is likely to lead voters to associate the candidate with a registered political party unless the description is authorised by a certificate.

6. **Rule 6A(1B)** of the same act states that a nomination paper may not include a description of a candidate which is likely to lead electors to associate the

⁸⁴ The *Registration of Political Parties Act 1998* was consolidated into the *Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA)*

candidate with two or more registered political parties unless the parties are each qualifying parties in relation to the constituency and the description is a registered description authorised by a certificate.

7. **Rule 19(2A)** of the same act states that if a candidate who is the subject of a party's authorisation under **Rule 6A(1)** so requests, the ballot paper shall contain, against the candidate's particulars, the party's registered emblem.

8. In our opinion:

- A candidate who uses a registered description or party name such as 'Labour Party Candidate' and has the description authorised does so under the rules for a single party standing a particular candidate - Rule 6A(1).
- A candidate who uses a registered joint description such as "The Labour and Co-operative Party Candidate" and has the description authorised does so under the rules for two or more parties standing a joint candidate - Rule 6A(1B).
- The election rules allow a candidate who is nominated under the rules for a single party standing a particular candidate to request an emblem on the ballot paper - Rule 19(2A).
- This election rule, Rule 19(2A), does not apply for those candidates of two or more parties standing a joint candidate. The election rule that allows a candidate to request an emblem applies to candidates nominated under Rule 6A(1) (Single party candidates) but does not apply to candidates nominated under Rule 6A(1B) (Joint candidates).
- Therefore joint candidates are not permitted to use an emblem on the ballot paper.
- If a joint candidate did request an emblem, the nomination will remain valid but the request for an emblem should be disregarded.⁸⁵

The election rules relating to the use of emblems on ballot papers in certain other elections were amended before the elections in May 2011: the *Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2011* were debated on 7 March 2011 in the Second Delegated Legislation Committee. The Minister, Mark Harper, explained that these regulations resolved the issue for candidates in the mayoral elections and noted that the Government had

... laid statutory instruments to deal with it for the local and parish elections, and the conduct orders deal with it for the devolved elections and the Northern Ireland local elections. We will introduce the necessary secondary legislation for the European Parliament elections and the Greater London authority elections next year and in 2014, not in that order.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that to fix the issue for the general election will require primary legislation. We have already set out that we will have a Bill that deals with individual electoral registration and other matters. It is our intention to use that Bill, or if that proves to be unnecessary, we will use

⁸⁵ Electoral Commission Circular, [EC 14/2010](#)

another one. That is the likeliest option, however, and we can confirm that is our intention to fix this problem ahead of the 2015 general election.⁸⁶

The *Local Elections (Principal Areas) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Rules 2011* allowed for the change at local elections in England and Wales.

Clause 18 allows a candidate standing on behalf of two or more parties at a Parliamentary election to use a registered emblem of one of those parties.

9.6 Performance of Returning Officers

Clause 17 inserts a new Section 29A into the *Representation of the People Act 1983*. This new Section allows the Secretary of state to withhold or reduce a Returning Officer's fee for reasons of poor performance. This would be done on the recommendation of the Electoral Commission which sets performance standards for Returning Officers.

There was criticism of some Returning Officers after the 2010 general election when there were queues at polling stations at 10pm and voters were unable to cast their votes before the poll closed. Library Standard Note 5517, [Polling stations and hours of polling](#), gives further information.

Library Standard Note 5302, [Responsibilities of Returning Officers](#), gives details of the general responsibilities of Returning Officers and Acting Returning Officers in Great Britain and of the performance standards set by the Electoral Commission. In March 2009 the Commission first published performance standards for ROs. The latest version of the performance standards is available on the Commission's website.⁸⁷

Returning Officers' fees

The [Parliamentary Elections \(Returning Officer's Charges\) Order 2010](#) sets out the fees payable to each Returning Officer for running a Parliamentary election and also the amount they can claim for the actual costs of running the election. The Order (which is made before each general election) is made under section 29 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983*.⁸⁸

The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* introduced a number of changes to the arrangements for the recovery of Returning Officers' services and expenses. The Act amended section 29 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983* to allow the Secretary of State to specify in an Order the total overall amount a Returning Officer can recover for the services rendered and the expenses incurred for or in connection with an election.

In [Schedule 1](#) to the Order the amounts that may be claimed by the Returning Officer for each constituency are set out. The first column is the amount for the 'specified services'. These are the services undertaken by the Returning Officer himself in conducting the election; the Order describes these as follows:

5. The specified services are—
 - (a) conducting the election;
 - (b) discharging the returning officer's duties at the election; and
 - (c) making arrangements for the election.

⁸⁶ *Local Authorities (Mayoral Elections) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2011*, [Second Delegated Legislation Committee debate](#), 7 March 2011

⁸⁷ [Performance Standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain](#), Electoral Commission, December 2011

⁸⁸ Section 29 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983* is reproduced at the end of this note.

The second column is for the 'specified expenses'. These are the actual costs of running the election and are described in the Order:

7. The specified expenses are—

- (a) the appointment and payment of persons to assist the returning officer;
- (b) travel and overnight subsistence for the returning officer and any person appointed to assist the returning officer;
- (c) the costs of the nomination process;
- (d) printing or otherwise producing the ballot papers;
- (e) printing, producing or purchasing postal vote stationery;
- (f) printing or otherwise producing and arranging for the delivery of poll cards;
- (g) printing or otherwise producing and, where appropriate, publishing notices and any other documents required by any enactment for or in connection with a parliamentary election;
- (h) renting, heating, lighting, cleaning, adapting or restoring any building or room;
- (i) providing and transporting equipment;
- (j) providing information and communications technology equipment and software and associated costs;
- (k) providing security, including any necessary secure storage of ballot boxes, ballot papers and verification documents;
- (l) conducting the verification and the count;
- (m) providing and receiving training;
- (n) providing stationery and meeting postage, telephone, printing, translation and banking costs and the costs of other miscellaneous items; and
- (o) in a constituency in Scotland, the supply of copies of the register of electors for use in the conduct of the election.

The third column gives the amount that may be claimed overall, ie the total of these two amounts. It should be noted that in Schedule 2 different amounts are given; this schedule applied in 2010 where a Parliamentary general election was combined with the ordinary day of elections for councillors in all or part of that constituency, ie the polls were combined.

There are [guidance notes](#) for Returning Officers about expenses published by the Ministry of Justice. The extract below explains how the Returning Officers' fees are calculated:

7.3. The Charges Order provides for Returning Officers to recover a maximum recoverable amount for the services specified in the Order. This amount relates to the size of the constituency for which they are responsible, and should therefore reflect the amount of work required to conduct the election in that area. The amount has therefore been calculated in relation to the number of electors in the constituency.

7.4. For each constituency, the Returning Officer will be entitled to recover for his services at the election a sum of £475 for every 10,000 electors in that area on a strict pro rata basis (that is, electorate as at 1st December 2008 ÷ 10,000 x £475). This is subject, however, to an underpinning minimum payment of

£2,500. That is, if the calculation above produces a figure below £2,500, the Returning Officer will be entitled to recover that minimum - £2,500.

7.5. Where the poll at the general election is combined with the poll at any other scheduled election, this amount has been increased by 20% in recognition of the increased complexity involved in administering more than one election at one time. Where polls are combined over part of the constituency only the 20% increase has nevertheless been applied across the whole constituency. Responsibility for paying this increased amount (but not the fee itself) is split between those responsible for the polls which are to be combined. In a constituency where there is another election across the whole area, therefore, the amount in the 10% - the remaining 10% is payable by whichever authority is responsible for funding the other poll.

7.6. Previous Charges Orders included reductions in the payment for the services of Returning Officers where they are responsible for multiple constituencies. Usually there was a reduction for more than three and another for more than six. The reasoning behind this was that economies of scale were possible in such situations and such Returning Officers inevitably relied heavily upon deputies to assist them, so did not carry out the duties themselves.

7.7. In this election no such reduction is being proposed. This is because the payments are proportionate to the work required to conduct the election in that constituency. If a Returning Officer is responsible for – and does the work required in – several areas, then the payments should reflect that.

The fees for Returning Officers at local elections are set and paid by the local authority.

9.7 Notification of rejected postal votes

Clause 20 amends Schedule 4 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983* by inserting a power for the Secretary of State to make regulations which require the ERO to notify a person that their postal ballot paper has been rejected because the returned postal voting statement was not properly completed. This also covers rejected proxy votes and applies to parliamentary and local government elections in Great Britain. The power to make similar regulations for local government elections in Scotland is devolved to Scottish Ministers.

The [Equality Impact Assessment](#) published with the Bill gave further information about the number of rejected postal voting statements:

33. Anecdotal evidence from electoral administrators has suggested that a number of common mistakes are made routinely on postal voting statements returned alongside the postal ballot paper. This affected around 150,000 electors at the polls in May 2011. Common errors include missing signatures and dates of birth, accidentally inverted dates of birth, giving the current day's date rather than the date of birth and supplying a signature which has changed since the original application was made. A signature might change because the elector has changed their name through marriage, for example, or because the quality or nature of handwriting can deteriorate over time due to age or because of an injury. Whilst we cannot predict the behavioural impact of this policy we expect it will help a number of individuals avoid making repeated inadvertent errors and have a positive impact on their participation at future polls.

In the 2010 General Election 7.0 million postal ballots were issued; 15% of electors. 5.8 million of these ballots were returned, with 3.8% of those returned being rejected before being forwarded to the count. These 222,000 invalid postal ballots were rejected because a

signature and/or date of birth was mismatched (about half); because the elector omitted to enclose either the ballot paper and/or postal vote statement (about one-quarter).

Across the UK, around 19% of all votes counted were postal ballots. For votes at the count the number of ballot papers rejected was 0.28%.⁸⁹

9.8 Community Support Officers

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were introduced by the *Police Reform Act 2002*. They are not sworn constables, but civilian employees who have more limited powers. They were introduced in order to carry out basic patrol functions and deal with low level crime and nuisance. Background is in Library Standard Note 2718, [Police Community Support Officers](#).

Although Presiding Officers have a duty to maintain order in the polling station, police officers can be on duty to assist. There are certain specific provisions in the legislation to reflect this fact. **Clause 19** would extend these rules to cover PCSOs so that they could also be on duty at a polling station.

The Electoral Commission recommended that the rules should be changed in this way in its response to the Government's *Draft Electoral Administration Provisions*:

42. The rules for all types of election should be amended to specifically allow Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to enter polling stations. Discussions with police forces suggest that allowing PCSOs to do so would help the police to use their resources more flexibly in order to address any issues at polling stations on polling day.⁹⁰

Clause 19 would amend rule 32 of the Parliamentary Election Rules so that PCSOs could be admitted to the polling station, just as police officers can be currently.⁹¹ It would also amend Rule 31, under which Returning Officers must notify all those attending polling stations *except* constables on duty of the requirements of secrecy of the ballot; this provision would be extended, so that PCSOs on duty at the counting of the ballot would also be exempt.

There is also a provision which allows police officers who cannot vote at their own polling station because of their election duties to vote at any polling station in the constituency or electoral area.⁹² Clause 19 would also extend this to PCSOs.

9.9 CORE

Clause 21 repeals the provisions in part 1 of the *Electoral Administration Act 2006* to establish a co-ordinated online record of electors. The Minister, Mark Harper, explained the decision not to continue the CORE project in a written ministerial statement on 18 July 2011

The previous Government legislated for the co-ordinated online record of electors (CORE) in the Electoral Administration Act 2006 and the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. CORE was intended to provide a single source of electoral registration information for authorised users, principally to provide political parties with a system that would help them meet their donation reporting obligations. The CORE service was to be managed by a new public

⁸⁹ *Election 2010: The Official Results* Thrasher & Rallings p20

⁹⁰ Electoral Commission, [Response to the Draft Electoral Administration Provisions](#), October 2011

⁹¹ These are set out in schedule 1 of the *Representation of the People Act 1983* as amended

⁹² 2(5) of Schedule 4, *Representation of the People Act 2000*

body, a corporation sole, established for the purposes of being the “CORE keeper”.

The cost of building the CORE system was estimated to be £11.4 million and £2.7 million per annum to run thereafter.

The Government have decided not to pursue the project. We do not believe that establishing this system is proportionate, cost-effective or consistent with the Government’s policy on databases and reducing the number of non-departmental public bodies. We will continue to consider more cost-effective ways to improve the processes and procedures for political parties to report donations.⁹³

10 Use of the electoral register for other purposes

The electoral register is used for other purposes as well as being a record of those who are entitled to vote in elections. Credit Reference Agencies are able to buy the full register, as are Government departments. Copies of the full register also have to be supplied, without charge, to a number of organisations including the Office of National Statistics. The edited version of the register (electors can opt out of having their details included in this version) can be sold to anyone. There are no restrictions on access to the edited register, no supervision is required and so it may be made available for public inspection at any place the Electoral Registration Officer sees fit (such as public libraries).

Under the provisions of Part VI of the *Representation of the People Regulations (England and Wales) Regulations 2001*, SI 2001/341, the Electoral Registration Officer **must** supply, free of charge, a copy of the full register on publication to:

- The British Library, the National Library of Wales, the National Library of Scotland, the Office of National Statistics, the Electoral Commission and the Boundary Commissions.
- The Returning Officer for a local government election, the Acting Returning Officer for a Parliamentary election, the Local Returning Officer for a European Parliamentary election.

Under the provisions of the *Juries Act 1974* copies of the full register must also be supplied to the courts for the purposes of summoning jurors.

The Electoral Registration Officer must also supply, free of charge, copies of the full register to the following **on request**:

- Elected representatives, including MPs, MEPs, local councillors, Mayor of London and London members of the London Assembly, constituency members of the London Assembly, elected mayors, all within the registration area
- Candidates for election at a Parliamentary, local government, European Parliament or Welsh Assembly election and for election of a mayor under Part II of the *Local Government Act 2000*
- Local constituency parties
- Registered political parties

⁹³ HC Deb 18 July 2011 c71WS

- The council which appoints the Electoral Registration Officer and any other local authority, such as Parish or Community councils which are part of the ERO's area
- Any police force in Great Britain; the Police Force of Northern Ireland; the National Criminal Intelligence Service, the National Crime Squad, the Police Information Technology Organisation and any body of constables established under an Act of Parliament
- The Security Service; GCHQ and the Secret Intelligence Service.

Copies of the full register may be **sold** to:

- Government departments (including the Environment Agency in England and Wales, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency in Scotland, the Financial Services Authority and any body which carries out the vetting of any person for the purpose of safeguarding national security.
- Credit reference agencies.

There are restrictions on the use of the full register by the organisations which are allowed to purchase it. The Electoral Commission gives further details in its guidance for Electoral Registration Officers:

4.34 Government departments must only use the register for:

- in England and Wales, the prevention and detection of crime and the enforcement of the criminal law (whether in England or Wales or elsewhere)
- in Scotland, the administration of justice, the prevention and detection of crime and the enforcement of the criminal law (whether in Scotland or elsewhere)
- the vetting of employees and applicants for employment where such vetting is required pursuant to any enactment
- the vetting of any person where such vetting is for the purpose of safeguarding national security, or
- supply and disclosure as defined by the regulations

4.35 Credit reference agencies must only use the registers for:

- vetting applications for credit or applications that can result in the giving of credit or the giving of any guarantee, indemnity or assurance in relation to the giving of credit
- meeting any obligations contained in the Money Laundering Regulations 1993, the Money Laundering Regulations 2001 or any rules made pursuant to Section 146 of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, and

- statistical analysis of credit risk assessment in a case where no person whose details are included in the full register is referred to by name or necessary implication.⁹⁴

11 The edited register

There is no provision in the Bill to abolish the edited version of the electoral register.

The edited version of the register can be sold to anyone. Electors can opt out of having their details included in the edited register by ticking a box on the annual canvass form. The Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators have urged the Government to abolish the edited register but direct marketing organisations, some charities and companies like 192.com have argued for its retention.

The Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee agreed with the Electoral Commission and the AEA that it should be abolished:

41. The edited register is available for general sale and is used by organisations for commercial activities, such as marketing, as well as by the political parties for campaigning. Electors who do not want their details to appear on the edited register need to opt out. The Ministry of Justice consulted on the future of the edited register in 2009-10; the Government's response to the consultation has not been published, possibly due to the change of Government in 2010.

42. The Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators have both called for the publication of the edited register to cease. A 2008 survey conducted by the Local Government Association and the AEA found that "almost 9 in 10 electoral officers surveyed believed that the practice of selling the electoral register discouraged people from registering to vote".[41]

43. Some businesses, notably direct marketing agencies, rely on the edited electoral register to identify and access customers. In their written evidence to us 192.com, a people-finding website, stated that the edited register brings significant benefits to businesses and charities.[42] The Credit Services Association, which also incorporates the Debt Buyers and Sellers Group (DBSG), states that use of the full electoral register should be made available to debt collection agencies, as "not all financial crime occurs at the point credit is granted ... use of the register should be permitted throughout the lifetime of the agreement".[43] We thoroughly disagree with the CSA's proposal. Whatever benefit it might bring, we cannot justify the sale to commercial organisations of personal details gathered by the Government for electoral purposes. The Electoral Commission has suggested that if Government decides to keep the edited register that it should be changed to an opt in system, instead of opt out. We suspect that this option might well make the edited register too incomplete to be of much use. **We recommend that the edited register should be abolished.**⁹⁵

In its response to the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee's report, published in February 2012, the Government indicated that the future of the edited register was still under consideration:

⁹⁴ [Managing electoral registration in Great Britain: guidance for Electoral Registration Officers](#), Electoral Commission, Part H

⁹⁵ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, [Individual Electoral Registration and electoral administration](#), HC 1463, 2010-12

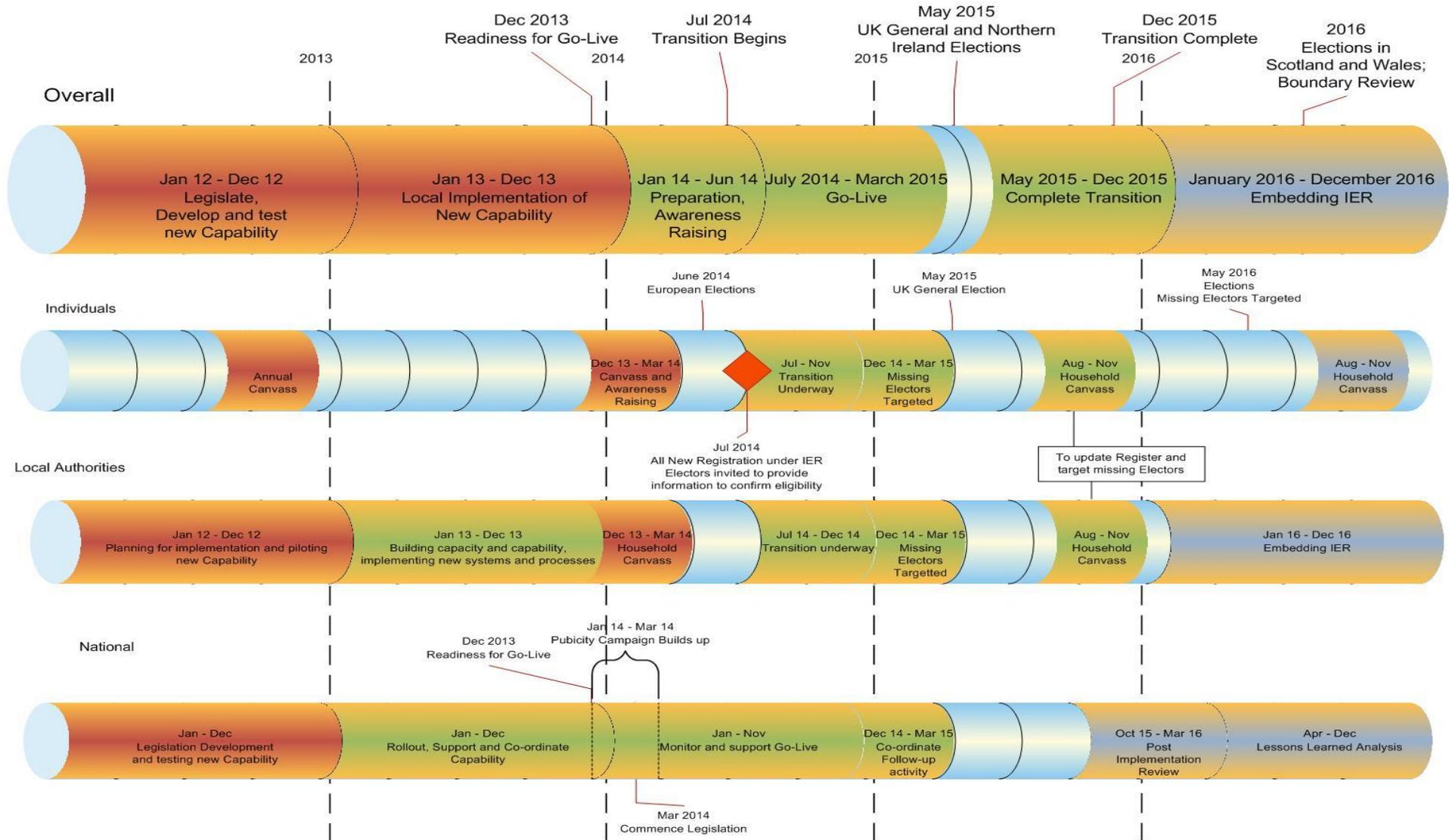
The Government is aware of and considering the finely balanced arguments on the future of the edited electoral register. The Government takes the handling of personal information seriously, and is committed to working to maximise registration rates. This needs to be balanced against the potential economic impact of abolishing the edited register. The Government's approach to this issue is currently under consideration in the context of the wider access regime for the electoral registers.⁹⁶

Further information about the edited register is provided in the Library Standard Note 6198, [The edited electoral register](#).

⁹⁶ [Government response to pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation on Individual Electoral Registration and amendments to Electoral Administration Law, Cm 8245, February 2012](#)

Appendix 1 - Move to Individual Electoral Registration: Cabinet Office's High Level Implementation Timeline

Implementation 2012-16



Move to Individual Electoral Registration

High Level Implementation Timeline

Introduction

1. The move to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) will make some big changes to the way we deliver Electoral Registration across Britain. This timeline sets out what these key points are and when they need to be delivered.
2. The timeline sets out the overall schedule for delivery and three key perspectives:
 - a. The individual;
 - b. Local Delivery; and
 - c. National.
3. There are five basic stages we will go through during the transition to IER:
 - a. Legislation, Develop and Test Capability (2012);
 - b. Preparing for Transition (2013);
 - c. Go-Live (2014);
 - d. Completing Transition (2014-2015); and
 - e. Embedding IER (2016 onwards).
4. The key points for the different perspectives in each of these stages are set out below.

Legislation, Developing and Testing Capability (2012)

5. This will involve getting the legislative frameworks in place and the development and testing of the new capability (including IT and business processes) as well as local planning for the year running up to implementation.

Individual

6. The individual will be invited to take part in the usual Annual Canvass but aside from this will not be asked to participate further at this stage.

Local Authorities

7. Those involved in local delivery will be asked to plan for the introduction of IER at a local level. This will include working out what their resource needs will be. They will also be asked to play an important role in the development and testing of the new capability to be rolled out more widely in 2013.

National

8. Primary legislation will be taken through Parliament. New business processes will be developed alongside capability (including IT capability) in partnership with local authorities.

Preparing for Transition (2013)

9. All Local Authorities will be invited to implement new capabilities at a local level including IT, business processes and resources. This will culminate in an assessment of readiness for Go-Live.

Individual

10. Individuals will notice that the annual canvass has moved to early 2014 with generally no additional steps to take. Some electors will be in areas where piloting of the new capability will be taking place and may notice that change is coming. There will also be early awareness raising activity at this time in preparation for the transition.

Local Authorities

11. Electoral Registration Officers and Electoral Administrators will have IT systems put in place, other resources acquired and capabilities - including staff training - built during this phase in readiness for go-live in the following year. All local capability needs will be ready by the end of this phase.

National

12. This phase sees the transition from the development and testing of capability to building the full capability locally. Central Government will be co-ordinating this working in partnership with Electoral Registration Officers and Administrators. Government will provide hands on support to Electoral Registration Officers and Administrators over this period.

Go-Live and Complete Transition (2014 - 2015)

13. Transition gets underway over the course of 2014 and up to the General Election. This phase sees the first live use of individual electoral registration and as such the change becomes more publicly visible.
14. This phase also looks to achieve the objective of moving all eligible voters to IER and embedding this as a regular business activity. Lessons identified from the first live canvass will lead to actions to improve the experience for the future.
15. It is important to note that the carry forward means that electors won't lose their vote in the UK General Election in 2015 but the process of transition will be complete by December 2015.

Individual

16. People should start to see a gradual build up of public awareness around Individual Electoral Registration up to the first IER canvass in 2014 where they will be registering as an individual for the first time. In the first part of the year individuals will see greater publicity around IER and will be invited to take part in the usual household canvass. Directly after the European elections IER will go-live and all new registrations will be expected to take place under IER. In the latter part of the year the first amended canvass will take place. This will be followed by activity during early 2015 to target those electors that have been missed from the initial canvass. There will be a full canvass after the General Election ahead of the boundary review and elections in Scotland and Wales in 2016. The elections in 2016 will be the first to take place under IER without carry-forward.

Local Authorities

17. Activity will be high for EROs during this phase as they go-live with IER. The steps will generally follow those for the individual: carrying out the household canvass, moving to IER after the European elections, carrying out a further amended canvass under IER and targeting missing electors in preparation for the General Election in 2015.

National

18. The Electoral Commission will be supporting the transition through monitoring and evaluation activity, identifying lessons for the future. Central Government will be providing hands-on support in partnership with local delivery as well as developing and co-ordinating follow-up actions from lessons identified by the Electoral Commission.

Embedding IER (2016)

19. This phase represents the end of transition as IER is in place. All parties should now see IER as business as usual for the future. A post implementation review should provide final assurance that all benefits are on track to be delivered, identify how they will be measured going forward and any further action that needs to be taken.