



House of Commons  
Political and Constitutional  
Reform Committee

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# **Individual Electoral Registration and Electoral Administration**

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**Tenth Report of Session 2010–12**

*Volume I*





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Political and Constitutional  
Reform Committee

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# Individual Electoral Registration and Electoral Administration

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**Tenth Report of Session 2010–2012**

*Volume I: Report, together with formal  
minutes, oral and written evidence*

*Additional written evidence is contained in  
Volume II, available on the Committee website  
at [www.parliament.uk/pcrc](http://www.parliament.uk/pcrc)*

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## The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee

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The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume.

Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Steven Mark (Clerk), Hannah Stewart (Legal Specialist), Lorna Horton (Inquiry Manager), Louise Glen (Senior Committee Assistant), Annabel Goddard (Committee Assistant) and Rebecca Jones (Media Officer).

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## Summary

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The White Paper and draft Bill on Individual Electoral Registration (IER) were published for pre-legislative scrutiny on 30 June 2011. These proposals speed up the introduction of individual electoral registration in Great Britain compared with the provisions put in place by the previous Government in 2009. There seems to be broad agreement on the principle of individual electoral registration (Chapter 2), but very differing views on how it should be implemented.

The White Paper has learnt lessons from the introduction of IER in Northern Ireland in 2002, such as the proposal to have a ‘carry-forward’, meaning that voters who are on the 2013 electoral register, but who are not registered under IER in 2014, will still be able to vote in 2015, unless they wish to vote by post or proxy (Chapter 5).

We make suggestions for improving the transition process, with a particular focus on the completeness of the electoral register (Chapter 3). The introduction of IER carries the risk that people will drop off the register and become disenfranchised, particularly in urban areas; if unchecked, this could have important consequences for future constituency boundary reviews.

The White Paper makes it clear that the Government sees registering to vote as a personal choice for the individual, and that it will not be an offence for an individual to fail to complete an electoral registration form (Chapter 3). In Northern Ireland, in contrast, this is an offence. Electoral administrators have told us that the threat of sanctions often nudges people, who might not have otherwise completed a registration form, to do so. Registering to vote has always been seen as a civic duty, and should continue to be so. The undertaking from the Deputy Prime Minister to make sure that ‘opting out’ of the registration process is not too easy is a step in the right direction.

The transition process (Chapter 4) will be labour-intensive for electoral registration officers, as they seek to engage many millions of eligible electors with the new system of individual registration. Proper funding of this process (Chapter 6) will be particularly important.

The Government’s other draft electoral administration provisions (Chapter 8) would legislate on a number of issues that electoral administrators have long called for, such as;

- the extension of the timetable for Parliamentary elections from 17 to 25 working days, and;
- allowing a UK Parliamentary election candidate jointly nominated by two or more registered parties to use on the ballot paper an emblem registered by one of the nominating parties.

These are largely sensible proposals, although others that have also been called for are missing, and we ask why.



# 1 Introduction

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1. The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 passed by the then Labour Government, provided for a new system of electoral registration where each eligible elector is registered individually, instead of the current system of registration by household. The Coalition's Programme for Government promised to "reduce electoral fraud by speeding up the implementation of individual voter registration".<sup>1</sup> On 30 June 2011, the Government published a White Paper on individual electoral registration, with draft clauses and an impact assessment.<sup>2</sup> In the same month, the Government laid secondary legislation allowing for a series of data matching pilots in particular local authority areas to test how far comparing electoral registers against other public databases would allow eligible people missing from the register to be identified.<sup>3</sup> Our Report largely focuses on the proposals in the White Paper.

2. On 13 July and 14 September 2011, the Government published two further sets of draft legislation, with explanatory notes, including a range of proposed measures in the field of electoral administration.<sup>4</sup> These will be looked at in greater detail in Chapter 8.

3. The Committee decided to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny of these proposals in July 2011. Our witnesses have included academic experts, representatives of some of those groups who might be particularly affected by the proposals, local authority officials involved in administering electoral registers and elections and in conducting the data matching pilots, the Electoral Commission, and the Government. We are grateful as ever to all of our witnesses, and to those who provided us with written submissions.

4. This Report looks first at the likely impact of the Government's individual electoral registration proposals on both the completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers, as well as the impact on those who use the registers. We then consider the transitional provisions for 2014-15, before looking at resource implications of the proposals for local electoral registration officers. Finally, we consider the other electoral administration proposals, in so far as these have not already been taken into account.

5. Individual registration was implemented in Northern Ireland in 2002. The Government's proposals therefore largely relate to the rest of the United Kingdom. We attempt to draw lessons in this Report from the Northern Ireland experience where this is relevant.

**6. We welcome the fact that these proposals have been published for pre-legislative scrutiny by us, as well as for wider consultation.**

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1 HM Government, *The Coalition: our programme for Government*, May 2010, p27

2 Cabinet Office, *Individual Electoral Registration*, and *Impact Assessment*, Cm 8108 and 8109, June 2011

3 Electoral Registration Data Schemes Order 2011 (S.I. 2011, No. 1466)

4 Cabinet Office, *Draft electoral administration provisions*, Cm 8150, July 2011 and *Further draft electoral administration provisions*, Cm 8177, September 2011

## 2 Principle

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7. The principle of moving to individual electoral registration is widely accepted. It was first recommended by the Electoral Commission in 2003<sup>5</sup> and subsequently by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 2007, which noted at the time that

“There appears to be a consensus among political parties, the Electoral Commission and most electoral administrators that individual registration, as opposed to registration completed and signed by one named person in the household, is likely to be a more accurate means of registering eligible voters. Individuals would then be responsible for their own registration in order to vote. There are however differences of view as to the pace at which such an important change should be made”.<sup>6</sup>

8. The three largest political parties all continue to support the principle of individual registration.<sup>7</sup> Their approach to its implementation is very different, however. In 2005, the Labour Government brought forward an Electoral Administration Bill, which provided for pilots to require personal identifiers (such as date of birth and national insurance number [NINO]) at registration before a general introduction of this measure. Although enacted, these provisions have not been brought into force. The current Coalition Government’s draft clauses would replace them on the statute book and would make individual registration compulsory in 2014 for those who wish to vote by postal or proxy, and for all following the general election in May 2015.

9. The Electoral Commission has summarised the benefits and risks of moving to a system of individual registration. The benefits are simple:

- to improve the security of the system, making it less vulnerable to fraud;
- to recognise people’s personal responsibility for this important stake in our democracy; and
- for a system that people recognise as up-to-date, not rooted in Victorian ideas about households and ‘heads of household’.<sup>8</sup>

10. The Commission also identifies potential areas of concern that the new system must tackle:

- any new system must deal especially with the issue of home-movers, which means dealing with duplicate entries;
- not losing the strengths of the current system in terms of completeness—the current annual canvass approach produces high levels of completeness;

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5 Electoral Commission, *The electoral registration process: Report and recommendations*, May 2003, Chapter 2

6 Committee on Standards in Public Life, Eleventh Report, *Review of the Electoral Commission*, Cm 7006, para 6.4

7 Ev w25

8 Ev 100

- designing a transition process that ensures that eligible people who are currently on the register, but only because someone else has entered them, do not drop off the register simply because they are not used to, or have problems with, the registration process; and
- reassuring people that the personal data they will be asked to provide, will be kept safe.<sup>9</sup>

11. The Government's proposals need to be judged against the extent to which they achieve these benefits and minimise these concerns.

12. In Northern Ireland the introduction of IER led to improved accuracy of the register, as duplicate and ineligible entries were identified and removed, although the completeness of the register did also drop. A new system of registration in Great Britain will only be successful if it improves both the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers, with the ultimate aim of re-building public trust in our electoral processes.

## 3 Completeness and accuracy of the register

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### Completeness

13. We welcome the Government's stated commitment to take steps to improve the completeness of the electoral registers.<sup>10</sup> The Cabinet Office and the Electoral Commission are currently conducting research to benchmark current levels of completeness prior to the implementation of individual registration, and this will clearly be necessary to gauge the impact of the change.

14. The introduction of individual electoral registration in Northern Ireland led to a significant fall in voter registration levels over the following years. While some of this resulted from the removal of names that should not have been on the register in the first place, some eligible people also fell off the register. The Government hopes that such a situation can be minimised in Great Britain by carrying forward people already on the register until after the general election in 2015, giving many existing electors a second opportunity to register, and the use of data matching (discussed below), coupled with the absence of any requirement for each person to re-register and provide personal identifiers each year.<sup>11</sup>

15. We have heard concerns during our inquiry, however, that some aspects of the Government's proposals risk having a negative impact on completeness, especially in areas with high population turnover. The fact that electoral registers are currently used for setting constituency boundaries makes even levels of completeness across the country particularly important. Having large numbers of eligible electors uncounted in future boundary reviews would also be detrimental to democracy.

### *Registration as personal choice*

16. One of the most controversial aspects of the Government's proposals is the proposal that "there should be no compulsion placed on an individual to make an application to register to vote".<sup>12</sup> This is on the basis that "while we [the Government] strongly encourage people to register to vote the Government believes the act is one of personal choice".<sup>13</sup> The Government makes the distinction between the current system, under which the householder's failure to complete and return the annual canvass form could disenfranchise other electors, and the proposed system, under which a failure to return the individual application would have no direct impact on other electors. The Government proposes therefore that it should remain an offence in future to fail to respond to attempts by electoral registration officers to discover who in a household is eligible to vote.

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10 Cm 8108, para 2

11 Cm 8108, paras 27–28

12 Cm 8108, para 64

13 Cm 8108, para 64

17. The Government also proposes to “allow a person to respond to an invitation to register by indicating that they do not wish to be chased”, so as to “ensure that people are not repeatedly asked to register during a canvass period when they have no intention of doing so and that Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) direct their resources to finding eligible electors who want to be registered”.<sup>14</sup>

18. There are two issues at stake here. First, should it be legal for people to choose not to register to vote? Second, if yes, how easy should it be made for them to opt out of the registration process?

19. There is a logic to the Government’s argument for making registration voluntary, but the Electoral Commission has warned us of possible “unforeseen consequences” for civic society more generally

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.<sup>15</sup>

20. John Turner, from the Association of Electoral Administrators agreed

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.<sup>16</sup>

21. The Electoral Commission has also expressed strong concerns about making registration voluntary during the transition to the new system, describing the proposal as “confusing”.<sup>17</sup>

22. In Northern Ireland, under a system of individual registration, it remains a criminal offence to fail to complete a registration form when asked to do so. There appears to be no reason why failure to complete and return a registration form should be a criminal offence in Northern Ireland but not in Great Britain. The Government should take steps to remedy this inconsistency.

23. Witnesses were also concerned about the way in which the Government proposed to make it easy for people to opt out of being contacted more than once during an annual registration cycle.<sup>18</sup> The Minister recognised that many witnesses, including the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators, had concerns about the ease

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14 Cm 8108, para 74

15 Q 184

16 Q 143

17 Q 188

18 Cm 8108, para 74

at which people could ‘opt out’ of the current proposals. The Deputy Prime Minister indicated in the House that he had some sympathy for those concerns, and giving evidence to us the Minister stated “we would look at those and change those provisions when we bring forward the final legislation”.<sup>19</sup> When challenged that the language of the White Paper could ‘nudge’ people into not registering to vote, the Minister replied

we will look at that evidence and certainly take on board the point about whether the combination of the opt-out and the language nudges, to use your phrase, people in the wrong direction, because that is absolutely something we are not trying to create.<sup>20</sup>

**We welcome 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. We urge the Government to take the necessary steps in this direction in the Bill.**

24. Electoral Registration Officers have also expressed concern about the proposal. Julian Bassham from the London Borough of Southwark, told us “30%-odd of people who eventually we get registered are not really interested, they only go on for credit purposes and because we are going to fine them”.<sup>21</sup> Louise Stamp from Tower Hamlets made clear that the current offences were by no means an empty threat, and were used to get people to complete annual canvass forms.<sup>22</sup> In his evidence to us, Chris Ruane MP agreed that the threat of fines for failure to complete a registration form had significantly improved electoral registration rates in his constituency.<sup>23</sup>

25. We heard concerns about the impact that this specific proposal could have on the completeness of the registers. The Electoral Commission has suggested that registration levels could fall to match turnout, in other words from around 90% to as little as 60%.<sup>24</sup> It is hard to say how accurate this prediction is. Large numbers of people with no intention to vote would presumably want to remain on the registers nonetheless, as being listed on the electoral register is one of the factors used for assessing applications for credit.

26. What seems likely, however, is that registration levels would fall by different amounts in different parts of the country, depending on their social and economic profile and the transience of the population. Using estimates based on what percentage of a constituency fills and returns a canvass form without receiving a reminder, John Turner of the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) agreed with this analysis, stating that once the ‘carry forward’ expires after the General Election in 2015 “in these sorts of leafy shires

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19 Q 221

20 Q 228

21 Q 92

22 Q 92

23 Ev w30

24 Q 201

you could be talking about a drop of 10% or 15%. In inner city areas I think ...(a fall of up to 30%) is somewhere near the mark”.<sup>25</sup>

27. Julian Bassham of the London Borough of Southwark agreed with the AEA’s analysis. He told us “the problem is going to emerge after 2015 when, as an urban inner London authority, we will see a significant fall-off in the register”.<sup>26</sup> His colleague from Stratford-on-Avon District Council, with a relatively stable population, was less concerned.<sup>27</sup>

**28. We recommend that it should initially be an offence to fail to complete a voter registration form when asked to do so by the relevant electoral registration officer. This should be reviewed after five years of operation of the new system of individual registration, by which time registration levels may be high enough and a culture of individual registration sufficiently embedded for compulsion to no longer be necessary.**

### **Constituency boundaries**

29. Under the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, the Boundary Commissions are required to use the number of names on electoral registers as a basis for drawing constituency boundaries, with a narrow margin for manoeuvre. If levels of completeness come to vary significantly between different parts of the country, constituency boundaries will be redrawn on a basis that may be perceived as unfairly disadvantaging one party.

30. Unless addressed, this issue is likely to come to a head in 2015. On current plans, the Boundary Commissions will be conducting their next review on the basis of the electoral registers as they stand in December of that year. This is at a point when those electors carried over under the old system will have fallen off the registers, but will not yet have needed to exercise their vote under the new system: the first such elections—to local authorities and devolved bodies—are likely to take place in May 2016.<sup>28</sup> While there is a risk that there will be an ongoing variation in levels of completeness across the country, as anecdotal evidence already tells us urban areas have lower registration rates than rural areas,<sup>29</sup> that variation is likely to be at its most extreme in late 2015.

31. The Minister did not agree that there could be a fall in the completeness of the register after the carry-forward expires in Autumn 2015, and he therefore did not think there was a risk of the register being inaccurate for the redrawing of boundaries in December 2015. He told us “It is really the only data set that you can use for doing boundary reviews because it is the right group of people, eligible voters. We want it to be as accurate as possible, both for elections and for boundary review purposes, so we are very focused on that as well”.<sup>30</sup>

**32. For the next parliamentary constituency boundary reviews to be fair and representative, electoral registers across the country need to be at least as complete—**

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25 Q 169

26 Q 85

27 Q 82

28 Q 261

29 Electoral Commission, *The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain*, March 2010, pp 69–70

30 Q 262

and as consistently complete—as they are now. The Government needs to ensure that its proposals will achieve this end.

33. There is a risk that the electoral registers in December 2015 will be particularly varied in their levels of completeness: this matters because they will be used under current legislation as the basis for the next boundary review. We recommend using instead the registers as they stood on or before general election day in May 2015.

### *Groups most at risk of failing to register*

34. Witnesses have suggested that people in groups that are already under-represented on the registers, such as young people, electors from some BME communities, home movers, and those in private rented accommodation, are at particular risk of dropping off the register during the transition to IER. The Electoral Commission told us that even under the current system “under-registration and inaccuracy are closely associated with the social groups most likely to move home”.<sup>31</sup>

35. Simon Woolley, Director of Operation Black Vote, told us that the introduction of IER would reduce registration rates amongst the groups he represents, at least initially: “that is going to happen, we have to brace ourselves for that”.<sup>32</sup> Dr Toby James of Swansea University,<sup>33</sup> the British Youth Council,<sup>34</sup> and the National Union of Students raised similar concerns. The NUS called for “greater powers to the Electoral Commission, targeting of registration rates, coordinated campaigns together with local organisations and community groups, such as students’ unions, and engagement with young people still in school or college even before they are eligible to vote”.<sup>35</sup>

36. Louise Stamp, Electoral Services Manager for the London Borough Tower Hamlets, outlined the work that Tower Hamlets was doing to try and break down some of the cultural barriers (38% of the population of Tower Hamlets is Bengali) that some electors could have with registering to vote individually. She also highlighted the high turnover of electors in a dense urban area such as Tower Hamlets made the EROs role particularly challenging: “we get 60% movements in our annual canvass period, so that is a massive churn”.<sup>36</sup> **We recommend that the Electoral Commission’s public information campaign around the launch of individual registration include as an important element strands aimed at encouraging those in groups currently under-represented on the electoral rolls to register to vote.**

37. The Government proposes that those who are “unable or unwilling”<sup>37</sup> to provide a national insurance number (NINO) will normally have to produce two other items of identification from an approved list, such as a passport or photo driving licence. Those

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31 Ev 100

32 Q 96

33 Ev w4

34 Ev w24

35 Ev w31

36 Q 81

37 Cm 8108, para 51

who cannot provide a form of photographic identification will have to present themselves to the local electoral registration office and sign a declaration. Disability charities have suggested to us that some disabled people, especially those in residential care, “may not only not have a national insurance number but also have difficulties in producing alternative evidence such as utility bills”,<sup>38</sup> while the requirement to travel to an office could also be problematic for people with mobility or mental health problems.<sup>39</sup>

38. The Minister stated that the Government was committed to ensuring that every eligible elector could use his or her vote. He told us the Government would “make sure that, in all of those groups you particularly mention, no one is disenfranchised”.<sup>40</sup> We welcome the Government’s commitment to ensuring that all eligible electors will be enfranchised.

39. By providing for a variety of ways in which people can verify their identity, the Government has ensured that most of those entitled to vote should be able to register successfully if they want to. **There may be a small number of people who neither have the required documentation nor are able to travel to an office to attest to their identity. We recommend that the Government ensure that people in this situation are not deprived of their right to vote.**

### *Improving registration rates*

40. We have heard during our inquiry of a variety of ways that might help encourage people to register to vote.

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”.<sup>41</sup>

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.<sup>42</sup> 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 ...

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38 Ev 84

39 Ev w20

40 Q 263

41 Ev 104

42 Ev w14

use of the register should be permitted throughout the lifetime of the agreement”.<sup>43</sup> 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.**

44. The AEA told us that traditional means of encouraging registration, even house to house canvassing, have only limited success in boosting registration rates: “it cost an awful lot of money to add about 5% of people to the register”.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that it may be worth considering more unconventional techniques.

### Accuracy

45. One of the main reasons for moving to a system of individual registration is to improve the accuracy of the registers, in particular by removing people who are ineligible to vote. However, they look less likely to be successful in ensuring that entries which become ineligible are subsequently removed in a timely way.

### Identifying duplicate entries

46. A central electoral register, such as the one that is in place in Northern Ireland, would have made identifying duplicate entries much simpler, but in July 2011 the Government decided to abandon plans for a Coordinated Online Register of Electors (CORE) on the basis that it was not “proportionate, cost effective or consistent with the Government’s policy on databases and reducing the number of non-departmental public bodies”.<sup>45</sup>

47. The Electoral Commission and Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg, Director of Democratic Audit, both told us that without a central register, identifying duplicate entries would be difficult and resource-intensive, and in some cases impossible.<sup>46</sup> It would not be possible, as in Northern Ireland, to say “if I looked in at Belfast I could see someone is registered in Londonderry”.<sup>47</sup>

48. The Government’s alternative to a central database relies largely on data matching with information held by other public bodies. We discuss this in detail below.<sup>48</sup>

**49. We recommend that the Government explore ways of improving the sharing of information between local authorities, especially where potential electors move house.**

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43 Ev w14

44 Q 158

45 HC Deb, 17 July 2011, col 71WS

46 Ev 70; Q 199

47 Q 164

48 Paras 79–84

### ***Crime prevention***

50. Individual registration should help to reduce the risk of some types of electoral fraud. The current system of household registration involves almost no verification of the data provided in response to the annual canvass, and is thus extremely vulnerable to fraud. It is unclear the extent to which such fraud in fact takes place. There does seem to be evidence, however, of a strong link between electoral register entries and other forms of fraud. A recent Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and National Fraud Initiative Operation Amberhill, analysed identifiers on forged or counterfeit documents and found that 45.6% of these were positive matches on electoral register entries, because criminals had either stolen real identities or added bogus entries to the register to facilitate fraud.<sup>49</sup>

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49 Cabinet Office, *Individual Electoral Registration Impact Assessment*, Cm 8109, June 2011, p 9

## 4 Canvass arrangements for 2014

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51. The Government has proposed arrangements for the transition from the current system of registration to the new one, rather than going for a ‘big bang’. This should help to moderate the impact of the change, but the detail of these transitional arrangements has given rise to some concern. Most of this concern has focussed on the Government’s proposal not to hold a household canvass under the current system in 2014.<sup>50</sup>

52. The White Paper explains that the Government proposes not to hold a full household canvass in 2014 because “as well as being more expensive ... a canvass followed by invitation risks confusing people who may not respond to an IER invitation having already responded to a canvass, believing that they have done enough to register”.<sup>51</sup> The Minister told us that the transition arrangements, including no annual household canvass in 2014, were necessary as a full household canvass followed by an invitation for electors to register individually could be “confusing”<sup>52</sup>

The very clear feedback we had from electoral administrators who would have to do that work was that simply would not be a very good thing to do. We would end up risking confusing people and end up with lots of people who had sent out the household form, not responding to the individual form, because they thought they had done what they needed to do.<sup>53</sup>

He told us that the Government’s proposal for a ‘modified’ canvass was preferable, in which a written invitation to register could be combined with doorstep canvassing.

53. The proposal to not hold a household canvass in 2014 has raised significant concern among our witnesses, both that large numbers of people will be missed in the initial rounds of invitations to individuals to register under the new system because they have moved, and that the registers in use at the 2015 general election will be significantly inaccurate. For the Electoral Commission, having an annual household canvass in 2014 is “a key priority”.<sup>54</sup> Jenny Watson, the Chair of the Electoral Commission, explained why

We know there are around 5 million changes to the register in any 12-month period and the majority of those will be due to people moving house. If we think about the period between the 2013 register and the 2014 register, when individual electoral registration and transition starts, we know that that will already have decayed in accuracy by around 5 to 6 percentage points. That means around 2 million to 3 million people will probably have moved in that time. What that does not do is address the variability of that figure throughout the country.

54. Her colleague Andrew Scallan added

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50 Cm 8108, paras 61-62

51 Cm 8108, para 67

52 Q 264

53 Q 264

54 Q 189

It is crucial that when you embark on this exercise of individual registration ... you start off with a baseline that is as accurate as possible. Having the canvass in 2014, at whatever time precisely in 2014, is demonstrably the best way of establishing the best baseline information.

55. Peter Wardle explained that on the Government's own figures

the June 2014 register, the one that will be used as the basis for the 2014 write-out, is likely to contain inaccuracies. Approximately 20% of people eligible to re-register under IER may not be invited in that invitation process. That is a very large number of electors to set against the potential savings of not carrying out an annual canvass, and that is what we are concerned about.

56. High numbers of home movers are a particular feature in urban areas. Julian Bassham from Southwark told us that without an annual canvass in 2014, "we are missing 70% to 90% of movers not joining the electoral roll. They wait until the annual canvass ... coupled with a high population churn ... around 30% to 40%—we could well be looking at a significant under-representation on the register of the eligible population of Southwark".<sup>55</sup>

57. We would be greatly troubled if, as the Electoral Commission warns, "as many as 2–3 million people across Great Britain could be no longer resident at the address recorded on the December 2013 electoral registers, and would therefore not receive an IER form in July 2014".<sup>56</sup>

58. People who are on the electoral register following a response to the household canvass in 2013 will, on the Government's proposals, remain on the register until after the general election in May 2015. This is a sensible way of ensuring that people have plenty of time to register individually and do not find themselves accidentally deprived of their right to vote in 2015. Coupled with the absence of a household canvass in 2014, however, these carry-forward proposals are likely to mean that millions of electors will be registered in the wrong place for the 2015 General Election.

**59. We recommend that the Government take steps to ensure that the electoral registers used for identifying individuals in the initial round of invitations to register under IER, as well as those used for the 2015 general election, are as accurate and complete as possible. We have heard serious concerns that the Government's current proposals will miss an unacceptably large number of potential electors, and calls from many 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.**

60. If the Government is determined not to hold a full household canvass in 2014, there may be proportionate alternatives that would achieve the Government's goal of saving money, without the risk of disenfranchising large numbers of people. **One alternative to holding a full annual household canvass in 2014 would be to identify those parts of the country with a significant level of annual turnover on the electoral register, and to**

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55 Q 82

56 Ev 102

**provide for something like the usual annual household canvass to take place in 2014 just in those areas. For this to happen, some parts of the country will need more funding than others. We recommend that the Government confirm that this is its intention.**

## 5 Postal and proxy voting

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61. Currently, electors who want to register for a postal or proxy vote have to provide the personal identifiers of a signature and a date of birth. These identifiers then have to be replicated by the elector when they cast their postal vote, and the returning officer verifies them against the original samples. Electors who wish to vote by proxy must submit a form setting out why they need to vote by proxy. In some situations, this must be co-signed by a qualified person, such as a doctor. Those who are nominated as proxies must also be eligible to vote in the relevant election.

62. As part of its consultations on electoral administration, the Government is proposing to alter the rules for proxy voting. We consider these proposals in Chapter 8 of this Report. We consider here the impact of the Government's proposals for individual electoral registration on those who use postal and proxy votes, especially those who may have no alternative to using them.

### Transitional arrangements

63. Under the Government's proposals, "electors with an absent [postal or proxy] vote who fail to register under IER in 2014 will automatically lose the right to use this method of voting".<sup>57</sup> This change carries risks that people who are currently registered for a postal or proxy vote may be unaware of the new requirements and become disenfranchised in 2015. This could have a particular impact on the elderly, the disabled, and those in residential care.

64. The Electoral Commission will run the campaign informing electors of the transition to individual electoral registration. We believe that particular attention will be paid to the need to make the information campaign accessible to all, and to target it towards groups who tend to rely on postal and proxy votes to exercise their right to vote.

65. When asked why IER would come into force before the 2015 General Election for postal and proxy voters, the Minister stated that the perception and risk of fraud associated with postal voting was too great for the Government to consider extending the 'carry-forward' for postal voters. He told us "it will be made very clear to people who have a postal vote that, if they do not take the trouble to register individually, they will still be on the register. They will still be able to vote, but they will not have the opportunity to vote by post".<sup>58</sup> He added that the Government was working with groups representing the elderly to ensure that they were aware of the changes to the registration requirements for postal voting.<sup>59</sup>

66. Electoral administrators and returning officers expressed concern about the proposal not to carry forward existing postal and proxy registrations for elections in 2015, given that postal voters, unlike those voting in person, already provide a date of birth and a signature

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57 Cm 8108, para 79

58 Q 263

59 Q 263

as identifiers.<sup>60</sup> John Turner told us that the AEA “cannot see any logic” in the proposal.<sup>61</sup> As evidence from Scope and Mind suggests,<sup>62</sup> many of those who have an absent vote would struggle to vote in person, and some may also have difficulty in completing the individual registration process. **We recommend that the Government look closely at applying the same carry-forward arrangements for the 2015 General Election to postal and proxy registrations as to other registrations, to avoid inadvertently disenfranchising vulnerable electors.**

### Requirement for a signature

67. The current requirement to supply a signature when applying for and casting a postal vote has, according to disability charity Scope, “caused particular challenges for disabled people who may not be able to make a distinctive mark or sign in a consistent manner”.<sup>63</sup> The requirement for a signature does not prove the eligibility of the postal voter, only that the same signature has been provided on the application and subsequent postal vote.

68. People’s signatures often change over time, particularly in old age. John Turner, Chief Executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, gave us anecdotal evidence that many postal votes were rejected because of signatures failing to match

“the current postal voter identifier process, of itself, lends to disenfranchisement because of this matching of signatures and dates of birth, where the data was given up to five years ago”.<sup>64</sup>

69. **We recommend that the Government take the opportunity provided by the introduction of individual registration to consider dropping the requirement of a signature as a personal identifier to cast a postal vote, once IER is well-established. This is because of the unreliability of the signature as a personal identifier, and because those electors wishing to cast a postal vote under IER will already have had their identity verified by other means.**

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60 Q 147

61 Q 152

62 Ev w19

63 Ev 81

64 Q 182

## 6 Resources and data matching

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### Resources

70. The White Paper provides a framework, but much of the detail of how individual registration will be administered remains to be filled in. Local authorities and the Association of Electoral Administrators stressed the need to resolve much of this uncertainty within a tight timescale. The Government's estimate of the cost of implementing IER is £108.3 million, and the Government states in the White Paper that it "is committed to fully funding the costs to local authorities".<sup>65</sup> However, the White Paper suggests that the move to individual electoral registration may become cheaper over time as "IER also opens up the possibility that the process for registration may be more efficient".<sup>66</sup>

71. Jocelyn McCarley, from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, told us that the move to individual registration in Northern Ireland put EROs under intense pressure, despite the transition being fully funded by Government. She stated "we certainly had sufficient resources to bring in individual registration. I think the problem was we ... underestimated the amount of resources we would need in terms of staff. The volume of forms coming into the office was a bit of shock; it all needed data input".<sup>67</sup> Jocelyn McCarley also told us that EROs in Northern Ireland did not have sufficient resources to keep chasing individuals who have not responded to requests for information.<sup>68</sup>

72. There is evidence that some EROs are already struggling to perform their statutory duties. Electoral Commission data shows that in 2010, ten EROs failed to ensure the completeness and accuracy of electoral registration records met agreed standards.<sup>69</sup> Eight EROs also failed to meet the standard for doorstep canvassing in 2010, and three of those have failed to achieve that standard three years in a row.<sup>70</sup> Michel Saminaden, speaking on behalf of local authority Chief Executives, or SOLACE, told us that the move to individual registration would increase the number of registration forms, and would put a strain on EROs' already stretched resources "there is no doubt, because we will be talking with many tens of thousands more electors".<sup>71</sup>

73. We received evidence from local authority staff involved in three of the 20 pilot schemes trialling the comparison of data from electoral registers with government databases that IER would require very different skills and people from the current system

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65 Cm 8108, para 6

66 Cm 8108, para 6

67 Q 176

68 Q 176

69 Ev 104

70 Electoral Commission, *Report on performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain, Third analysis of performance*, April 2011, p 14, para 2.12

71 Q 176

“gone are the days of the gangmaster driving the team of canvassers to bang on as many doors as possible and get a result, and in comes a much different level of skills around data matching and examining IT systems and so on”.<sup>72</sup>

“we will need a lot more technical staff who can manage all the data matching, rather than, as now, staff experienced in elections and electoral law”.<sup>73</sup>

74. John Turner, speaking on behalf of electoral administrators, raised concerns that the lack of detail from Government means that the timescale for commissioning and implementing the relevant IT systems needed for IER is very tight: “as every month passes, it is going to get extremely difficult to ensure that the system is totally workable and that the necessary IT systems that will support that system are in place”.<sup>74</sup> The AEA has written that

“given the scale of the work to be undertaken to deliver the necessary infrastructure including the IT, business processes, data protocols, guidance, and form design, it is essential that the draft secondary legislation is available for scrutiny whilst the Bill is still in the UK Parliament ... Further, it is vital to bring into effect in sufficient time any provisions (whether in primary or secondary legislation) necessary to enable work to commence on developing and testing that infrastructure”.<sup>75</sup>

**75. We recommend that the Government publish the information, including draft secondary legislation, that electoral administrators need to deliver the necessary infrastructure for individual registration as soon as possible after the Individual Electoral Registration Bill is introduced.**

76. The Electoral Commission has argued for powers to assist or sanction EROs who repeatedly fail to discharge their statutory duties, to help ensure that the transition to IER meets minimum standards across Great Britain.<sup>76</sup> Any inconsistencies would become more apparent in future given the larger number of parliamentary constituencies likely to cross local authority boundaries

“there are now some spectacular complications ... that issue of consistency is crucial because ... some very small administrative issues could result in a differentiation within particular wards that will create constituencies”.<sup>77</sup>

77. The Minister told us “I think it is fair to say the Electoral Commission are quite keen for a bigger role. At the moment, that is unproven”.<sup>78</sup> We believe that the Electoral Commission must play a key role in ensuring that IER is implemented consistently, and that may require effective powers of sanction to do so. **We conclude that there is a strong**

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72 Q 86

73 Q 86

74 Q 166

75 Ev 92

76 Ev 95

77 Q 190

78 Q 284

**case for the Electoral Commission to be given powers to intervene where EROs consistently fail to meet agreed performance standards.**

78. The Government has committed to funding the transition to IER which is likely, in the short term, to be resource-intensive as EROs aim to contact and register an estimated 46 million individuals, as opposed to 25 million households. The Association of Electoral Administrators has written that “the successful implementation of the new system will depend on the relevant funding going directly to electoral services. Any funding needs to continue post 2015 and should not simply be seen as one-off capital funding”.<sup>79</sup> Michel Saminaden of SOLACE has also suggested the need for “some sort of ring-fencing” to ensure that money made available to local authorities for IER is not diverted elsewhere. **We recommend that the Government ensure that the funding it provides to support local authorities with the transition to IER is ring-fenced for this purpose.**

## Data matching

79. The concept behind the 20 data matching pilots currently under way is “to test whether EROs can use public databases to identify people eligible to vote but missing from the register so they can invite them to register”.<sup>80</sup> The Government hopes to assess early in 2012 whether these schemes should be rolled out more widely.

80. Representatives of three of the local authorities involved in the data matching pilots told us that “for all of us ... it is very, very labour intensive”.<sup>81</sup> All three authorities had hired additional staff to help run data matching, boosting staffing levels in their electoral registration sections by 50-100% for the duration of the pilot. If it is to be successful, additional resource will be needed not only to match data, but also to follow it up with letters, and house enquiries if appropriate.

81. Julian Bassham, Electoral Services Manager for the London Borough of Southwark told us that data matching “has been more successful for us at this stage in telling us what we do know rather than what we don’t know ... At the moment it does not look, from our side, like the DWP data will necessarily answer those questions”.<sup>82</sup> The Electoral Commission has stated that it wishes to see further options for identifying unregistered electors “not only in the event that data matching is less successful than we hope, but also to deal with ‘at risk’ groups who are less easily picked up through the data matching approach”.<sup>83</sup>

82. The problems are partly technical. Addresses may not match between records because they have been input differently, or because house names have changed.<sup>84</sup> In Southwark, 25% of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) records could not be matched to properties in the borough as known to the local authority.<sup>85</sup> Without nationality

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79 Ev 94

80 Cm 8108, para 20

81 Q 62

82 Q 66

83 Ev 103

84 Q 75

85 Q 74

information, it is impossible to know if someone is likely to be eligible to vote or not. We also heard that people are not removed from the DWP database when they die or leave the country, meaning that large numbers of records on the database are essentially inaccurate and confusing to electoral administrators.<sup>86</sup>

83. The Minister told us that Government and the Electoral Commission would have to look at the data generated by all 22 data matching pilots before making a decision on the effectiveness of data matching. He stated

The Electoral Commission, according to the secondary legislation, has to have those evaluations ready in March, so what we are going to have to be taking a decision on before we introduce the legislation is whether we think there is sufficient evidence available to put the powers into the legislation to roll out data-matching, if we wanted to.<sup>87</sup>

**The evidence we have received, however, suggests that data matching will be of limited effectiveness, especially in identifying potential electors. We recommend that the Electoral Commission publish its evaluations of the pilots before second reading of the Bill, in order to inform debate.**

84. Access to the data in the first place has not always been straightforward. Local authorities participating in the pilots have not had the power to require access to data. Darren Whitney of Stratford-on-Avon District Council told us that part of their pilot had been delayed as they had not received any data from the Ministry of Defence, even though the terms of the pilot agreed with the Government involved access to data from their Joint Administration and ANITE databases.<sup>88</sup> The Minister for Personnel in the Ministry of Defence, Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP, wrote to us on 12 October 2011 stating that data had been provided to Stratford-on-Avon in August.<sup>89</sup> In fact the relevant data was only received by Stratford later in October. **Data matching can only be a success if local authorities are provided with the information they need in a timely and helpful way. We regret that the Ministry of Defence has taken so long to co-operate with at least one of the data matching pilots. This suggests that there may be a need for better central co-ordination and ministerial oversight of the data matching programme.**

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86 Qq 70–71

87 Q 245

88 Q 72

89 Ev w38

## 7 Treatment of personal data

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85. How personal data is treated is clearly crucial to the success of and popular support for individual registration. The White Paper does not prescribe in detail the practicalities of how data submitted as part of an IER application or acquired through data matching should be treated.<sup>90</sup> In outline, the Government proposes that national insurance number data should be disposed of once an identity has been verified, while date of birth information should be retained (but not published) to help identify duplicate entries.<sup>91</sup>

86. Our witnesses generally had little to say about data protection and privacy issues. The memoranda from EURIM<sup>92</sup> and the London School of Economics<sup>93</sup> are notable exceptions. Michel Saminaden of SOLACE told us “in terms of coping technically, we will; we always do and we ... will come across data protection problems and we will have to deal with those as they come along”.<sup>94</sup>

87. The Association of Electoral Administrators were confident that EROs would be able to deal with the retention and disposal of large amounts of data, stating that “we haven’t seen the detail of how that will be handled, but whenever new challenges have been thrown at both the electoral profession and the suppliers, the IT suppliers who support them, generally it has worked”.<sup>95</sup>

88. The Information Commissioner’s Office do not have any concerns either: “we are pleased to note the importance attached to the security of personal data in these proposals and welcome the commitment demonstrated by the intention to introduce a fine or custodial sentence for misuse of data”.<sup>96</sup>

**89. The Government’s proposals for data collection, retention, and disposal appear to us to be proportionate. However, much of the detail is still unknown.**

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90 Ev w23

91 Cm 8108, para 25

92 Ev w10

93 Ev w21

94 Q 144

95 Q 144

96 Ev w12

## 8 Draft electoral administration provisions

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### The Government's proposals

90. On 13 July and 14 September 2011, the Government published two sets of draft provisions including a number of electoral administration provisions for pre-legislative scrutiny.<sup>97</sup> The draft provisions requiring primary legislation would:

- extend the electoral timetable for UK Parliamentary elections from 17 to 25 working days, and, in doing so, adjust a number of the deadlines within the timetable (in particular the date for delivery of nominations which are fixed at the start of the electoral timetable). This will allow more time for the postal vote process and to facilitate the administration of elections more generally;
- make changes to the timing of polling place reviews in Great Britain to bring them in line with the proposals to set Parliamentary terms to five-year periods, and the five year cycle for UK boundary reviews implemented by the Parliamentary Voting Systems and Constituencies Act 2011;
- address an oversight in existing legislation to enable a UK Parliamentary election candidate jointly nominated by two or more registered political parties to use on the ballot paper an emblem registered by one of the nominating parties; and
- change the law so that a parish or community council election may be held on the ordinary day of election of councillors even if this is also the date of a Parliamentary or European Parliamentary election.

91. Draft provisions that could be achieved through secondary legislation would:

- require EROs to check 100% of the identifiers for postal votes at elections; and
- extend the 'emergency' proxy voting facility to enable those called away on business or military service unexpectedly, and at short notice, before an election, to appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf (as well as people unexpectedly called ill).

92. **The proposals published in July have been widely supported. We have had only a very limited opportunity to test the proposals published in September.** Some witnesses argued that the draft provisions did not go far enough, with Bristol City Council stating that they would welcome any further extension to the timetable for parliamentary elections.<sup>98</sup> Dr Orford, Professor Rallings, and Professor Thrasher cited research that distance to polling places can affect the number of votes cast there, and called for a review of the distance of polling places.<sup>99</sup> The Electoral Commission has also raised a number of questions and concerns about the detail of the Government's proposals from July, in particular:

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97 Cabinet Office, *Draft electoral administration provisions*, July 2011, Cm 8150, and *Further draft electoral administration provisions*, September 2011, Cm 8177

98 Ev w3

99 Ev w1

- a) why the Government is “proposing that the election timetable should continue to be counted forward from the dissolution of Parliament, rather than calculating deadlines backwards from polling day”. This may be to allow for the possibility of an early general election, consistent with the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011;
- b) why the Government is “proposing greater flexibility for the timetable for Parliamentary by-elections and polls which are re-run due to the death of a candidate, including flexibility for the Acting Returning Officer over the setting of polling day”; and
- c) whether the Government will “amend the rules to allow an earlier dispatch of postal ballot packs than that which is possible under the current timetable, or explain why it does not intend to make such a change”. This seems a matter of particular importance if overseas voters are to have a realistic opportunity of exercising their postal vote.<sup>100</sup>

93. The Government has also asked for views on two further possible reforms which are not currently proposed: for appointing polling and counting agents, and to shorten the deadlines for postal vote applications. The first proposal is suggested “in the context of the proposal to extend the electoral timetable”.<sup>101</sup> John Turner, Chief Executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, doubted whether changing the deadline for postal vote applications would ease pressures around the process for issuing postal votes, suggesting that with a different deadline “you can just create another period of pressure”.<sup>102</sup> We would be concerned at any change that made it harder for people to vote. **We recommend keeping the deadline for postal vote applications at eleven days before polling day.**

94. Finally, the Government has asked for views on the possibility of amending the Recess Elections Act 1975. At present, under this Act a writ may not be issued in recess for vacancies that arise where a Member effectively resigns their seat by applying for one of the sinecure offices of the Crown Steward and Bailiff of the Chiltern Hundreds or of the Manor of Northstead.<sup>103</sup> This provision, which originally dates from the 1850s, seems likely to us to be a historical anomaly. In our view, the principle should be that constituents should be left unrepresented for as little time as possible. **Unless strong evidence should emerge to the contrary, we recommend that the Recess Elections Act should be amended to allow writs to be issued in recess for any vacancies that arise where a Member effectively resigns their seat.**

95. The Electoral Commission has also stated that it is “disappointed with the lack of policy context alongside the draft provisions. The explanatory notes do not provide enough background or evidence to support appropriately detailed consideration of these proposals”.<sup>104</sup> Publication of the proposals in two tranches has also not helped in attempting to understand the Government’s overall rationale.

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100 Ev 108

101 Ev 111

102 Q 181

103 Ev 113

104 Ev 107

96. **The provisions published in draft by the Government are largely technical, but the Government needs to be able to explain why it is making the package of proposals that it is, and why it is not taking forward other proposals for change in electoral law, particularly those put forward by the Electoral Commission.**

### Other possible changes

97. In addition to the Government’s proposals, the Electoral Commission has raised a number of areas of law that they believe could be usefully changed. These include:

- a) allowing eligible electors in the queue at close of poll to vote;
- b) giving Returning Officers powers to request a fresh identifying signature from those voting by post (as currently many postal votes are rejected because a voter’s signature has changed since their first application);
- c) allowing academics access to the full register for research purposes; and
- d) considering requiring electors to show identification at polling stations in Great Britain.<sup>105</sup> Voters must already show such identification in Northern Ireland.

98. On the issue of close of poll the Minister set out the Government’s position that the issues around close of poll in the 2010 election were “largely around poor planning, poor resource management” and that an attempt to legislate in this area could create more problems than it solved.<sup>106</sup> We agree with the Minister that in this area careful planning and allocation of resources are likely to be more effective in ensuring all those who are eligible can access their vote without resorting to legislation.

99. The Committee also received written evidence from a number of expatriates calling for the Government to abolish the current 15 year limit on voting in General Elections when living overseas. Mark Harper responded that it was “something that Government is considering at the moment, but we have not reached a decision”.<sup>107</sup>

**100. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government set out its position on each of the Electoral Commission’s proposals for further reform of electoral administration law.**

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105 Ev 109

106 Q 284

107 Q 283

## 9 Conclusion

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101. While there is general agreement in principle that individual electoral registration (IER) is the right move for Great Britain, our inquiry has revealed concerns about the detail of its implementation.

102. We welcome the opportunity we have had to scrutinise the draft legislation on IER and electoral administration in detail. The next version of the Bill should be improved as a result of the consultation process, and as a result of parliamentary scrutiny.

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Introduction

1. We welcome the fact that these proposals have been published for pre-legislative scrutiny by us, as well as for wider consultation. (Paragraph 6)

## Registration as personal choice

2. We welcome 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. We urge the Government to take the necessary steps in this direction in the Bill. (Paragraph 23)
3. We recommend that it should initially be an offence to fail to complete a voter registration form when asked to do so by the relevant electoral registration officer. This should be reviewed after five years of operation of the new system of individual registration, by which time registration levels may be high enough and a culture of individual registration sufficiently embedded for compulsion no longer to be necessary. (Paragraph 28)

## Constituency boundaries

4. For the next parliamentary constituency boundary reviews to be fair and representative, electoral registers across the country need to be at least as complete—and as consistently complete—as they are now. The Government needs to ensure that its proposals will achieve this end. (Paragraph 32)
5. There is a risk that the electoral registers in December 2015 will be particularly varied in their levels of completeness: this matters because they will be used under current legislation as the basis for the next boundary review. We recommend using instead the registers as they stood on or before general election day in May 2015. (Paragraph 33)

## Groups at most risk of failing to register

6. We recommend that the Electoral Commission's public information campaign around the launch of individual registration include as an important element strands aimed at encouraging those in groups currently under-represented on the electoral rolls to register to vote. (Paragraph 36)
7. There may be a small number of people who neither have the required documentation nor are able to travel to an office to attest to their identity. We recommend that the Government ensure that people in this situation are not deprived of their right to vote. (Paragraph 39)

### Improving registration rates

8. We recommend that the edited register should be abolished. (Paragraph 43)

### Identifying duplicate entries

9. We recommend that the Government explore ways of improving the sharing of information between local authorities, especially where potential electors move house. (Paragraph 49)

### Canvass arrangements for 2014

10. We recommend that the Government take steps to ensure that the electoral registers used for identifying individuals in the initial round of invitations to register under IER, as well as those used for the 2015 general election, are as accurate and complete as possible. We have heard serious concerns that the Government's current proposals will miss an unacceptably large number of potential electors, and calls from many 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. (Paragraph 59)
11. One alternative to holding a full annual household canvass in 2014 would be to identify those parts of the country with a significant level of annual turnover on the electoral register, and to provide for something like the usual annual household canvass to take place in 2014 just in those areas. For this to happen, some parts of the country will need more funding than others. We recommend that the Government confirm that this is its intention. (Paragraph 60)

### Postal and proxy voting

12. We recommend that the Government look closely at applying the same carry-forward arrangements for the 2015 General Election to postal and proxy registrations as to other registrations, to avoid inadvertently disenfranchising vulnerable electors. (Paragraph 66)
13. We recommend that the Government take the opportunity provided by the introduction of individual registration to consider dropping the requirement of a signature as a personal identifier to cast a postal vote once IER is well-established. This is because of the unreliability of the signature as a personal identifier, and because those electors wishing to cast a postal vote under IER will already have had their identity verified by other means. (Paragraph 69)

### Resources

14. We recommend that the Government publish the information, including draft secondary legislation that electoral administrators need to deliver the necessary infrastructure for individual registration, as soon as possible after the Individual Electoral Registration Bill is introduced. (Paragraph 75)

15. We conclude that there is a strong case for the Electoral Commission to be given powers to intervene where EROs consistently fail to meet agreed performance standards. (Paragraph 77)
16. We recommend that the Government ensure that the funding it provides to support local authorities with the transition to IER is ring-fenced for this purpose. (Paragraph 78)

### **Data matching**

17. The evidence we have received suggests that data matching will be of limited effectiveness, especially in identifying potential electors. We recommend that the Electoral Commission publish its evaluations of the pilots before second reading of the Bill, in order to inform debate. (Paragraph 83)
18. Data matching can only be a success if local authorities are provided with the information they need in a timely and helpful way. We regret that the Ministry of Defence has taken so long to co-operate with at least one of the data matching pilots. This suggests that there may be a need for better central co-ordination and ministerial oversight of the data matching programme. (Paragraph 84)

### **Treatment of personal data**

19. The Government's proposals for data collection, retention and disposal appear to us to be proportionate. However, much of the detail is still unknown. (Paragraph 89)

### **Draft electoral administrations provisions**

20. The proposals published in July have been widely supported. We have had only a very limited opportunity to test the proposals published in September. (Paragraph 92)
21. We recommend keeping the deadline for postal vote applications at eleven days before polling day. (Paragraph 93)
22. Unless strong evidence should emerge to the contrary, we recommend that the Recess Elections Act should be amended to allow writs to be issued in recess for any vacancies that arise where a Member effectively resigns their seat. (Paragraph 94)
23. The provisions published in draft by the Government are largely technical, but the Government needs to be able to explain why it is making the package of proposals that it is, and why it is not taking forward other proposals for change in electoral law, particularly those put forward by the Electoral Commission. (Paragraph 96)
24. We recommend that in its response to this Report, the Government set out its position on each of the Electoral Commission's proposals for further reform of electoral administration law. (Paragraph 100)

# Formal Minutes

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**Thursday 27 October 2011**

Members present:

Sheila Gilmore  
Fabian Hamilton  
Tristram Hunt

Mrs Eleanor Laing  
Mr Andrew Turner  
Stephen Williams

In the absence of the Chair, Mrs Eleanor Laing was called to the Chair.

Draft Report (*Individual Electoral Registration and Electoral Administration*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 102 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Tenth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That Mrs Laing make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for printing with the Report (previously reported and ordered to be published on 14 July, 8, 13 and 15 September and 13 October).

[Adjourned till Thursday 10 November at 9.45 am

## Witnesses

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### Thursday 8 September 2011

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**Dr Roger Mortimore**, Director of Political Analysis, Ipsos Mori, and **Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg**, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, University of Liverpool, and Executive Director, Democratic Audit Ev 1

### Tuesday 13 September 2011

**Louise Stamp**, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, **Julian Bassham**, Electoral Services Manager, London Borough of Southwark, and **Darren Whitney**, Democratic Services Manager, Stratford-on-Avon District Council Ev 13

**Simon Woolley**, Director, Operation Black Vote Ev 18

**Cristina Sarb**, Public Policy Adviser, Scope Ev 21

**Katie Ghose**, Chief Executive, Electoral Reform Society Ev 23

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**John Turner**, Chief Executive, Association of Electoral Administrators, **Jocelyn McCarley**, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, and **Michel Saminaden**, Chief Executive, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, Joint lead on IER for SOLACE Ev 29

**Jenny Watson**, Chair, **Peter Wardle**, Chief Executive, and **Andrew Scallan**, Director of Electoral Administration and Boundaries, Electoral Commission Ev 38

### Thursday 13 October 2011

**Mr Mark Harper MP**, Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform Ev 49

## List of printed written evidence

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1	Dr Stuart Wilks-Heeg	Ev 69, 70
2	London Borough of Tower Hamlets	Ev 74
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4	Stratford-on-Avon District Council	Ev 80
5	Scope	Ev 81
6	Electoral Reform Society	Ev 85
7	Association of Electoral Administrators	Ev 90
8	Electoral Commission	Ev 95, 107, 109
9	Mr Mark Harper MP, Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform	Ev 111, 112

## List of additional written evidence

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(published in Volume II on the Committee's website [www.parliament.uk/pcrc](http://www.parliament.uk/pcrc))

1	Dr Scott Orford, Professor Colin Rallings and Professor Michael Thrasher	Ev w1
2	Bristol City Council	Ev w3
3	Dr Toby S James	Ev w4
4	EURIM	Ev w10
5	Information Commissioner's Office	Ev w12
6	Credit Services Association	Ev w14
7	192.com	Ev w14
8	MIND	Ev w19
9	London School of Economics	Ev w21
10	Open Rights Group	Ev w23
11	British Youth Council	Ev w24
12	The Labour Party	Ev w25
13	Chris Ruane MP	Ev w29
14	National Union of Students	Ev w31
15	British Community Committee of France	Ev w32
16	Andrew Milne	Ev w34
17	David Burrage	Ev w35
18	Brian Cave, Pensioners Debut	Ev w37
19	Department for Work and Pensions	Ev w38
20	Ministry of Defence	Ev w38

## List of unprinted evidence

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The following written evidence has been reported to the House, but to save printing costs has not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library, where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Parliamentary Archives ([www.parliament.uk/archives](http://www.parliament.uk/archives)), and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to The Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW (tel. 020 7219 3074; email [archives@parliament.uk](mailto:archives@parliament.uk)). Opening hours are from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Anita Rieu-Sicart, Editor, Var Village Voice

John and Olive Parsons

Graham and Valerie Neal

Hugh and Pat Moore

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2010–12

First Report	Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill	HC 422
Second Report	Fixed-term Parliaments Bill	HC 436 (Cm 7951)
Third Report	Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill	HC 437 (Cm 7997)
Fourth Report	Lessons from the process of Government formation after the 2010 General Election	HC 528 (HC 866)
Fifth Report	Voting by convicted prisoners: Summary of evidence	HC 776
Sixth Report	Constitutional implications of the Cabinet Manual	HC 734 (Cm 8213)
Seventh Report	Seminar on the House of Lords: Outcomes	HC 961
Eighth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions	HC 923 (HC 1477)
Ninth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2010-12	HC 1477