

Individual Electoral Registration: Implementing the Change 2012-2016

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1. Foreword

I am delighted to publish the implementation plan for Individual Electoral Registration - the most significant change to our system of electoral registration for many years.

These changes aim to modernise and improve our electoral registration system, creating one which has better protection against electoral fraud and is more convenient for eligible citizens to register to vote. It will put electors first and aims to increase public trust in our elections.

The aim of this plan is to explain how the new system will affect eligible citizens and electoral administrators and how this change will be delivered. In particular, it outlines the timetable for the work and how this will be managed alongside other activities electoral administrators will have to carry out over that period.

This is not a definitive manual on the new system of electoral registration and further more detailed guidance will be published next year. Nor is this the only information that we will be making available this year to assist in the planning for implementation. The first tranche of draft secondary legislation has just been published and further tranches will be published over the summer. We will consult with local authorities on how the change will be funded, and will continue to work in partnership with local authorities on the development of the IT needed to support the new system and test the new system with eligible citizens and those representing people with special requirements. It is the Government's intention, one shared by the other main partners involved, that the elector should be at the heart of our plans. That is therefore the starting point for this plan, and throughout implementation we will be testing the new service with users to ensure it is fit for purpose.

We also intend to implement this plan in partnership with Electoral Registration Officers, electoral administrators and the Electoral Commission - those with direct experience of running the electoral registration system. I am very grateful for the commitment and support they have shown so far and look forward to continuing this partnership in the months and years ahead.

Our approach so far has been to develop the elements of the new system of electoral registration incrementally, testing our proposals with stakeholders, learning and adapting as we go. We have already consulted on the overall policy and draft primary legislation, adapting our policy to reflect feedback from Parliament and other stakeholders. We piloted data matching last year with 22 local authorities.

We will continue this approach throughout the delivery of this change, to ensure that we have assurance that the new service will work effectively on the ground before we go live in 2014. We are therefore planning further pilots this year to test the IT needed to support the new service, as well as the process of confirming existing electors.

I hope that you find this plan informative and helpful if you are involved in implementing the new system. Feedback will be absolutely critical to our success, so please send any comments or questions you may have to electoralregistration@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk

Mark Harper
Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform

2. What this will mean for the Citizen

Registering to vote matters. It is the building block of our elections and an important civic duty. It provides people with an opportunity to elect their Member of Parliament, their local Councillor or Member of the European Parliament and is used as the basis for important activities like Jury Service.

The move to introduce Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has been called for by a wide range of bodies for many years to ensure that only those eligible to vote get on the electoral register. However this change is also about giving people more direct control of their electoral registration, as well as greater choice over how to register, such as the ability to apply online.

Our aim is therefore to put the elector at the heart of our plans for the new system by making electoral registration as convenient as possible, giving people plenty of opportunities to register during the transition, and more choice over how to do it once the new system is in place.

We've taken care to ensure that the change is planned properly and takes people's needs into account over the transition. Figure 1 summarises what an eligible citizen needs to do over the transition to the new system.

It is important to be clear that until summer 2014, when the transition to the new system gets underway, the current system of electoral registration will operate as now.

The only change will be that instead of asking each household to return a canvass form in the Autumn of 2013, the last canvass under the old system will take place in Spring 2014. This will ensure that the register is as up to date as possible for the European elections and for the transition to IER.

The transition to Individual Electoral Registration

After the European parliamentary elections in June 2014, we will start the transition to Individual Registration. It is important that the timing of the transition is achievable for administrators and makes sense from the point of view of electors. We will therefore not fix a precise date for this to start until we have tested the system for confirming existing electors and have decided whether we will be writing to people with the results of the confirmation before or after the summer.

Once we have further evidence from our pilots and testing of the IT systems this year, we will announce a firm timetable for the transition in early 2013, however we expect that the **transition will begin either in July or September 2014** (for simplicity the diagrams state July). From that point onwards all new applications to register will have to be made individually using the new system. It will also be possible to register to vote online, opening up more choice over how to register.

The transition will begin with the **confirmation of existing electors**. This means that if an elector's name is on the electoral register when the transition begins, we will try to match their name against information held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on its Customer Information System. If we can match it, that entry on the register will be confirmed, the elector will be told about this and they will not need to take any further action.

Evidence from piloting carried out in 2011 suggests that about two thirds of electors could be confirmed this way, but this process is being tested and refined this year to confirm how it will work in practice. We will also look to test other records – including local authority data - to see which are accurate and reliable enough to be used to confirm people's details on the register.

Messages to be given to eligible citizens:

If you are on the register already and your details can be matched with the DWP records, you will be confirmed on the register and will be sent a letter. You will not need to take any further steps to stay on the register during the transition.

If your details are not confirmed on the register, you will be asked to re-apply. If you are not registered to vote, but think you are eligible, or are on the register but have moved house since the last register was published you will also be asked to apply.

To make an application to register to vote once the transition is underway, you will need to make an individual application, with your name, address, date of birth and National Insurance Number. You can do this using a form sent to you by your Electoral Registration Officer, or will be able to do so online.

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) will invite people individually to register under the new system. This will include people on the register who have not been confirmed, and the names of any other people who the ERO thinks might be eligible.

Where there is no information or some doubt about who lives at an address an ERO will ask the residents to identify who lives at that address and then invite them to apply to register individually.

People will be reminded more than once and if they still do not respond, will be visited by a canvasser before a new electoral register is published in December 2014.

If the eligible citizen receives an invitation to register, they should return the form with the information requested. EROs will be able to issue a civil penalty to individuals who, when required to make an application, fail to do so. There will be safeguards in place to ensure that only those who refuse repeated invitations can be fined, and registration officers will have to take specific steps to encourage an application before they can issue a fine. In December 2014 a new electoral register will be published. It will contain the names of the people who have successfully been confirmed on the register and those who have applied successfully to be added to the register.

Message for eligible citizens

If you were on the register before the transition got underway, have not been confirmed on the register and have not yet applied individually, you will stay on the December 2014 register and not lose your vote at the 2015 General Election. However you will have to make a successful new application before December 2015, otherwise your name will be taken off the register.

Postal and Proxy voters

Message for eligible citizens

If you have a postal or proxy vote, or wish to act as a proxy for someone else, you will have to be individually registered to retain it – which means that if you are not individually registered before the 2015 General Election you will have to vote in person at a polling station.

If an elector is already on the register and has a postal or proxy vote and their details are matched against the DWP records and confirmed on the register, they will be informed and will not have to take any further action to stay on the register and keep their postal or proxy vote.

If they are not matched against the DWP records, they will be informed and asked to make an individual application. If they do not do so, they will stay on the register for the 2015 General Election, but lose their postal or proxy vote. We will take steps to ensure that people with postal and proxy votes are invited to re-apply and reminded in writing and by a canvasser, before this happens.

Message for eligible citizens:

As with other existing electors, we hope the majority of people with postal votes can be confirmed automatically on the register in the summer of 2014 but if you are not you should make an individual application to be on the register when invited.

Before the General Election in 2015

The period between the publication of the December 2014 register and the General Election will be used to encourage those people missing from the register to apply, people who have moved house to update their details, and those who have not yet applied individually to do so.

Message for eligible citizens:

If you receive an invitation to register at this time, or your details have changed, or you know of someone who is eligible to vote but not on the register, you should tell your Electoral Registration Officer using the form sent to you, or online.

Many EROs currently carry out a “mini canvass” at this time. We are working with EROs and administrators to identify what this should involve, however this will be an important opportunity to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote for the General Election, and to minimise last minute pressures on electoral administrators immediately before that election.

After the General Election

A full household canvass will take place in the autumn of 2015. This will look a lot like the current system where each household is sent a list of people registered to vote at that address, however from 2015 onwards if an elector is on the register and their details have not changed, they will only have to confirm that their details have not changed – it will not be a requirement to apply each year to register to vote.

If an eligible citizen, or someone at the address, is not on the register, for example because they have moved or have just become old enough to vote, they should tell their authority who will send them an invitation to register, or make an application to register direct on the local authority website.

Message for eligible citizens:

If you were on the register in 2014 but were not automatically confirmed on the register and did not make an individual application, you will have to submit an individual application by December 2015 or be removed from the register.

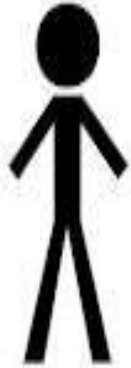
They will be invited to apply individually, reminded in writing and if they still do not respond, will be called upon by a canvasser. If after this further set of reminders they do not apply individually, their entry will be removed from the register and they will have to re-apply to exercise their right to vote.

Once the transition is complete

In January 2016 the transition to IER will be complete and all new electors or home movers will be required to apply individually to register to vote. An annual canvass of all households will continue to be carried out to ensure that the electoral register is up to date.

Figure 1

Individual Electoral Registration – transition to the new system



“So what do I need to do as a citizen?”

Before July 2014
The current system will continue to run as now, with a few small changes...

Return the household canvass form as you do now.

The final household canvass will take place from December 2013 to Spring 2014.

July – Dec 2014
We will confirm as many people as we can on the register by matching your records against official data. If we can't, or you are not registered, we'll invite you to apply

Nothing, if we can confirm you on the register. We'll tell you if we do.

If we haven't confirmed you, or you aren't registered we'll ask you to re-apply ...and remind you if you forget!

Dec 2014 to May 2015
If you were on the register but have not successfully re-applied we will keep you on the register for a year so you won't lose your vote at the General Election

If you were on the register before and aren't confirmed and haven't re-applied please do, but you won't lose your vote at the general election.

If you've moved since you last registered, be sure to tell your local authority to make sure you have a vote.

However, if you have an absent vote you won't be able to vote using that method if you've not been confirmed or successfully applied to be on the new IER register.

July – Dec 2015
Every household will be asked to update who lives there so that anyone who has moved can be asked to re-register. People who had been kept on the register for the General Election must re-apply

If you still haven't yet been confirmed on the register you will be asked again and reminded, but if you don't re-apply by December 2015, you will drop off the register.

You'll also be asked if anyone has moved in or out of your house.

2016 onwards
Each year households will be asked to update who lives there so the register can be updated

Each year as now you will be asked to confirm who lives at your address.

You will only need to re-apply if you move house.

3. What this will mean for EROs and Electoral Administrators

EROs and electoral administrators are essential to the implementation of Individual Registration. It simply cannot be done without them. We will therefore work in partnership with them, consulting and involving them fully in our emerging plans and pilots, as we have done over the last year.

From August 2012 we will be running pilot schemes to test the use of data matching to confirm existing electors in the transition to the new system. These will be followed by further pilots in early 2013 aimed at testing data sources for identifying potentially eligible electors currently missing from the register and identifying inaccurate, fraudulent and/or duplicate entries. We will consult with EROs and administrators on the draft secondary legislation, on the funding arrangements for the transition, and work in partnership with them to develop the IT service required for implementation.

What will EROs and Electoral Administrators be required to do and when?

In summary, the implementation of IER falls into five stages over the next four years. Alongside this work EROs and administrators will continue their work to run elections and carry out other related activities, including the normal canvass process.

We have therefore talked to administrators, EROs and the Electoral Commission to ensure that our plans dovetail with their other work. The timeline on the next page summarises the key activities and how these relate to other significant events, these are:

- 2012-13: Designing, building and testing the new system;
- 2013-14: Preparing for delivery and roll out of the new service;
- July – Dec 2014: Transition begins with confirmation of existing electors and write out
- 2015: Completion of the transition with pre-election mini canvass activity, and post General Election household canvass; and
- 2016 onwards: New system in place

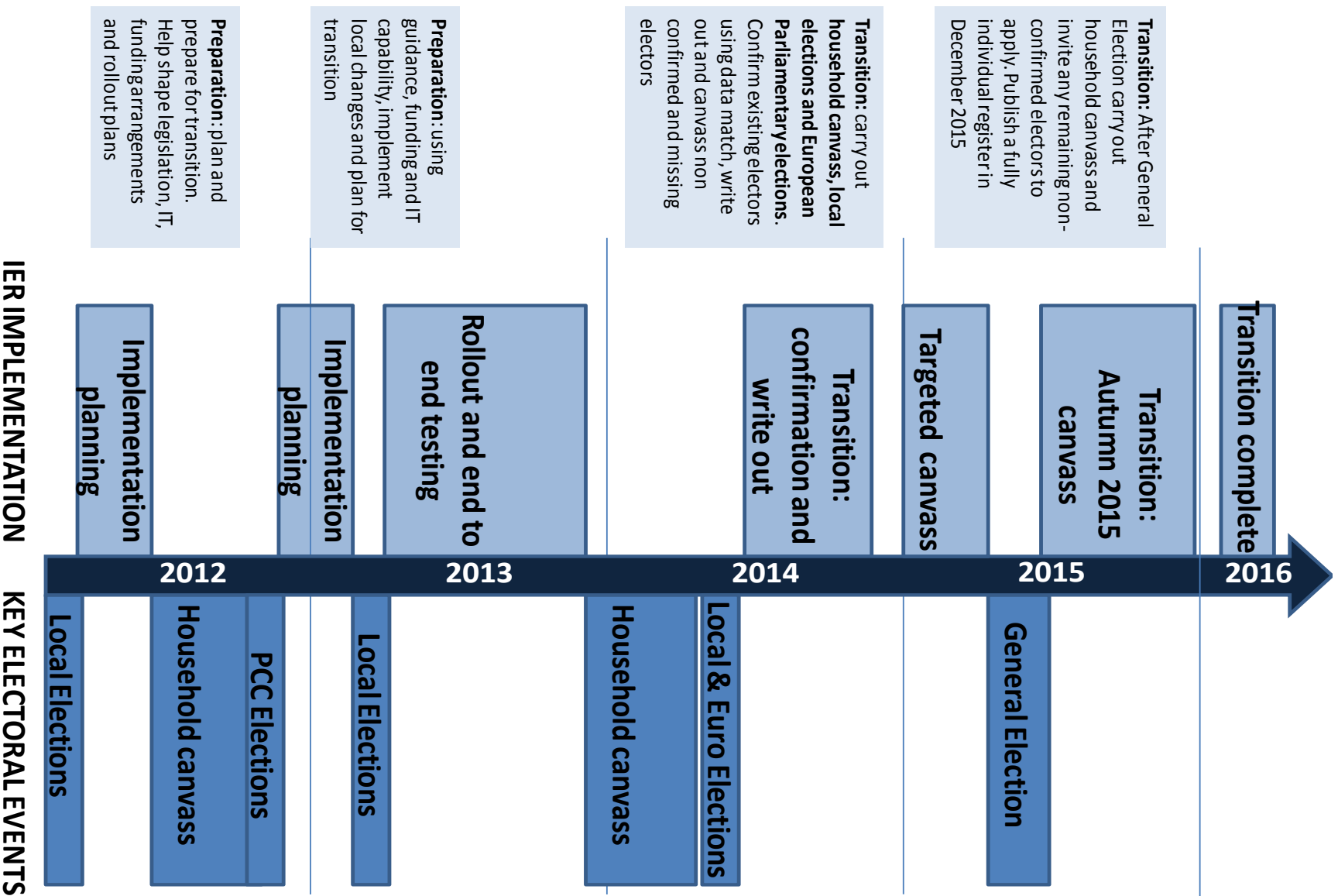
The main events in IER implementation which EROs or electoral administrators, need to be aware of, or plan for, are:

- **During 2012:** to give views on draft secondary legislation and proposed grant allocation mechanism. If willing, take part in testing the new IT system and data matching pilots.
- **December 2012 to March 2013:** to plan for 2013 transitional activities which prepare for IER implementation.
- **From April 2013:** to look out for guidance on the requirements of the new legislation, make plans to roll out the new system in 2014 and communicate the change to your local area. Work with your Electoral Management Systems (EMS) IER supplier to implement changes to local IT systems.
- **By November 2013:** to complete a full test of the matching and verification service, and confirm you have plans for sufficient staff and resources for transition in 2014 and 2015.
- **Spring 2014:** to carry out the final old style household canvass
- **In either July or September 2014:** to begin the transition to the new system after the European elections (this date will be confirmed once the IT and business processes for the transition have been tested.) Key activities will include:

- Matching Administrator's registers against the DWP database to confirm existing electors
 - Writing to all confirmed electors to explain that their registration will continue and there is nothing else for them to do
 - Writing out to, and reminding any non-confirmed electors, in addition to inviting others who are potentially eligible but missing from the register to apply
- In **December 2014**: to publish a new register, including all electors confirmed under IER, together with those on the spring 2014 register who have not yet re-applied.
 - **In January to March 2015**: to carry out targeted activity to invite further missing electors and those who may have moved, to update their registration. Also write to people encouraging those not on the register to apply.
 - **In autumn 2015 and after the May 2015 General Election**: to carry out a full household canvass. Every household should be asked to confirm who lives there and anyone new will be invited to register individually. Electors from the March 2014 canvass, who were not confirmed automatically and have not yet re-applied, should be canvassed again. If they still do not re-apply by **December 2015**, they will be removed from the register.

Figure 2 highlights the key activities and responsibilities of EROs and administrators over the next four years.

Figure 2



4. What needs to happen to implement Individual Electoral Registration at local level?

The move to IER will require a number of different elements to come together before the transition can take place. In summary these elements are:

- **Public Information: providing the public with information, guidance and support** about the new system, and what is required of them, at the right time. This will be led by the Electoral Commission, in close consultation with the Cabinet Office and other delivery partners. All the publicity elements mentioned below have both national (Electoral Commission) and local (ERO) elements:
 - Local publicity plans will be developed *from June 2013*
 - Support the transition to IER with co-ordinated national and local messages to explain to people what they need to do to ensure they remain registered *from July – December 2014*
 - Registration activity will be carried out in advance of the General Election *from March – April 2015*
 - Further publicity will occur in Autumn 2015 to ensure all those who have not moved over to the new system do so *by December 2015*
- **Law and Guidance: developing policy, legislation and guidance** to set up the new system, create legal requirements. Then explain what this means for EROs and their administrators, regarding business processes they must be prepared to carry out in 2014, 2015 and when the new system beds in from 2016:
 - Further data matching Statutory Instruments come into force *by August 2012*
 - Electoral Registration and Administration Bill is enacted [*subject to Parliament*]
 - Secondary Legislation / Regulations are made *in early 2013 (although final commencement provisions will be made in early 2014)*
 - Electoral Commission / Cabinet Office guidance is published *in 2013*
- **Resources: acquiring and or providing these to support the change** including the financial resources, and others, to ensure that there are people with the skills needed to implement the transition:
 - ERO Grant allocation mechanism confirmed *by December 2012*
 - ERO and administrators' Support Structure in place *by March 2013*
- **IT: introducing changes to local authority IT systems** especially to Electoral Management Systems and local IT capability to support the transition to the new system. There will also be a confirmation and data matching system that we will provide for all EROs which will have the capability to match their registers and verify applications against external trusted databases.
 - Further data matching pilots begin *by September 2012*
 - IT testing and development phase is completed *by March 2013*
 - IT rollout to EROs starts *from April 2013*
 - IT system is fully functional and ready for the transition *by December 2013*

For more information about what needs to happen to implement Individual Electoral Registration at local level see Figure 3.

Figure 3

Local implementation summary				
Capability	IT	Law & Guidance	Resources	Public Information
	Introduce local Electoral Management System changes (from April 2013) Enable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> digital applications confirmation & data matching service local hardware (by December 2013)	Create a legal framework to introduce IER including processes and powers to support transition and business as usual (May 2012- June 2013) Develop other elements of compliance: Data Protection, Privacy Impact Assessments, IT security (by December 2013)	Planning for recruitment of extra staff and canvassers where needed (from Autumn 2013) Train canvassers and staff in IT & new processes (November 2013 – Summer 2014) Acquire grants to pay for additional IER related costs related to post, printing, local hardware & software (from the financial year 2013/14)	Plan local publicity (June 2013) Support the transition to IER with coordinated national & local messages to public (July – Dec 2014) Registration activity in advance of General Election (Mar-Apr 2015) Further publicity to target those who have not moved over to the new system (Autumn 2015)

Delivery partners

Delivering this change will be a collaborative effort involving a range of partners and Government has been greatly assisted already by many of them. We expect to continue working closely with:

- **Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)** who are legally responsible for the delivery of electoral registration.
- **Local Authorities.** While the legal responsibility for electoral registration will remain with EROs, these are usually senior officers of a local authority and are therefore dependent on that authority for funding and other critical support for business change.

- **Electoral Administrators** who run electoral services and electoral registration on behalf of the ERO, and their representative body, the **Association of Electoral Administrators**.
- The **Society of Local Authority Chief Executives** which represents senior officers in local authorities including many of those who are EROs.
- **The Electoral Commission** which is a key partner in delivering this change. It will be responsible for delivery of key elements including publicity, co-ordinating the delivery of guidance, maintaining performance standards for EROs.
- **Scottish Assessors** - Electoral registration in Scotland is the responsibility of Assessors, who (barring two) are heads of Valuation Joint Boards, independent of local authorities. We have already started working with the **Scottish Assessors Association** and will continue to do so. We will also liaise with the **Electoral Management Board for Scotland**, to ensure that the changes are co-ordinated with the management of elections.
- **Commercial suppliers** - In addition, these will also play a role in implementation. While commercial arrangements are likely to be principally managed by local authorities, the providers of **Electoral Management Systems** will play a key role in offering new products which can support the implementation of individual registration.

Taking forward local engagement

During 2012, the main preparations for individual registration will be undertaken at a national level (in legislation, policy formation and IT development) and at a local level through piloting and collaborative working with EROs and electoral administrators.

To ensure that all EROs are engaged, we will work with them and local authority Chief Executives (together with Scottish Valuation Boards) during Summer 2012 to highlight the need to plan for IER and help them to undertake an initial assessment of whether their organisation has the necessary resources and/or skills to make the transition to IER.

This should help uncover any potential barriers to local delivery, build relationships and support networks, and ensure that the move to individual registration is factored into local corporate planning. We will then work closely with local authorities to address any particular concerns they may raise.

5. How we will implement this change

Moving over 46 million people spread across over 380 local authorities to a new system of IER over the next four years is a challenge involving many partners. Figure 4 is an overview of what needs to be done, by whom and when, from the development phase right through to when Individual Electoral Registration has become embedded in 2016

Figure 4

