

Report of the
Chief Electoral Officer
for Northern Ireland
2010-2011

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2010-2011

*Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 9(1) of the Northern Ireland
(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006*

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The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP
Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
11 Millbank
London
SW1P 4PN

30 June 2011

Dear Secretary of State,

I have the honour, in accordance with section 9(1) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, to present this Report on how I have discharged my functions for the year ending 31 March 2011.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Shields
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

St. Anne's House
15 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1ER

FOREWORD

I am delighted to present this, my first Annual Report, which outlines the work of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2011.

Whilst the Report is technically about how I have discharged my functions as Chief Electoral Officer, the work has largely been undertaken by my dedicated staff, both at our Headquarters in Belfast and throughout all of the Area Offices across Northern Ireland.

During the year free and fair elections were held for the Westminster Parliament and all the Business Plan Targets and Development Objectives that remained relevant were achieved. This would not have been possible without the considerable assistance provided from a range of stakeholders, including the Electoral Commission, the political parties, the Northern Ireland Information Service and the Constitutional & Political Group at the Northern Ireland Office. All of their assistance and input has been invaluable.

It is also appropriate that I mention my predecessor, Douglas Bain, who retired in October 2010. Douglas made a significant contribution to the work of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland during his five years at the helm of this organisation. I would also take this opportunity to express my personal gratitude for the help and guidance he has provided to me in taking on this role.



Graham Shields
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

30 June 2011

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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

Electoral Administration in Northern Ireland

1.1 The arrangements for electoral administration in Northern Ireland are different from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The system in Northern Ireland is administered centrally by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland who is an independent statutory office holder appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He is assisted by the staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, the administrative structure created to support him in the discharge of his duties. The Chief Electoral Officer is both the electoral registration officer for all 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland and returning officer for all elections and referendums in that jurisdiction. His main duties and responsibilities are set out in the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 (as amended by Article 6 of the Electoral Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1972), the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. The Accounting Officer of the Northern Ireland Office is responsible to Parliament for all expenditure incurred by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Role of the Chief Electoral Officer

1.2 The main duties of the Chief Electoral Officer are:

- to act as electoral registration officer for all constituencies in Northern Ireland;
- to act as returning officer for all elections and referendums in Northern Ireland;
- to recommend to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by 16 April each year whether or not a registration canvass should be conducted;
- to act as an assessor to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland;

- to act as an assessor to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner; and
- to lead and manage the Electoral Office.

1.3 The Chief Electoral Officer is required to report to the Secretary of State on an annual basis on how he has discharged his functions. Section 9(2) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 requires him to include in his Report an assessment of the extent to which the relevant registration objectives in Northern Ireland have been met in the year to which the report relates.

Role of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

1.4 The Electoral Office is the name given to the group of permanent and casual staff who support the Chief Electoral Officer in the performance of his duties. It operates from a headquarters building in Belfast and area offices in Belfast (co-located with Headquarters) and six other locations across Northern Ireland.

Role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

1.5 In Northern Ireland electoral matters are excepted, meaning that they are not devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Secretary of State is responsible to Parliament for electoral law and policy including:

- maintaining the legal framework that is necessary for elections to the European Parliament, the United Kingdom Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and to district councils;
- funding the Chief Electoral Officer;
- providing staffing and other resources necessary to maintain the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland; and

- consulting as necessary with the Chief Electoral Officer and the Electoral Commission on legislation and policy proposals.

1.6 The Secretary of State is supported in this role by the Minister of State and officials from the Constitutional & Political Group of the Northern Ireland Office.

Role of the Electoral Commission

1.7 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It also regulates party and election finance and in Great Britain set standards for well-run elections and electoral registration.

1.8 The Commission's corporate plan, published in 2009, set out its strategic direction over the next five years. The aim and objectives of the plan are underpinned by two key priorities – demonstrating and enhancing its effectiveness as a regulator of party and election finance and leading the drive for increasingly high standards of electoral administration, including electoral registration. The Commission's corporate objectives for the period 2009-10 to 2013-14 are:

- integrity and transparency of party and election finance
- complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process
- well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted
- fair boundary arrangements for elections in England.

1.9 The Commission has a range of functions in Northern Ireland. Its key role is to monitor and regulate party and election finance, including donations and loans to political parties and regulated donees. It also has a statutory duty to report on the main elections in

Northern Ireland. The Commission has sole responsibility for public awareness of electoral registration and elections and undertakes media activity to promote it. It has no executive functions in relation to the registration of electors or the conduct of elections. These are the sole responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Funding Arrangements

- 1.10 The salary costs of the Chief Electoral Officer, as an independent statutory officeholder, are met from the Consolidated Fund. His operating costs, except for the costs of running elections, are funded by the Northern Ireland Office. The cost of European and United Kingdom parliamentary elections are met by HM Treasury whilst the cost of any Northern Ireland Assembly elections is found from the Northern Ireland block. District councils meet the cost of their own elections.

SECTION 2 - PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS

- 2.1 This section summarises the performance achieved against the five Targets and twenty one Development Objectives set out in the Business Plan 2010/11 which can be viewed at www.eoni.org.uk.
- 2.2 The five Targets were achieved in full.
- 2.3 Twelve of the twenty one development objectives were achieved in full and nine development objectives were discontinued during the course of the year. Further information can be found at Annex A.

SECTION 3 – REGISTRATION

Statistics

- 3.1 The revised register published on 1 December 2010 contained 1,202,200 electors, a net increase of 31,864 (2.7%) in the electorate compared with the previous year. By 31 March 2011 that number had risen to 1,213,184, the highest ever figure in Northern Ireland.
- 3.2 During the period of this report 47,390 individuals were registered in Northern Ireland for the first time, 38,126 changed their qualifying address whilst 18,031 were removed from the register as a result of death or becoming ineligible. 10,093 other modifications were made to the register. The total number of changes made to the registration information held was 115,993, an increase of 7.7%.

Continuous Registration

Overview

- 3.3 During the year there were further refinements in the practices and procedures for the system of continuous registration that has replaced the annual canvass in Northern Ireland. These included, for example, the withdrawal of the returned Electoral Office letter as proof of address to assist in combating the potential for electoral fraud.

Information by Public Authorities

- 3.4 The validity of the continuous registration process depends on the provision of information to the Chief Electoral Officer by a number of public authorities. Except in the case of deaths notified by the Registrar General, no change can be made to the register until the individual elector submits a registration application confirming the accuracy of the information provided by the public authority.

Business Service Organisation

- 3.5 The main source of information on changes of address of registered electors continued to be the Business Services Organisation. On a quarterly basis that organisation provides information on all those registered with any part of the Health Service who had, according to that organisation's records, changed their name or address. No medical or other sensitive information was provided. On receipt of such notification a letter was sent to all the individuals reminding them to submit an application if they were not already registered or to update the details of their name and address if they had changed since the date of their last application. During the year more than 128,000 such letters were issued.

Department of Work and Pensions

- 3.6 Following a request made by my predecessor, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has commenced supplying quarterly updates of information on those attaining 16 years rather than 17 years. This has enabled my staff to make early contact with those who leave school aged 16, many of whom would otherwise be missed during the Schools Initiative outlined below.
- 3.7 During the course of the year my staff wrote to 794 persons recorded on the DWP database with a National Insurance Number the same as that of another person on the database. As a result 417 erroneous entries were removed and 377 entries were amended.

Registrar General

- 3.8 The Registrar General for Northern Ireland continued to provide weekly lists of all those whose deaths had been registered in Northern Ireland, whilst the Senior Coroner provided monthly lists of those whose death was awaiting an inquest. The Registrar General in the Republic of Ireland provided six monthly lists of those who had died in his jurisdiction whose last address was in Northern Ireland. Using this information 13,701 deceased persons were removed from the register. For the first time information was also provided on

the 6,981 marriages and civil partnerships that took place in Northern Ireland during the course of the year.

Post Primary Schools/ Further Education Colleges

3.9 The Schools Initiative was undertaken between September 2010 and January 2011. During that period all but 2 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland with more than 10 pupils received a visit from Electoral Office staff.

3.10 During the course of the year further education colleges were for the first time obliged to provide the Electoral Office with information on student registration. First year students were written to in October 2010 inviting them to register. A considerable number of visits were also made by Electoral Office staff to fresher events at campuses throughout Northern Ireland. By December 2010 approximately 11,000 attainers had been added to the electoral register, largely as a result of the Schools Initiative and the engagement with further education colleges.

District Councils

3.11 The Electoral Office maintains a database of all residential accommodation in Northern Ireland. To assist in maintaining its accuracy all district councils were required to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with information on new residential properties on a monthly basis. This process appears to have been working satisfactorily.

3.12 The POINTER system is intended to provide a comprehensive property database for use by all public sector organisations in Northern Ireland and the Electoral Office continued to take an active role in the POINTER Stakeholder Forum.

National Fraud Initiative

3.13 The Electoral Office continues to participate in the National Fraud Initiative through the provision of registration data.

Northern Ireland Office

3.14 The NIO continued to provide information on all those in Northern Ireland who became British citizens. During the year letters were sent by the Chief Electoral Officer to 485 individuals from 62 countries who were not already registered. By 31 March 2011 94.2% of them had been registered.

3.15 The previous nationalities of these new electors is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Previous Nationalities of New British Electors

	2010/11	2009/10		2010/11	2009/10
Philippines	172	391	Tunisia	2	3
China	53	69	Cuba	-	1
India	67	49	Iraq	2	4
Hong Kong	27	20	Lebanon	-	4
Zimbabwe	3	4	Sudan	7	9
Turkey	6	9	Australia	1	1
Bulgaria	2	7	Algeria	3	-
Ukraine	13	7	Ghana	2	3
Kosovo	1	1	Chile	-	1
USA	5	12	Nepal	1	3
South Korea	2	4	Zambia	-	2
Belarus	1	1	Palestinian Authority	-	1
Nigeria	-	3	Germany	1	1
Thailand	13	11	Gambia	2	2
Albania	2	2	Italy		2
South Africa	11	29	Dominican Republic	1	1
Brazil	4	3	Russian Federation	7	10
Pakistan	17	5	Mauritius	1	2
Morocco	2	5	Kazakhstan	-	1
Canada	2	-	Somalia	-	1
Argentina	2	-	Bangladesh	6	7
Egypt	4	18	Lithuania	-	1
Jamaica	2	-	Israel	-	1
Japan	-	1	Kyrgyzstan	-	2
Maysara, Palestinian Authority	-	1	Hebron, Palestinian Authority	-	1
Macedonia		1	Malaysia	-	3
Saudi Arabia	2	1	Poland	1	1
Kenya	1	4	Colombia	1	-
Trinidad & Tobago	2	1	Peru	-	1
Afghanistan	4	3	Ireland	-	1
Romania	2	4	Oman	-	1

Fiji	1	1	Turkmenistan	2	-
Jordan	1	1	Nepal	1	-
Vietnam	-	2	Namibia	1	-
Venezuela	4	1	Mongolia	1	-
Portugal	-	1	Yugoslavia	1	-
Iran	1	4	Qatar	1	-
Sri Lanka	1	-	Hungary	2	-
Guinea - Bissau	1	-	USSR	1	-
Uzbekistan	1	-	Estonia	1	-
Rwanda	1	-	Malawi	1	-
New Zealand	1	-	Syrian Arab Republic	1	-

Other Registration Initiatives

3.16 In January 2011 all Area offices participated in a review of all those registered at nursing homes across Northern Ireland in preparation for the polls in May 2011. A review was also undertaken in relation to those who had requested a temporary absent vote at the two previous elections. Electors in this category were offered the facility of applying for a permanent absent vote and advised that a further request for a temporary vote would require further supporting information.

3.17 In November and December 2010, in conjunction with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, electoral registration leaflets were issued with all vehicle excise licence reminder letters. Review letters were also issued to electors whose poll cards were returned by Royal Mail following the Westminster Parliamentary election in May 2010. 1,166 electors were subsequently removed from the register after no response was received.

Free Prize Draw

3.18 The Free Prize Draw, which has been used to encourage participation in the electoral registration process, was withdrawn at the end of the year. The Chief Electoral Officer was of the opinion that it had served its purpose in publicising the registration process and was no longer necessary.

Electoral Identity Cards

3.19 The production of electoral identity cards in-house continued throughout the year. A total of 23,903 cards were issued by all Area offices during the course of the year, which is more than double the number issued in 2009/10.

Meeting the Registration Objectives

3.20 Under Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 the Chief Electoral Officer is required to include in his Annual Report an assessment of the extent to which the relevant registration objectives have been met.

3.21 These objectives are set out in Section 10ZB of the Representation of the People Act 1983 and are –

“to secure, so far as reasonably practicable –

- (a) that every person who is entitled to be registered in a register is registered in it,
- (b) that no person who is not entitled to be registered in a register is registered in it, and
- (c) that none of the required information relating to any person registered in a register is false.”

First Registration Objective

3.22 The total electorate on 1 December 2010 was 1,202,200. The Registrar General and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency advised that the estimated eligible population on that date was 1,387,200. The register published on 1 December 2010 was, on that basis, 86.7% comprehensive in comparison with the register published on 1 December 2009 which was 85.2% comprehensive. The increase of 1.5% reflects the success of the registration work undertaken.

3.23 The ways in which it is intended to offer those individuals who are not registered the opportunity to do so are outlined in the Electoral Office Business Plan 2011/12 which can be viewed at www.eoni.org.uk

3.24 It must, however, be accepted that there are some individuals who take a conscious decision not to register. When challenged about their attitude reasons given have included a total lack of interest in politics, a lack of trust in politicians and fear of having their addresses discovered by family members, debt collectors or the law enforcement agencies. Whilst these individuals will continue to be given every encouragement to register it is, at present, their right not to do so.

Second Registration Objective

3.25 An independent assessment of the accuracy of the December 2007 register, undertaken on behalf of the Electoral Commission, was published on 15 September 2008. It concluded that the revised register was 94.3% accurate.

3.26 The Electoral Commission have, unfortunately, not been able to carry out any work on the accuracy of the register in Northern Ireland since 2008. There is, accordingly, no statistical basis on which to make an assessment of its accuracy. There is, however, no reason to believe that there was any significant change in the accuracy of the register over the period of this Report. The work described above and elsewhere in the Report all tended to maintain the high level of accuracy.

Third Registration Objective

3.27 The evidence requirements and the other measures described above have together given significant assurances that the information held on the register of electors is accurate.

Assessment

3.28 It is assessed that the statutory registration objectives have, to a large extent, been met.

Recommendation about a Canvass

3.29 Under Section 10 ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983 a canvass of electors was to be held in 2010. However, following advice received from the Chief Electoral Officer, the Secretary of State accepted that a canvass should not take place because of the pending Westminster Parliamentary election and the fact that the canvass would almost certainly have resulted in a significant reduction in the eligible electorate.

3.30 Having regard to the fact that the comprehensiveness of the register published in December 2010 showed an increase of 2.7% compared with the register published in December 2009, no recommendation for a canvass in the year 2011/12 was made to the Secretary of State.

SECTION 4 - ELECTIONS

Introduction

4.1 This section outlines the actions taken in connection with the Westminster Parliamentary election in May 2010 and the subsequent electoral petition in connection with the result for the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency. It also outlines the by-election for the Castlereagh East District Electoral Area and gives information on cases of suspected breaches of electoral law, most of which were election related.

Parliamentary General Election

4.2 The Parliamentary General election took place on 5 May 2010. There were 1,169,184 eligible electors and the overall turnout was 677,952 or 57.9% of the eligible electorate. The total number of spoiled votes was 4,065 or 0.6% of the votes cast. The total number of postal votes issued was 16,001 (1.37%) and the total number of proxy votes issued was 2,109 (0.18%). 3,585 staff were employed at the 1,512 polling stations across Northern Ireland and 1,891 staff were employed at the election count centres.

4.3 In keeping with arrangements for the European Parliamentary election in 2009, the Electoral Commission funded additional staff for the Helpline at the Electoral Office Headquarters. All staff were employed and trained by the Electoral Office and the arrangements worked extremely well.

4.4 Election day on 5 May 2010 ran smoothly and there were no reports of any significant problems at any of the polling places across Northern Ireland.

4.5 Eight count venues were utilised at locations throughout Northern Ireland and, for the first time ever, the counts were commenced following the close of polls. The arrangements put in place worked very well and the first result, for the West Tyrone constituency, was declared at 12.30am on 6 May 2010. The final result for the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency was not

declared until 2.30pm on 6 May 2010. The delay was caused by the requirement for a number of re-counts and an intervening overnight break.

- 4.6 The count at the Templemore Leisure Centre in Londonderry was interrupted for over two hours after a dissident republican proxy bomb was left in the leisure centre car park. The leisure centre also had to be searched following reports that a device had been left inside the premises. The incident was efficiently dealt with by the PSNI and the Army Bomb Disposal Team and the count was resumed once the area had been declared safe. Despite the disruption, it was still possible to declare the Foyle constituency result at 2am, followed by East Londonderry at 4.40am.

Fermanagh and South Tyrone Electoral Petition

- 4.7 The Parliamentary election for the constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone produced a very close result and after three recounts there were only four votes separating the winning candidate, Mrs Michelle Gildernew of Sinn Fein, from Mr Rodney Connor, the Unionist unity candidate. Mr Connor subsequently lodged an electoral petition which was heard before the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Declan Morgan, and Mr Justice Gillen at Dungannon Courthouse in September 2010.

- 4.8 In their judgment, delivered on 22 October 2010, the Lord Chief Justice and Mr Justice Gillen found that:

‘.....the election was conducted so as to be substantially in accordance with the law as to elections.’

Michelle Gildernew was therefore found to be duly elected.

Castlereagh East District Electoral Area By-election

- 4.9 The only district council by-election to take place during the year was held on 5 May 2010 in the Castlereagh East District Electoral Area of Castlereagh Borough council. The Acting Chief Executive was the Deputy Returning Officer. The staff of the Newtownards Area Electoral Office dealt with the processing of absent vote applications, the provision of equipment and

materials and the staffing of the polling stations on his behalf. The Area Electoral Officer provided advice to the Deputy Returning Officer on a wide range of matters connected with the election and undertook the training of poll staff. The election was conducted efficiently by all concerned.

- 4.10 During the course of the year the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 (Amendment) Order 2010 introduced changes to the law regarding the filling of casual vacancies that arise on district councils. Vacancies may now be filled by the council ‘co-opting’ a new councillor to replace a former councillor (who may, for example, have died or retired). A by-election is now only required in certain clearly prescribed circumstances.

Electoral Law Offences

- 4.11 Following the Westminster Parliamentary Election 21 cases of suspected postal and proxy vote fraud were forwarded to the PSNI for investigation. In 5 cases the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) directed no prosecution, 4 were dealt with by way of Adult Caution and 5 by Advice and Warning. PPS direction is awaited in relation to the 7 outstanding cases.
- 4.12 Two suspected cases of issuing imitation poll cards, contrary to Rule 28 of the Parliamentary Rules, were referred to the Police however no further action was directed in respect of each of them due to lack of evidence.
- 4.13 During the course of the year, 2 suspected registration offences committed by foreign nationals were reported to the UK Border Agency and 2 additional suspected registration offences were reported to the PSNI for investigation.

SECTION 5 – CENTRAL SERVICES

Premises

- 5.1 There were no significant changes to the premises occupied by Headquarters or the eight Area Electoral Offices.

Staff

Staff Resignations and Appointments

- 5.2 Seven members of the permanent staff, compared with six in 2009/10, resigned or retired. Six were full-time positions including the Assistant Area Electoral Officer in the Belfast Office and the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections). As a cost saving measure the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections) was recruited internally on a temporary basis for 12 months from October 2010.
- 5.3 Five permanent members off staff were appointed. Open competitions were run to fill the vacancies for the IT Officer, two Assistant Finance Officers and two Helpline Officers in Information Services. All vacancies were filled without difficulty following the public recruitment process.
- 5.4 A number of short-term vacancies were trawled to cover internal positions from the current pool of casual staff for the Ballymena and Newtownabbey Area Electoral Offices and Corporate Services.
- 5.5 More than 2,000 election applications were received to work at the poll or the count at the Westminster Parliamentary Elections in May 2010. In line with previous practice, only those who passed a test were employed to count votes. In addition, an open recruitment competition for casual electoral assistants was run for all Area Offices with the exception of Banbridge. Recruitment for reserve election staff commenced in January 2011 for the Combined Elections on 5th May 2011.

Staff Recognition Scheme

5.6 A staff recognition scheme was developed during 2010 to provide a framework to recognise staff for a particular staff suggestion or customer service excellence. The policy was subject to consultation and agreed with NIPSA.

Structure

5.7 Only minor changes to the Electoral Office staff structure were made during the year. The structure at 1 April 2010 is at Annex B whilst the structure in place at 31 March 2011 is at Annex C.

Training

5.8 By the year end 96% of the corporate Training Plan had been successfully completed. That Plan was again the amalgam of personal development plans agreed between line managers and their staff as part of the performance appraisal process.

5.9 Whenever possible training was delivered in-house to reduce costs and to ensure that it was tailored to the particular needs of the Electoral Office and its staff. Where that was not practicable the NICS's Centre for Applied Learning was used or an alternative provider was identified in accordance with the Procurement Policy.

5.10 A further six staff undertook the Foundation Course in Electoral Administration designed by the Association of Electoral Administrators. This course is now compulsory for all new Electoral Office staff. There are eight staff undertaking the Certificate in Electoral Administration, four have completed their first year and four have successfully completed their studies after two years and been awarded the Certificate.

5.11 All staff have completed the Protecting Information e-learning programme through the National School of Government website and have successfully achieved a certificate.

Sick Absence

5.12 Sick absence levels in relation to short-term and work related long-term absence continued to be low (2.1%) and closely monitored by the Board.

Staff Survey

5.13 The Electoral Office followed up its March 2010 survey with a follow-up questionnaire in July 2010. During the year the Plan drawn up as a result of the follow-up questionnaire was implemented to develop a reward and recognition scheme.

Funding

5.14 The total running costs funding provided to the Electoral Office for 2010/11 was £2.76m, compared with £2.85m in 2009/10. Total expenditure was £2.74m, just over 99% of the budget available.

5.15 Funding for the Westminster Parliamentary election was provided from the Consolidated Fund and was accounted for separately from the Electoral Office running costs. The agreed budget was just over £2.5m and the expenditure at 31 March 2011 was £2.075m, or approximately 83% of the total anticipated expenditure on the election. The account was on target to be closed on 28 February 2011, however at the request of the Northern Ireland Office it remained open after the end of year because of the Belfast West Parliamentary by-election.

5.16 Approximately 150 separate procurement exercises were carried out. The largest contracts awarded was for the purchase of additional polling screens, lights and ballot boxes for the 2011 combined elections and referendum at a

cost of over £0.5m. 970 invoices were sent to Financial Services Division and all met the prompt payment targets.

Stakeholder and Media Relations

Media

- 5.17 Sole responsibility for all matters relating to public awareness of elections and registration remained with the Electoral Commission.
- 5.18 The Chief Electoral Officer issued a number of press releases during the year. Many of these attracted substantial coverage in the printed press, the radio and, on occasion, on TV. Printed and broadcast interviews were given by the Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues.
- 5.19 Area Electoral Officers continued to develop good relationships with their local newspapers and radio stations. These have been used to good effect to give free publicity for local registration and election matters.
- 5.20 The Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues, received invaluable support in their dealings with the media from staff of the Northern Ireland Information Service within the Northern Ireland Office. These staff also played a vital role in advising on the arrangements for the media at the Westminster Parliamentary election in May 2010. Feedback from the media on the arrangements made for them was complimentary.

Political Parties

- 5.21 The Northern Ireland political parties were consulted on all planned initiatives by the Electoral Office and some provided valuable and constructive comments.
- 5.22 The Chief Electoral Officer attended all meetings of the Assembly Parties Panel, the meeting convened by the Electoral Commission to discuss electoral

matters. He gave information on changes made to electoral law and practice and on forthcoming initiatives.

Electoral Commission

5.23 A mutually beneficial and sound working relationship continued to exist at all levels between the Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues and the Head of the Commission's Belfast Office and his staff. The Chief Electoral Officer also attended regular meetings of the Electoral Referendum Steering Group at their headquarters in London in preparation for the May 2011 polls.

Disability Groups

5.24 As well as including them in all consultation exercises, regular discussion on a wide range of issues took place with national groups such as Disability Action and RNIB. Area Electoral Offices liaised with these and other groups representing those with a disability at a local level and encouraged participation by their members in the democratic process.

Northern Ireland Office

5.25 The Chief Electoral Officer worked closely with the Elections Unit at the Northern Ireland Office on amendments to the law required for the Northern Ireland Assembly and local government elections and the referendum on the Alternative Vote System. There was daily, or more frequent, contact throughout the year on this and other issues.

5.26 The Chief Electoral Officer worked closely with Northern Ireland Office officials on a number of pieces amending legislation including the Parliamentary Voting Systems and Constituencies Act 2011, the Local Elections (Northern Ireland) Order 2010 and the Northern Ireland (Elections) (Amendment) Order 2010.

Helpline

5.27 The Helpline at Headquarters dealt with 19,061 enquiries during the year which represented an increase of nearly 37% compared with 2009/10. The Helpline had its busiest ever day on Tuesday 29 March 2010 after poll cards were issued for the May 2011 elections and referendum had been issued. 2,490 calls were received on that day, breaking the previous record of 1,800 calls in a single day.

Website

5.28 From April to November 2010 more than 662,000 pages were viewed on the Electoral Office website. The method for recording website traffic changed from recording page views to recording visits in December 2010. From December 2010 to March 2011 there were 40,297 visits made to the website.

5.29 23,054 registration forms were downloaded in the languages shown in following table -

Table 2 – Registration forms downloaded by language

Language	No. Forms downloaded 2010/11
English	21,857
Polish	504
Ulster Scots	149
Portuguese	179
Lithuanian	113
Irish	172
Romanian	44
Slovak	36
Total	23,054

Records Management

5.30 19 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and 20 under the Data Protection Act were received.

IT System

5.31 There were no major IT projects during the course of the year. Further work was continued on a back-up site at a remote location to ensure that the Electoral Office could continue to offer an acceptable level of service in the event of the loss of Headquarters facilities.

SECTION 6 – CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Management Board

- 6.1 There were no significant changes to the composition or practices of the Board during the year. It continued to meet monthly or more often as required. It was comprised of the Chief Electoral Officer, both Assistant Chief Electoral Officers and the Heads of both Corporate Services and Information Services. Two members of staff, who were NIPSA representatives, received copies of all Board papers and were invited to all the meetings.
- 6.2 In addition to taking all strategic business decisions, the Board took as standing items the review of performance against targets and development objectives, finance, staffing issues, risk management and complaints. The equality and human rights aspects of any matter were considered by the Board as part of the normal decision making process. The Board also evaluated all initiatives undertaken.

Customer Service Excellence

- 6.3 Charter Mark has been replaced by Customer Service Excellence (CSE) which adopts a more customer focused approach to the delivery of high standards of customer care. I am pleased to report that the Electoral Office successfully made the transition from Charter Mark to Customer Service Excellence in March 2011 by obtaining CSE accreditation.

Complaints

- 6.4 During the year 102 formal complaints were received compared with 67 in 2009/10. Given that in 2010/11 the Electoral Office engaged at least once with each one of the 1.2m registered electors this represents a very low level of dissatisfaction.

6.5 Feedback from the CSE focus groups outlined confusion with the current complaint procedure from both staff and electors. As part of the work to achieve CSE the complaints procedure was revised and approved by the Management Board in February 2011.

6.6 The nature and outcome of the formal complaints is summarised in the following table –

Table 3 – Formal Complaints Received 2010/11

Nature of Complaint	No.	Outcome
Registration evidence requirements/ tone of letter	10	Evidence requirements and tone of letter revised
Registration issues/difficulties encountered	11	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Receipt of BSO letter/tone of letter/Removal letters	4	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable/ tone of letter revised
Could not vote	5	Relevant legislation explained
Poor service from EONI staff	4	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Late registration procedures	5	Relevant legislation explained
Schools Initiative	1	Explanation issued
Postal Voting/ Postal Vote Packs/Deadlines	20	Explanation/apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Poor service provided by poll staff	4	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Poll cards	4	Explanation/apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Location of polling station	12	Explanation issued
Already marked off register when attending to vote	1	Explanation and apology issued
Polling Agents	2	Relevant legislation explained
Forms of electoral identification	7	Relevant legislation explained
Advertising of postal votes	1	Referred to Electoral Commission

Election posters	3	Explanation issued
Electoral Law	1	Relevant legislation explained/referred to NIO
Flags at polling station	1	Explanation issued
Non-receipt/ problems with Electoral Identity Card	2	Explanation and apology issued
Polling staff recruitment process	2	Explanation and apology issued
Name falsely included on NI Assembly elections 2007 Statement of Persons Nominated	1	Explanation/remedial action taken
Details appearing on 192.com	1	Explanation/remedial action taken
Total	102	

Equality

- 6.7 As part of our strategy to promote training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities a number of placements from Orchardville Society were appointed to HQ and Area Offices under Project ABLE (Autism Building Links to Employment).
- 6.8 To assist in ensuring we continue to develop policies and practices that promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities the Electoral Office joined the network of Employers for Disability NI.
- 6.9 The annual Equality Progress Report was submitted to the Equality Commission in August 2010.

Other Plans and Policies

- 6.10 There were no other significant developments in relation to the implementation of the Good Relations Strategy and the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy.

Charitable Donations

6.11 Under the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy and the Charter Mark principles Electoral Office staff select, by secret ballot, a different cross community charitable organisation to support each year. For 2009/10 the Macmillan Cancer Fund was chosen. Through a variety of events a total of £7,868.66 was raised during the year.

Internal Audit

6.12 The Chief Electoral Officer and the Management Board continued to benefit from the constructive reports produced by ASM our internal auditors.

6.13 During the year they undertook planned audits of five areas agreed by the Board as suitable for detailed examination. In all of these a satisfactory assurance rating was given.

6.14 The 28 recommendations made by the auditors were considered by the Management Board, who because of the small size of the Electoral Office acted as the audit committee. All recommendations were accepted and 22 were implemented almost immediately. The other six recommendations will be implemented at the earliest opportunity.

Boundaries

6.15 The Chief Electoral Officer is an assessor to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland and to the District Electoral Areas Commissioner. During the year he attended a number of meetings with both the Commission and the Commissioners and provided them with information and advice to assist them in the discharge of their duties.

SECTION 7 – THE AREA OFFICES

Introduction

- 7.1 There were eight Area Electoral Offices that provided, other than the telephone Helpline at headquarters, the main point of contact for members of the public on electoral matters.
- 7.2 The locations of these offices and the constituencies for which they were responsible is shown in Table 4.

Table 4 – Area Electoral Offices

LOCATION	CONSTITUENCIES
Londonderry	Foyle East Londonderry
Ballymena	North Antrim Mid Ulster
Omagh	West Tyrone Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Banbridge A	Upper Bann Newry & Armagh
Banbridge B	South Down Lagan Valley
Newtownabbey	Belfast North East Antrim South Antrim
Newtownards	Belfast East Strangford North Down
Belfast	Belfast South Belfast West

- 7.3 Each office was managed by an Area Electoral Officer who was both the deputy registration officer and deputy returning officer for the constituencies. As such these officers had, under the supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer, responsibility for all matters relating to electoral registration and for the conduct of free and fair elections to the Westminster Parliament, the European Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. By law the Chief Executive of each district council was the deputy returning officer for any

local government election. Each Area Electoral Officer was supported by an Assistant Area Electoral Officer and a number of registration officers appropriate to the workload of that office.

- 7.4 The following paragraphs, whilst by no means covering all that was done, give an insight into the work of each office during the year.

Londonderry/Derry Area Electoral Office

- 7.5 The Londonderry/Derry Area Electoral Office at 20 Queen Street, Londonderry serves the Foyle and East Londonderry constituencies.

- 7.6 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by four permanent full time staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.

- 7.7 During the year the electorate of the Foyle constituency increased by 2,704 whilst that of East Londonderry was increased by 1,990. There was a monthly average of 328 personal callers to the office.

- 7.8 In addition to participation in general registration initiatives such as the Schools Initiative, staff also attended the three further education colleges within their area of responsibility to provide registration and electoral identity card clinics. All post primary schools were successfully visited within the allocated timescales.

- 7.9 During the course of the year the Area Electoral Officer organised two information days for the Chinese community in the Foyle constituency. Registration and ID clinics were provided for those in attendance and presentations on the registration process were made in both English and Chinese.

- 7.10 There was also an open day at the local office for people with learning difficulties. This included adults from the DESTINED group who promote inclusion in the community for those with learning difficulties. Those

attending were afforded the opportunity to complete registration forms and receive electoral identity cards.

Omagh Area Electoral Office

7.11 The Omagh Area Electoral Office at 21 Kevlin Avenue, Omagh serves the West Tyrone and Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituencies.

7.12 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent staff and by casual staff during particularly busy periods.

7.13 During the year West Tyrone constituency increased by 1,307 whilst Fermanagh and South Tyrone increased by 1,408. There was a monthly average of 238 callers to the office.

7.14 The Area Electoral Officer and his staff visited a total of 28 post primary schools as part of the Schools Initiative during the reporting period. The office also participated in a six week programme of outreach in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency, providing electoral registration services and identity cards on site at Dungannon Borough Council and Fermanagh District Council offices. The office also trialled a short period of late opening hours to 7pm on Thursday nights, however the results were disappointing and it was discontinued.

Banbridge A Area Electoral Office

7.15 The Banbridge A Area Electoral Office is co-located with the other Banbridge office at 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge. It has responsibility for the Upper Bann and Newry and Armagh constituencies.

7.16 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two permanent members of staff with additional casual staff being employed as required.

- 7.17 During the year the electorate in Upper Bann and Newry and Armagh increased by over 2,000 in each. There was a monthly average of 261 callers at the Banbridge A and B offices.
- 7.18 As well as the Schools Initiative and other general registration work, staff from the office attended fresher's fayres in the five Further Education Colleges in their area, resulting in over 300 registration applications being received.
- 7.19 Staff also attended a Democracy Week event organised by Banbridge Council, as well as two 'Safe and Well' outreach events in Bessbrook and Armagh, aimed at improving engagement with members of the travelling community.

Banbridge B Area Electoral Office

- 7.20 The Banbridge B Area Electoral Office is co-located with the other Banbridge office at 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge. It serves the Lagan Valley and South Down constituencies.
- 7.21 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two full time members of staff with additional assistance, as required, from casual staff.
- 7.22 During the year the electorate in South Down increased by 1,475 whilst that of Lagan Valley increased by 1,426.
- 7.23 In addition to visiting all post primary schools in the two constituencies as part of the Schools Initiative, staff from the office also attended fresher days at the Further Education Colleges in Downpatrick and Lisburn.
- 7.24 Staff were also successful in registering in excess of 100 remand prisoners at Maghaberry Prison during the course of the year and they also conducted a review of those registered to vote at nursing homes across the two constituencies.

Belfast Area Electoral Office

- 7.25 The Belfast Area Electoral Office is situated on the first floor of the Electoral Office Headquarters at 15 Church Street, Belfast. It serves the Belfast West and Belfast South constituencies.
- 7.26 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by five permanent members of staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.
- 7.27 During the year the electorate of the Belfast South constituency increased by 1,785, whilst that of Belfast West increased by 1,096.
- 7.28 There was a monthly average of 720 personal callers to the office. This remains easily the highest number of callers at any area office and reflects the fact that many electors, registered outside the two constituencies for which the Belfast office has responsibility, find it convenient to call there when in the city centre.
- 7.29 In addition to the general registration initiatives the Area office participated in a number of events aimed at encouraging registration amongst ethnic minorities and other hard to reach groups.

Newtownards Area Electoral Office

- 7.30 The Newtownards office at 2(B) Regent Street, Newtownards serves the North Down, Belfast East and Strangford constituencies.
- 7.31 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by four permanent members of staff with further casual staff being engaged as required.
- 7.32 During the year the electorate of the Belfast East constituency increased by 1,810, whilst that of North Down increased by 1,591. The electorate of the Strangford constituency increased by 1,731. There was a monthly average of 304 personal callers to the office.

- 7.33 A total of 18 post primary schools were visited as part of the Schools Initiative, together with 3 Further Education Colleges. The office also provided a number of mobile registration/identity clinics across each of the constituencies within their area of responsibility. The Area Electoral Officer held focus groups with Kilcooley Community Group and Woman's Centre in Bangor and in the East Belfast Community Development Agency. A presentation was also given by the Area Electoral Officer to community workers in east Belfast.
- 7.34 An ongoing problem with disabled access to the Newtownards office resulted in a search for a new ground floor location in the Newtownards area. A property was located but unfortunately due to the current difficult economic climate it was decided not to proceed with this option for the time being.

Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office

- 7.35 The Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office at 1-3 Portland Avenue, Glengormley serves the East Antrim, South Antrim and Belfast North constituencies.
- 7.36 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by 3 full time staff members and 2 others who job share one of the posts. Additional casual staff were employed as required.
- 7.37 During the year the electorate of East Antrim constituency increased by 920, whilst that of Belfast North increased by 1,413. The electorate of the South Antrim constituency increased by 1,346. There was a monthly average of 308 personal callers to the office.
- 7.38 In addition to visiting 24 post primary schools as part of the Schools Initiative, staff from the office also visited Further Education Colleges in their area of responsibility to encourage registration of first time voters. Staff also provided a number of registration and identity clinics at locations in Belfast North constituency.

7.39 As the result of a number of events organised during the course of the year, staff raised a total of £824 for the Macmillan Cancer fund.

Ballymena Area Electoral Office

7.40 The Ballymena Area Electoral Office is located at 122 Broughshane Street, Ballymena and serves the constituencies of Mid Ulster and North Antrim.

7.41 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by 2 permanent members of staff and 2 members of staff who job share. Additional casual staff were employed as required.

7.42 During the year the electorate in the Mid Ulster constituency increased by 1,326 whilst that of North Antrim increased by 1,134. There was a monthly average of 188 personal callers to the office.

7.43 Staff from the office visited all 21 post primary schools and 4 Further Education Colleges in the two constituencies during the Schools Initiative. They also organised registration initiatives with a number of bodies including the 'Young at Heart' Community Group, the Simon Community in Ballymena and the Lighthouse Hostel also in Ballymena.

7.44 Staff from the office raised a total of £891 for the Macmillan Cancer Relief charity during the course of the year.

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Targets and Development Objectives 2010/11

OT	On Target
A	Achieved
NA	Not Achieved
NP	Not Proceeding

Targets	Status	Comments
1. To deliver a free and fair Parliamentary general election within the budget allocated.	A	Electoral Commission assessed election as free and fair. Election completed within budget.
2. To submit the report for the year to 31 March 2010 to the Secretary of State by 12 July 2010.	A	Submitted 1 July 2010
3. To publish on 1 December 2010 a register that contains more electors and is at least as accurate as the December 2009 register.	A	Size of register increased by 2.7% since December 2009.
4. To publish the new statutory Polling Station Scheme by 31 January 2011.	A	Revised Polling Station Scheme published on 31 January 2011.
5. To operate the Electoral Office efficiently, effectively and within budget throughout the year.	A	A number of efficiency measures implemented. The office remained within budget at year end.

Customer Service Development Objectives		Status	Comments
1.	Throughout the year to maintain Charter Mark accreditation and to prepare an application for Customer Service Excellence for submission in 2011/12.	A	Assessment successful. CSE accreditation awarded on 22 March 2011.
2.	By 31 March 2011 to develop a course in customer care suited to the particular needs of the Electoral Office and its customers and to have it accredited by a recognised independent authority.	A	Accredited Course has been agreed with Open College Network and will be delivered to staff during 2011/12.
Registration Development Objectives			
3.	At the Parliamentary general election 2010 to issue a registration form to all unregistered persons who attend to vote.	A	Only a small number of forms had to be issued due to the registration work undertaken prior to polling day.
4.	By 30 October 2010 to have evaluated the registration initiatives undertaken in 2009/10 and to have identified further initiatives to be undertaken in 2011/12.	A	Initiatives identified for 2011/12
5.	By 31 December 2010 to carry out registration visits to at least 85% of further education colleges.	A	Registration visits completed.
6.	By 31 January 2011 to have carried out registration visits to at least 95% of post primary schools with at least 10 pupils of registration age who are not registered.	A	Registration visits completed to all but 2 post primary schools across Northern Ireland.
7.	By 31 March 2011 to devise and pilot an initiative to register young people in or leaving care.	NP	This initiative was suspended to enable financial savings in the current difficult economic climate. The short term impact is minimal because of the comparatively small number of electors involved. Further action will be considered when economic conditions improve.

8.	By 31 March 2011 to devise and pilot an initiative to encourage registration by those working in industrial estates or large factories.	NP	See comments at 7 above.
9.	By 31 March 2011 to devise and pilot an initiative to encourage registration by service personnel and their families.	NP	See comments at 7 above.
10.	By 31 March 2011 to identify and pilot at least two further initiatives to distribute leaflets encouraging registration via other public sector organisations.	A	Insert in Housing News re Elections in 2011 (coverage of 80,000 households). Publicity leaflet issued with DVA Licence renewals during November/December 2010.
Elections Development Objectives			
11.	By 30 November 2010 to amend practices and procedures in light of lessons learned at the Parliamentary general election.	A	Practices and procedures have been amended and incorporated in the 2011 election plan.
12.	Throughout the year to work pro-actively with the Northern Ireland Office and other stakeholders to update the law governing local government elections.	A	New legislation in place for 2011 elections.
13.	By 31 March 2011 to have planned and prepared for the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to district councils due to take place before 31 December 2011.	A	Combined polls took place successfully on Thursday 5 May.
Corporate Services Development Objectives			
14.	By 31 July 2010 to have assumed full responsibility for the payment of staff.	NP	Further action suspended following satisfactory resolution of problems with current service supplier.

15.	By 31 October 2010 to evaluate the benefits of an automated attendance record system and, if approved by the Board, to implement same by 31 March 2011.	NP	Management Board agreed that this would not be a viable option due to the intricacies of the system and implementation costs.
16.	By 31 December 2010 to consider the case for seeking to bring the responsibility for the processing and payment of all invoices in-house.	NP	Further action suspended. See 14 above.
17.	By 31 December 2010 to have established a new pool of casual workers for elections, registration and other duties.	A	Management Board agreed to retain the current pool of casual staff to work at the 2011 elections and undertake a recruitment exercise to make up the shortfall. New pool was established including current and new staff recruited through open competition.
18.	By 31 January 2011 to have agreed with the Electoral Commission a date for the transfer from them to the Chief Electoral Officer of responsibility for public awareness of those election and registration issues for which he has operational responsibility.	NP	Unable to proceed with this objective because the Electoral Commission would not provide funding for the role.
19.	By 28 February 2011 to have made all changes to records and systems consequential to any alterations to ward and district electoral area boundaries.	NP	The expected review of ward and DEA boundaries did not take place as a result of the decision not to proceed with local government re-structuring. There were, accordingly, no alterations to boundaries.
20.	By 28 February 2011 to close the account for the Parliamentary general election 2010.	NP	The account was on target to be closed by 28 February 2011, however the NIO requested that it should remain open until after the by-election for the Belfast West constituency, expected in the spring of 2011.

21.	<p>By a date to be agreed with the Northern Ireland Office to prepare and submit a Comprehensive Spending Review bid.</p>	<p>A</p>	<p>The NIO Spending Review bid was completed on time and has been accepted by HM Treasury.</p> <p>The CEO met with NIO officials to discuss potential savings during the spending review period. It was acknowledged by the NIO that the savings are heavily contingent on a change to legislation and future restructuring of EONI offices. The CEO and NIO will hold further meetings in due course to discuss progress on the delivery plan.</p>
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OPERATING COSTS

	£k
<u>Basic Pay -</u>	
Permanent Staff	1,207.9
Temporary Staff	72.1
Basic Pay Total	1,280.0
<u>Overtime -</u>	
Permanent Staff	38.3
Overtime Total	38.3
<u>Employers National Insurance -</u>	
Permanent Staff	87.9
Temporary Staff	2.9
Employers National Insurance Total	90.8
Accrued Superannuation Liability Charge	219.4
Total Staff	1,628.5
Power	45.5
Premises (Keyholding)	1.4
Maintenance & Minor Works	54.5
Training	33.6
Travel	14.8
Subsistence	1.5
Personnel Costs	10.1
Other Employee Costs	2.0
Hospitality	0.3
Office Services (Printing, Equipment, Hire, Window Cleaning)	63.4
Computers (Software, Hardware, Maintenance, Line Rental etc)	257.6
Professional Services	27.4
Materials (Mainly Stationery Orders)	21.3
Property charges	86.2
Postage	136.9
Telecommunications	30.1
Office Equipment	3.1
Central & Common Services (Cleaning Offices)	14.9
Estate Management	6.5
Insurance (Premises)	5.8
Advertising	5.7
Fees	5.4
Transport Costs	1.5
Advisory Services	6.2
Operating Leases (Rent of Offices & Photocopiers)	232.9

NIAO Fees	15.3
Total Goods & Services	1,083.9
Electoral Identity Card	7.2
Encouraging Registration (Prize Draw)	4.0
Non Cash Costs	172.5
Receipts	(155.7)
TOTAL PROGRAMME	2,740.4
Capital	0
GRAND TOTAL	2,740.4



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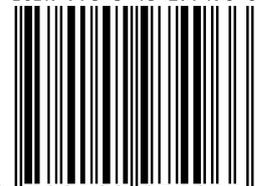
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