

# Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2007-2008

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

*Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 21 July 2008*



# Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2007-2008

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

*Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 21 July 2008*

**© Crown Copyright 2008**

The text in this document (excluding the Royal Arms and other departmental or agency logos) may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context.

The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document specified.

Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

For any other use of this material please write to Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU or e-mail: [licensing@opsi.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@opsi.gov.uk)

ISBN: 978 0 10 295735 8

# **Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland Report for the Year 2007–2008**

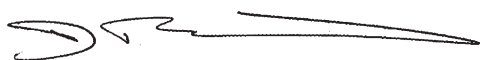
The Rt Hon Shaun Woodward MP  
Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
Northern Ireland Office  
11 Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4QE

20 June 2008

*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 Annual Report on how I have discharged my functions for the year ending 31 March 2008.*

*Yours sincerely*



*Douglas Bain CBE TD Advocate  
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland*

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



## FOREWORD

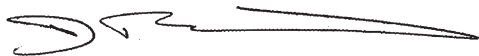
This is my second Annual Report since my appointment as Chief Electoral Officer in June 2006.

Overall 2007/08 was a successful year in which all but two of the twenty four relevant targets and development objectives were achieved. The one target that was not met (by 1 December 2007 to increase the comprehensiveness of the electoral registers by 5% compared with 1 December 2006) would almost certainly have been achieved but for a delay in the coming into force of legislation to support the new continuous registration process. Despite that delay the electorate was increased by 4.73%. The development objective that was not achieved (to obtain Charter Mark status by 31 March) was missed only by a few days with notification of the award being received in early April.

The continuous registration process, which replaced the annual canvass, was developed during the year through the introduction of new initiatives some of which are described in this Report. It is encouraging that towards the end of the reporting year there was an increase of more than 300% in the number of registration applications received compared with the same period in the previous year.

Continuous registration has resulted in increased work for my permanent staff: much of the work previously undertaken by casual staff at the time of the annual canvass now falls to them. I am most grateful to every one of them for the positive manner in which they have embraced the radical changes that have necessarily been made to their working practices.

Against that background, it is profoundly disappointing and disturbing that no effective action has been taken to resolve the issue, noted in my first Report, concerning the unsatisfactory employment status of my staff which is noted in section 5 of the Report. Those with an interest in maintaining the high standards of electoral administration that have been enjoyed in Northern Ireland should be in no doubt that until this issue is resolved in a satisfactory manner my ability to achieve my statutory registration objectives and to continue to deliver free and fair elections will be jeopardised.



Douglas Bain CBE TD Advocate  
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland





# CONTENTS

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
	<b>Foreword</b>	iv
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	1
	Electoral Administration in Northern Ireland	1
	Role of the Chief Electoral Officer	1
	Role of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland	1
	Role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	2
	Role of the Electoral Commission	2
	Funding Arrangements	3
<b>2</b>	<b>Performance against targets</b>	4
<b>3</b>	<b>Registration</b>	5
	Statistics	5
	Continuous Registration	5
	Provision of information by public authorities	5
	Registration Form	7
	EU Elections	7
	Electoral Registration Week	7
	Home Movers Initiative	8
	Free Prize Draw	8
	New British Citizens	8
	Evidence Requirements	9
	Electoral Identity Card	9
	Meeting the Registration Objectives	9
	First registration objective	10
	Second registration objective	10
	Third registration objective	10
	Assessment	11
	Recommendation about a Canvass	11
<b>4</b>	<b>Elections</b>	12
	Northern Ireland wide elections	12
	By-elections	12
	Overnight counting at Parliamentary elections	12
	Election preparation	12

	Electronic Counting	13
	Alleged electoral offences	13
<b>5</b>	<b>Central Services</b>	14
	Premises	14
	Staff	14
	Staff resignations	14
	Status of Electoral Office Staff	14
	Training	15
	Re-structuring and re-grading	15
	Funding	16
	Stakeholder and media relations	17
	Media	17
	Political Parties	17
	Electoral Commission	17
	Disability Groups	18
	Northern Ireland Office	18
	Presentations	18
	Helpline	19
	Website	19
	Records Management	20
	IT Systems	20
<b>6</b>	<b>Corporate Governance</b>	21
	Management Board	21
	Charter Mark	21
	Equality	21
	Internal Audit	22
	Boundaries	22
<b>7</b>	<b>The Area Offices</b>	23
	Introduction	23
	Newtownards Area Electoral Office	23
	Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office	24
	Omagh Area Electoral Office	24
	Belfast Area Electoral Office	25
	Ballymena Area Electoral Office	25
	Banbridge A Area Electoral Office	26
	Banbridge B Area Electoral Office	26
	Londonderry Area Electoral Office	27
<b>Annexes</b>		
<b>A</b>	<b>Performance Against Targets and development objectives</b>	28
<b>B</b>	<b>Structure as at 1 April 2007</b>	31
<b>C</b>	<b>Structure as at 31 March 2008</b>	32
<b>D</b>	<b>Operating Costs</b>	33

# 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 ('the CEO') who is a statutory officeholder independent of Government. He is assisted by the staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland ('EONI'), the administrative structure created to support him in the discharge of his duties. The CEO 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 CEO.

## **Role of the Chief Electoral Officer**

- 1.2** The main duties of the CEO 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 EONI.
- 1.3** The CEO 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 2006 Act further requires him to include in his Annual 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** EONI is the name given to the group of permanent and casual staff who support the CEO in the performance of his duties. It has no separate statutory existence or responsibilities. 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 CEO;
  - providing staffing and other resources necessary to maintain the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland; and
  - consulting as necessary with the CEO and the Electoral Commission on legislation and policy proposals.
- 1.6** The Secretary of State is supported in this role by the Political Development Minister and officials from the Rights, Elections and Legacy Division (formerly the Rights and International Relations Division) of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

## **Role of the Electoral Commission**

- 1.7** The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the United Kingdom 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 2008, 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 2008-9 to 2012-13 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;
  - public understanding of the way our democracy works; and
  - fair boundary arrangements for elections.

**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 certain types of elections and in June 2007 published its report on the March 2007 Northern Ireland Assembly elections. The Commission also undertakes public awareness activities in connection with electoral registration and elections. It has no executive functions in relation to the registration of electors or the conduct of elections. These are the sole responsibility of the CEO.

#### **Funding Arrangements**

**1.10** The salary costs of the CEO, 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 apart from costs incurred by EONI which are treated as EONI Operating Costs (see Annex D).

## **2. PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS**

- 2.1** This section summarises the performance achieved against the 6 key targets and 18 development objectives set out in the Business Plan 2007/08 which can be viewed at [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk).
- 2.2** Of the 6 key targets, 5 were achieved in full. The remaining target, an increase of 5% in the comprehensiveness of the register published in December 2007 was missed. The later than expected availability of the new statutory powers enacted to support the continuous registration process almost certainly accounted for this failure.
- 2.3** Of the 18 development objectives 16 were achieved in full. Work on one, relating to implementation of changes to electoral law and practice, was suspended when the Northern Ireland Office postponed the introduction of the relevant legislation. The eighteenth, obtaining the Charter Mark by 31 March 2007 was missed by only a few days. Whilst the assessment on which the award of the Charter Mark was based was completed by 31 March, unfortunately administrative processes within the Charter Mark awarding body meant that intimation of the award was not received until early April.
- 2.4** Further details of performance against key targets and development objectives are at Annex A.

### **3. REGISTRATION**

#### **Statistics**

- 3.1 The new register published on 3 December 2007 showed a net increase of 50,863 in the electorate compared with the register published on 1 December 2006. By 31 March 2008 there had been a further net increase of 1,623 individuals bringing the total electorate to 1,127,602.
- 3.2 These net increase figures do not reflect the true volume of work undertaken to maintain the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the register. During the year a total of 105,596 changes were made to the register.

#### **Continuous Registration**

- 3.3 In the absence of any Northern Ireland wide election the focus of work during the year was the registration of electors by means of the continuous registration process commenced in January 2007 following the abolition of the annual canvass.

#### *Provision of Information by Public Authorities*

- 3.4 The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 amended the Representation of the People Act 1983 by conferring on the Secretary of State a power to make regulations for the provision of information to the CEO by specified public authorities. Provision of this information was considered necessary if the CEO was to be able to maintain an accurate and comprehensive electoral register. It is unfortunate that the necessary regulations were not in operation until June 2007 with the result that the CEO was unable formally to request information before that date. This delay was the major reason for the failure to meet the target of a 5% increase in the comprehensiveness of the electoral register. Had the regulations been made in accordance with the original timetable it is very likely that the target would have been exceeded.
- 3.5 The first formal requests for information were directed to all 26 district councils. Each council was requested to provide details of all new residential properties in their area along with certain other information on properties in their areas that were required to keep the Electoral Office property database up to date. In this way all properties at which no person is registered, commonly referred to as “void properties”, can be identified and letters reminding of the need to register as an elector can be sent to the occupier.
- 3.6 Initially a number of district councils either failed to comply at all with this legal requirement to provide information or failed to provide it in the specified manner or by the specified time. Their unfortunate failure to carry out their statutory duties inhibited the CEO’s ability to contact the occupiers of new residential properties and to encourage them to register. However, by the year end all councils appeared to be at least trying to provide the required information. Compliance by district councils

with their statutory duties with regard to the provision of information for registration purposes will be kept under close review in 2008/09.

- 3.7** The new regulations also provided for the provision of information by the Department of Work and Pensions and the Northern Ireland Central Services Agency. Both of these organisations had to modify their software to facilitate the provision of relevant information to the CEO. Due to other higher priorities work the Department of Work and Pensions had not completed this work by the year end. Following the necessary software changes the Northern Ireland Central Services Agency provided information on some 60,000 individuals who, according to their records, had changed their name and/or address. To spread the expected increased workload for the Area Offices it was decided to post letters to these individuals, at the rate of 12,000 per week, inviting them to submit an electoral registration form. The first batch was posted just before the end of the reporting year.
- 3.8** The Registrar General of Births and Deaths in Northern Ireland continued to provide regular details of all deaths registered in Northern Ireland. This information was checked to identify those deaths that related to registered electors. These individuals were removed from the electoral register.
- 3.9** Where a death is to be the subject of an inquest it is not registered until the inquest has taken place. During the year a new procedure was put in place to remove the risk of these dead individuals remaining on the register and potentially voting by post or proxy. The Senior Coroner for Northern Ireland kindly agreed to provide the CEO, on a regular basis, with a list of all deaths awaiting inquest. Deaths notified in this manner will be processed in the same way as deaths notified by the Registrar General.
- 3.10** A small number of deaths are notified by a relative of the deceased before notification has been received from either of the official sources. Where a death of a person on the electoral register is notified in this way the entry is removed at the next opportunity.
- 3.11** Although the Department of Work and Pensions was unable to provide information under the new statutory provision, it continued to provide an invaluable service in checking the accuracy of national insurance numbers provided by applicants during the registration process. During the year over 3,000 mis-matches were identified as a result of these checks. All these individuals were contacted and asked to resubmit their national insurance number. Some 600 of that number responded and provided their correct number. The remainder failed to respond and were removed from the electoral register as they had failed to meet the statutory registration requirements to provide their correct national insurance number. Statistics are not available on how many of these individuals subsequently submitted a fresh registration application with the correct national insurance number and were again registered.



### *Registration Form*

- 3.12** In recognition of the increasing number of individuals eligible to register in Northern Ireland who do not have English as their first language, the simplified version of the registration form introduced last year was made available in 13 other languages including Irish and Ulster Scots. It is available on request in a number of other formats.
- 3.14** The new registration form was made available to estate agents, credit unions, offices of the Registrar General where marriages are registered and to solicitors with a request that they draw the attention of their customers to the need to advise EONI of any change of name or address by completing a registration form. Although these organisations willingly agreed to do this the level of forms received from in this way has so far been disappointingly small.

### *EU Elections*

- 3.15** EONI staff were present at the polling station in Belfast for the Polish elections and in Ballymena for the Romanian elections. Electoral registration forms and a letter explaining the benefits of registration, in English and the other language, were handed to all those who came to vote. The CEO had discussions with the Honorary Lithuanian Consul about providing a similar service at the Lithuanian elections scheduled for October 2008.

### *Electoral Registration Week*

- 3.16** Prior to its abolition the yearly canvass provided a focus on registration activities. To replace this it was decided that there should be an annual Electoral Registration Week with a theme each year of promoting registration by a particular section of the community.
- 3.17** By kind permission of the Assembly Speaker Electoral Registration Week 2007 was launched in the Long Gallery at Stormont on 1 October in the presence of the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and Etta Campbell the then recently appointed Electoral Commissioner with special responsibility for Northern Ireland.
- 3.18** The theme for 2007 was encouraging registration amongst people with disabilities. This theme was selected in part because the Northern Ireland Office had indicated that the Electoral Administration Act provision abolishing the unsatisfactory common law on mental capacity to vote was likely to be brought into operation by 1 October. Unfortunately that timescale was not achieved and it now appears likely that the provision will not be in force until July 2008.
- 3.19** The launch was attended by invited guests from a wide range of disability groups from across Northern Ireland. The EONI staff present were assisted in their work of hosting the guests by pupils from Longstone School, Dundonald who attended by kind permission of the principal, Mr Trevor Howard. The launch received widespread coverage on television, radio and in the newspapers. During the week Area Electoral

Officers ran or participated in more than 40 separate events across Northern Ireland aimed at encouraging registration by those with disabilities or more generally. These also achieved good media coverage.

- 3.20** Planning for the week started in early summer 2007 and was undertaken by a group made up of the CEO, the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Registration), staff from the Northern Ireland Information Service and representatives of Disability Action, RNIB, RNID, MENCAP and the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. Thanks are due to all of those concerned for the significant time and effort they so willingly gave to make this first Electoral Registration Week successful.

#### *Home Movers Initiative*

- 3.21** The registration figures also benefited from the Home Movers initiative which was run by the Electoral Commission from 1 October 2007 until the end of the reporting year. People whom it was believed had recently changed their address received a letter from the Commission advising them of the need to update their address details with EONI. Although a small number of electors contacted both EONI and the Commission to advise that they had mistakenly received home mover letters, over 7,300 electors updated their details as a result of this initiative.

#### *Free Prize Draw*

- 3.22** Following approval by HM Treasury the Electoral Office Free Prize Draw was launched on 7 March 2008. The draw is open to all those whose application to register for the first time or to change the particulars of an existing registration is approved. Draws will take place every 3 months with prizes of £500, £300 and two of £100 on each occasion.
- 3.23** A leaflet giving details of the draw is now included with all relevant EONI correspondence.
- 3.24** The draw attracted considerable media interest and it is intended to obtain further coverage for each draw as a means of promoting the benefits of electoral registration.
- 3.25** Although it is far too early to assess the impact of the draw on registration levels, anecdotal evidence indicates that it is likely to prove particularly effective amongst young people.

#### *New British Citizens*

- 3.26** All persons resident in Northern Ireland whose application to become British citizens are successful attend a ceremony at Hillsborough Castle organised by the NIO at which citizenship is conferred by a Lord Lieutenant. Ceremonies are held approximately every four weeks. During the reporting year 493 individuals aged 17 years or over attended such a ceremony.

**3.27** The practice, commenced in 2006/07, of having an EONI presence at all such ceremonies, was continued until August. Because of the limited resources available to the CEO, it was then decided that instead of a presence at each ceremony the CEO would simply write to all those upon whom citizenship had been conferred explaining the need to register. By 1 June 2008 88% of those who attended ceremonies during the reporting year had completed the registration process. Follow-up action is being taken in all outstanding cases.

### **Evidence Requirements**

**3.28** Because of the need to meet the statutory registration objective of ensuring that only those entitled to register are registered, proportionate evidence requirements were introduced on 1 February 2008. These set out, for the first time, the type of evidence required by the CEO in respect of each of the statutory registration criteria to satisfy him that the applicant is entitled to be registered. The requirements will be refined in the light of experience. There can be no doubt that, as a result of the introduction of this counter-fraud measure, the risk of individuals who were not entitled to be registered being registered and of identity theft by means of registration in a false name or at a false address were significantly reduced. The evidence requirements have, however, resulted in a considerable increase in the workload of EONI staff. Ways of addressing this were under consideration at the year end.

### **Electoral Identity Card**

**3.29** During the year 4528 new cards were issued compared with 6902 in the previous year. The decrease was due largely to a combination of two factors. In 2006/07 a substantial number of cards were issued as a result of the more than 40 mobile sites deployed ahead of the Assembly elections. Further, it was decided during the year to increase the security measures taken when an application for a card was made by post.

**3.30** The discussions with the Federation of Retail Licence Trades Northern Ireland referred to in last year's Report was brought to a successful conclusion when they launched their campaign against under age drinking during October 2007. The electoral identity card is one of only three documents now recognised by their members as sufficient proof of age.

**3.31** The total costs in connection with electoral identity cards was £72.5k. The Business Plan 2008/09 contains a development objective of reviewing the current arrangements for the provision of identity cards.

### **Meeting the Registration Objectives**

**3.32** Under section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 the CEO is required to include in his Annual Report an assessment of the extent to which the relevant registration objectives have been met.

**3.33** These objectives are set out in Section 10ZB of that Act 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*

**3.34** On the basis of an estimate of the eligible population provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, the revised electoral register published on 3 December 2007 was 83.5% comprehensive. This represented an increase of 2.6% on the comprehensiveness of the 2006 register which was compiled following the last annual canvass.

**3.35** Although at the year end there were still approximately 200,000 eligible individuals who were not registered, areas of work set out in the Business Plan 2008/09 should result in a further reduction in that number. The Business Plan can be viewed at [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk).

*Second Registration Objective*

**3.36** The evidence requirements described at paragraph 3.28 above were introduced primarily because of this registration objective. The view was taken that it was simply not acceptable to take on trust the information set out on registration application forms. Rather proportionate checks were required so that the registration officer could be satisfied that the information was correct and that the applicant was entitled to be registered.

**3.37** Whilst no guarantee can be given that a small number of individuals who were not entitled to be registered remained on the register, it is beyond doubt that the opportunities for abuse were reduced considerably as a result of action taken during the year.

*Third Registration Objective*

**3.38** The evidence requirements themselves provided a check on the accuracy of the information held. Further checks were built into the continuous registration process. An independent survey to assess the accuracy of the electoral register published on 3 December 2007 was commissioned by the Electoral Commission but had not been published at the year end. It is expected to confirm a high degree of accuracy of the Northern Ireland register.

### *Assessment*

- 3.39** Whilst there is no room for complacency, it is assessed that the work undertaken during the period of this Report resulted in a register that was 2.6% more comprehensive than the one published following the last annual canvass in 2006 and which was more accurate than any other electoral register in these islands. The statutory registration objectives have, to a large extent, been met.

#### **Recommendation about a canvass**

- 3.40** Following the abolition of the annual canvass, section 10ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983 provides that a full canvass shall take place in 2010 and at 10 yearly intervals thereafter unless the Secretary of State, following a recommendation from the CEO, orders that the scheduled canvass should be brought forward or postponed. The CEO must make any such recommendation no later than 15 April.
- 3.41** Given that the comprehensiveness of the register published in December 2007 showed an increase of 2.6% compared with the register published following the 2006 canvass and that it was at least as accurate as the 2006 register, no recommendation for a canvass in 2008/09 was made to the Secretary of State.

## **4. ELECTIONS**

### **Northern Ireland wide elections**

- 4.1 There were no Northern Ireland wide elections during the period of this Report.

### **By-elections**

- 4.2 By-elections were held in the The Glens DEA of Moyle district council on 13 December 2007 and the Dromore DEA of Banbridge district council on 13 February 2008. The chief executive of the relevant district council acted as the deputy returning officer whilst the staff of the appropriate Area Electoral Office dealt with the increased volume of applications to register received once it was known that an election was to take place, the processing of absent vote applications and the identification and staffing of polling stations. The Area Electoral Officer provided advice to the deputy returning officer on a wide range of matters connected with the election. Both by-elections passed off smoothly, at least from an administrative point of view.

### **Overnight Counting of Parliamentary Elections**

- 4.3 For many years there has been concern that in Northern Ireland the counting of votes at a Westminster General Election did not start until the day following the poll in stark contrast to Great Britain where, in all but a very few constituencies, the count started as soon as possible after the close of poll with the result being announced, in most cases, in the early hours of the following morning.
- 4.4 Whilst this divergence of practice may have been justified in the past on grounds of security it was announced on 20 April 2007 that in future the counts of all Northern Ireland constituencies at such elections would take place overnight. This decision was taken following a limited consultation exercise the results of which were overwhelmingly in favour of overnight counting.
- 4.5 Counts for district council and Northern Ireland Assembly elections, both of which operate on the much lengthier STV system, will continue to be counted on the day after the poll. Counts for the European Parliamentary elections, which cannot commence until all the polls throughout Europe have closed, will continue to commence on the Monday following polling day.

### **Election Preparation**

- 4.6 In view of the widespread speculation that there was to be a Westminster General Election in autumn 2007 preparations, including new arrangements for selecting staff for count centres by means of a test of their accuracy and speed of counting, were commenced. Staff also coped with the increased level of registration forms received as a consequence of the speculation. Although no election was in fact called, little of the time spent preparing was entirely wasted.

## **Electronic Counting**

- 4.7** Following the Assembly elections in March 2007 the CEO announced his intention to press for the early introduction of electronic counting of votes at STV elections in Northern Ireland provided counting in that way worked well at the Scottish elections that May.
- 4.8** The CEO and a number of his senior colleagues were present at a number of count centres throughout Scotland to observe the counting of votes for the Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. The counts did not go well. It was reported in media circulating in Northern Ireland that the problems at the counts was due in a large measure to difficulties with the electronic counting process. In view of that adverse publicity the CEO took the view that the Northern Ireland public would not have confidence in electronic counting in that jurisdiction until it had been shown to work in a satisfactory manner at a minimum of one major United Kingdom election. Accordingly he announced that he would be making no recommendation for the introduction of electronic counting of votes in Northern Ireland until, at earliest, after the London Mayoral and London Assembly elections in May 2008.
- 4.9** Prior to the year end arrangements were made to allow the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections) to undertake the project manager role for the electronic counting of votes at the London elections in May 2008 and for a number of senior Electoral Office staff to attend the counts as observers. Their reports will inform any decision on the introduction of electronic counting in Northern Ireland.

## **Alleged Electoral Offences**

- 4.10** Following the Assembly elections in March 2007 three cases of suspected postal voting fraud were referred to the police for investigation. In each case it was suspected, following comparison of the signature on the postal vote application with the signature held in the Electoral Office records, that the application had been signed by a member of the applicant's family. In all three cases the PSNI investigation disclosed a prima facie case of postal voting fraud. In two of the cases the individuals admitted the offence and were given a formal caution. In the remaining case the Public Prosecution Service decided that no proceedings should be taken.
- 4.11** In addition to these postal voting cases, a case of alleged false statements in nomination papers at the Assembly elections has been referred to the police for investigation. Following the submission of a file to the Public Prosecution Service, the candidate and the election agent concerned have been charged and will appear in court at a later date.
- 4.12** A case of failure to provide information to the electoral registration officer was reported to the police and criminal proceedings were instituted following submission of a file to the Public Prosecution Service. At the year end a date for the individual's first appearance in court was awaited.

## 5. CENTRAL SERVICES

### Premises

- 5.1 Minor works were undertaken at a number of the premises to make them more suitable both for customers and staff.
- 5.2 From analysis of comments received from customers it became apparent that some were experiencing difficulty finding our offices. To address this, a map showing the location of each office was added to the website and new signage was erected at all offices except Omagh and Banbridge where it will be put in place as soon as planning permission is granted.

### Staff

#### *Staff Resignations*

- 5.3 During the year 9 of the 40 permanent members of staff resigned their posts. In the majority of cases the lack of career opportunities was either the main reason or a contributory factor in their decision. Although there was no difficulty filling those vacancies that remained after the restructuring process (see paragraphs 5.9 – 5.15 below) there was an undoubted loss of experience and a reduction, in the short term, of EONI's ability to maintain its customary high standards. In addition, the recruitment process imposes an unwelcome burden on an organisation as small as EONI. This unacceptable level of staff turn-over had been predicted by the CEO and made clear to both the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the NIO during his discussions with them in 2006/07 about the need to urgently address the issue of the status of EONI staff.

#### *Status of Electoral Office Staff*

- 5.4 Although the staff of EONI enjoy terms and conditions of service which are almost identical to those of the Northern Ireland Civil Service they do not enjoy civil service status. They are employees of the CEO. As such they have no entitlement to apply for vacancies in the Northern Ireland Civil Service except where these are open to the general public. Because of the small size of EONI opportunities for promotion and career development are limited and it is apparent that this lack of opportunity has been a factor in a number of the resignations in recent years, including almost all of the more than 20% of staff who resigned their posts during the period of this Report. Those members of EONI staff who decide to make a career in electoral administration do not have the opportunities for promotion and personal development available to those engaged in similar work in Great Britain.
- 5.5 Another consequence of the present status of the staff is that those who do remain in EONI are unlikely to have the breadth of experience that would be gained by working outside that relatively narrow although complex field. Whilst that may have been acceptable at a time when little in electoral law or practice changed from one year to the next, it is very far from acceptable in the current environment in which Northern



Ireland is rightly recognised as a front runner of good and modern provision of electoral services and in which an innovative approach is required.

- 5.6** It is most disappointing that, despite bringing these concerns to the attention of both NIO and Northern Ireland Civil Service, no effective action has been taken to address them. Those with an interest in maintaining the high standard of electoral administration in Northern Ireland should be in no doubt that until the issue of the status of EONI staff is addressed in a satisfactory manner it is likely that able staff will continue to leave EONI and that as a consequence, the ability of the CEO to continue to deliver to the public a high quality service, both in relation to registration and the conduct of elections, will be jeopardised.

#### *Training*

- 5.7** As part of the drive to improve continuously the service provided to customers, all EONI staff were trained in customer care and disability awareness. Formal guidance on dealing with unacceptable customer behaviour was agreed and issued.
- 5.8** The benefits of the learning and development policy agreed in early 2007 were apparent throughout the year. Training and development needs were more accurately assessed and the target of delivering the agreed training plan was met.

#### *Restructuring and Re-grading*

- 5.9** The resignation of the Head of Area Office Services and of one of the two Belfast Area Electoral Officers in July 2007 provided an opportunity to streamline the management structure and to undertake a long overdue grading review of the remaining posts.
- 5.10** Following consultation with the political parties and other key stakeholders, it was decided to close one of the two Area Electoral Offices that were co-located in Belfast adjacent to EONI Headquarters. The remaining Belfast Area Office assumed responsibility for the Belfast West and Belfast South constituencies. The Belfast East constituency became the responsibility of the Newtownards Area Electoral Office whilst the Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office took responsibility for the Belfast North constituency in which, following the adoption of the revised Parliamentary boundaries, it will be located. To ensure no detriment to members of the public living in Belfast, it was made clear that the remaining Belfast Office would, like all the other seven Electoral Offices, continue to provide a full range of services to any customer calling there irrespective of the constituency in which they resided. The offices in Newtownards and Newtownabbey, both of which following the reorganisation had responsibility for three constituencies, were provided with an additional member of staff to secure that despite the increased volume of work they would be able to maintain their high standard of customer service.
- 5.11** Towards the end of the year the remaining Belfast Area Electoral Office was relocated to under-utilised accommodation within the adjacent Headquarters building. Negotiation of a sub-lease of the vacated premises to the Police Ombudsman for

Northern Ireland was well advanced at the year end. Although there was some initial additional expenditure it is anticipated that in a full year this relocation will release at least £60,000 for use on frontline services. The move was in line with the Electoral Office Estate Review published last year and available on [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk).

- 5.12** Following the resignation of the Head of Area Office Services it was decided, after consultation with the staff and NIPSA, that the post should be suppressed and that the duties should be reallocated amongst the remaining members of the Headquarters management team. Responsibility for oversight of the eight remaining Area Electoral Offices was split equally between the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer and the Project Officer. At the same time the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer relinquished responsibility for oversight of Information Services but assumed an oversight role in relation to Corporate Services as well as assuming overall responsibility for all matters relating to the preparation for and conduct of elections. The post was re-titled Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections).
- 5.13** The Project Officer post was created originally in connection with the change from an annual canvass to continuous registration. At the end of the project phase of that major change was apparent that it would be necessary to have a single senior officer with responsibility for all aspects of the various new initiatives that were planned. That manager would also be responsible for oversight of the Information Services function at Headquarters as well as for four Area Electoral Offices. To reflect the breadth and responsibility of the post the title was changed from Project Officer to Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Registration).
- 5.14** The structure at 1 April 2007 is at Annex B whilst the new structure in place on 31 March 2008 is at Annex C.
- 5.15** For some years there had been concern that the grading of a number of posts within EONI did not adequately reflect the responsibilities undertaken. With the full agreement of staff and NIPSA it was decided to undertake a grading review. The work was undertaken by independent consultants from the Department of Finance and Personnel using the rigorous Cabinet Office approved Job Evaluation and Grading Support (JEGS) process. The review of all the posts had not been completed at the year end but it had already identified that the greater number of posts evaluated were indeed undergraded. In all cases the findings of the review have been accepted and implemented. The increased cost has been found from within existing resources largely from the savings made from the suppression of the Head of Area Office Services and the Area Electoral Officer Belfast posts.

## **Funding**

- 5.16** Total Electoral Office funding, other than on elections, for 2007/08 was £2.421m which represented a reduction of nearly £900k from the previous year. This reduction was possible in the main as a result of the replacement of the annual canvass by the system of continuous registration although other efficiency measures made a

contribution. Details of the expenditure are at Annex D. The budget was underspent by only £13.2k which represents just over 0.5% of the budget.

**5.17** The final figure for expenditure on the 2007 Assembly elections was £2.8m.

**5.18** During the year processes were put in place to ensure that in future all election accounts will be closed within 12 months of the relevant election. The accounts for the European Parliamentary elections 2004 and the combined Westminster Parliamentary general and district council elections in 2005 were both closed. The account for the 2007 Assembly election will be closed as soon as one disputed matter is resolved.

## **Stakeholder and Media Relations**

### *Media*

**5.19** Throughout the year the CEO and Area Electoral Officers made extensive use of the media to inform the public of developments in electoral law and practice. The CEO has given numerous interviews to both broadcast and written media. This would not have been possible without the excellent support provided by the staff of the Northern Ireland Information Service.

### *Political Parties*

**5.20** The CEO and his staff at all levels had regular contact with the political parties and assisted them in their efforts to encourage electoral registration.

**5.21** The CEO attended all meetings of the Assembly Parties Panel convened by the Electoral Commission and briefed its members on developments and initiatives being undertaken by his colleagues in EONI. The Northern Ireland political parties were included in all consultation exercises carried out by EONI.

**5.22** The CEO met separately with a number of Northern Ireland MPs and MLAs to discuss issues raised by them. He also met with the Shadow Justice Secretary and the Shadow Solicitor General to brief them.

### *Electoral Commission*

**5.23** The CEO continued to enjoy a good and mutually beneficial relationship with the staff of the Commission's Belfast office with whom he had contact several times each week.

**5.24** In the course of the year a bi-monthly meeting was established to co-ordinate public awareness activity of the need to register. These meetings were attended by the CEO and his media advisor and staff from the Commission including the Head of the Northern Ireland office and the Head of Campaigns. The meetings had already proved their worth by the year end and will be of particular benefit in the run up to the European Parliamentary Elections in June 2009.

- 5.25** The Chief Electoral Officer is a member of the Electoral Leadership Forum, the group established by the Commission at which senior electoral administrators from across the UK have an opportunity to discuss issues with each other, the Commission and representatives of the Ministry of Justice.
- 5.26** The CEO spoke at both the seminar organised by the Commission following the Assembly elections and at the launch of the Commission's statutory report on these elections. At both events he outlined a number of largely technical amendments to the law that he would be recommending to the NIO. If implemented these would simplify the administration of Assembly elections. Detailed proposals for amendments were submitted to the NIO during the summer of 2007.

#### *Disability Groups*

- 5.27** Regular meetings took place with Disability Action, RNIB and RNID to discuss a range of issues impacting on people with disabilities. These organisations, together with MENCAP and the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, were represented on the steering group that oversaw Electoral Registration Week 2007 which focused on encouraging registration and participation by those with disabilities.
- 5.28** As a result of these useful contacts a number of development objectives intended to make it easier for those with a disability to play their full part in the democratic process were included in the 2008/09 Business Plan which was published just before the end of the reporting year.

#### *Northern Ireland Office*

- 5.29** The CEO has continued to enjoy an excellent working relationship with the Rights and International Relations Division (now the Rights, Elections and Legacy Division) of the NIO. In addition to the routine work in relation to funding issues there has been a very close fruitful contact on the proposed legislative changes which were published in the form of draft legislation shortly after the year end.

#### *Presentations*

- 5.30** On 8 October 2007 the CEO delivered a speech to the HS Chapman Society on the Northern Ireland Experience of individual registration. He also took part in a number of seminars organised by that Society intended to inform the ongoing debate on the introduction of individual registration in Great Britain.
- 5.31** In September he delivered an address on the same subject to the Association of Electoral Administrators at their annual seminar in Coventry.
- 5.32** Assisted by his two Assistant Chief Electoral Officers the CEO gave evidence to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in the course of their enquiry into electoral registration. In their report 'The Future of the Electoral Register in Ireland and Related Matters' published in April 2008 the Joint Committee recommended the adoption of many features found in Northern Ireland

including individual registration, the provision of information by specified public authorities and the creation of a post similar to that of CEO.

- 5.33** In February 2008 the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections) addressed the Association of Electoral Administrators at their conference in Brighton on the conduct of the 2007 Assembly elections.
- 5.34** Area Electoral Offices and their staff made presentations to promote the benefits of registration to a wide range of organisations. Further details can be found in Section 7 of this Report.

### **Helpline**

- 5.35** The Helpline, previously known as the Advice Line, was put on a more professional and effective footing during the year. The staff, who in the main had been casual employees, accepted offers of permanent employment. A new call centre reporting system was introduced in October 2007 allowing, for the first time, for the production of meaningful statistics on the nature of calls and callers. These were considered by the Management Board at its monthly meetings.
- 5.36** During the year the Helpline took more than 20,000 calls. A marked increase in the level of calls was identified towards the end of the year as a result of the various registration initiatives being undertaken.
- 5.37** Following discussions with the Electoral Commission it was agreed that EONI would operate a joint helpline in advance of future elections and registration campaigns taking calls previously handled by separate facilities run by EONI and the Commission. This was done to provide a more effective service which would better serve the needs of the electorate. This joined up approach worked well at the Assembly elections and helped eliminate public confusion that had, on occasions, resulted from the previous approach. The Commission agreed to meet the cost of any additional staff required by EONI as a result of assuming this responsibility. This was done by way of a service level agreement whereby EONI agreed to meet certain quality standards including call response times. EONI also provided the Commission with a weekly report on the number of calls handled and the outcomes achieved.

### **The Website**

- 5.38** The EONI website received nearly 80,000 visits during the year. Comparative figures for 2006/07 are not available as during that year the less meaningful measure of “hits” was used. The most popular document to be downloaded was the electoral registration form of which 15,976 were downloaded during the year. To facilitate access to the information on the site by those with a visual disability, the Browsealoud facility was made available. Browsealoud will read the website to the user highlighting words as they are read out.

## **Records Management**

- 5.39** Management of its records presents a particular challenge to any organisation as small as EONI that operates on a number of different sites. It is always difficult to say with certainty what records may exist in relation to any particular issue. To address this issue the TRIM Electronic Document Record Management System which had been procured previously, was implemented on 1 June 2007.
- 5.40** After some initial minor difficulties the system worked in a satisfactory manner and made easier the task of identifying documents required as a result of Freedom of Information Act requests and other enquiries. A review of the system will be completed during the summer of 2008 and any appropriate adjustments will be implemented as soon as practicable thereafter.

## **IT Systems**

- 5.41** All Electoral Office IT systems were reviewed by external security experts and the Security Accreditation was renewed in October 2007.
- 5.42** The network infrastructure, put in place in 2001, was unable to cope adequately with the increased usage as a result of the introduction of TRIM and a greater volume of registration and other business. Following an options appraisal, a way forward was selected and the network upgrade should be completed in early summer 2008.

## **6. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

### **Management Board**

- 6.1** The Management Board continued to meet monthly or more often as required. It was comprised of the CEO, both Assistant Chief Electoral Officers and the Heads of both Corporate Services and Information Services. Two members of staff, who are NIPSA representatives, receive copies of all Board papers and are invited to all the meetings.
- 6.2** In addition to taking all strategic business decisions the Board takes as standing items the review of performance against targets and development objectives, finance, staffing issues and risk management. Equality and human rights have been “mainstreamed” and these aspects of any matter considered by the Board are treated as part of the normal decision making process.

### **Charter Mark**

- 6.3** Although over the years independent reports had generally been positive about the standard of customer care provided by the Electoral Office, it was considered appropriate to include in the 2007/08 Business Plan a development objective of obtaining Charter Mark accreditation as a means of checking that the service provided was in fact up to the high standard required by the awarding body.
- 6.4** Charter Mark is the Government’s national standard for excellence in customer service and is open to all public sector organisations and others providing a service to the public. It assesses the organisation against 6 criteria comprised of 43 individual elements by way of an assessment of documentary evidence and a rigorous on site inspection during which staff, customers, partner organisations, management and other stakeholders are interviewed.
- 6.5** To prepare for the assessment a team, comprised of representatives from Headquarters and Area Offices, was established under the leadership of the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections). Although it had been believed that the Electoral Office provided a good level of customer service the team quickly established a number of areas in which improvement was required to reach the Charter Mark standard. These included the availability of information on customer care standards and the various services provided by the Electoral Office as well as improvements to the complaints process and the knowledge of staff on handling difficult customers. All these issues were addressed and following a completion of the two phase assessment process in March intimation of the award of the Charter Mark was received in early April 2008. Plans have already been drawn up to build upon this success by further improving the standard of service provided to the public.

### **Equality**

- 6.6** As noted above equality issues have been “mainstreamed” within EONI and are considered as part of the normal policy and decision making process.

- 6.7 In addition to the submission to the Equality Commission of the normal Annual Report a five year review of the operation of the Electoral Office's Equality Scheme was undertaken and submitted. A Disability Action Plan was prepared and, after a consultation exercise, forwarded to the Equality Commission.
- 6.8 An individual who had been offered employment at a polling station at the Assembly elections in 2007 made a complaint that she had been discriminated against on the grounds of her religion and/or political beliefs in that she had been offered employment only at unsuitable locations. Her complaint was investigated personally by the CEO who found it to be without merit. She took her complaint to an industrial tribunal but withdrew it just a few days before the hearing.

### **Internal Audit**

- 6.9 The CEO and the Management Board continued to benefit from the constructive reports produced by ASM Horwath, our internal auditors.
- 6.10 During the year they continued with planned audits of six areas agreed by the Board as suitable for detailed examination. In all but one of these a satisfactory assurance rating was given. In the sixth case, control of fixed assets, a number of inadequacies were identified resulting in a limited assurance rating. Prompt action was taken to deal with these deficiencies. No public property was lost as a consequence of the inadequacies identified.
- 6.11 All recommendations made by the auditors were considered by the Management Board who because of the small size of the EONI continued the tasks of a normal audit committee. All those recommendations considered appropriate were, where possible, implemented almost immediately. Where a recommendation related to a future event, such as the conduct of a full canvass, plans were made to implement it at the earliest opportunity.

### **Boundaries**

- 6.12 The CEO is an assessor to the Boundaries Commission for Northern Ireland and the Local Government Boundary Commissioner for Northern Ireland. During the year he attended a number of meetings with both the Commission and the Commissioners and provided them with information to assist them in the discharge of their duties.



## **7. THE AREA OFFICES**

### **Introduction**

- 7.1** Other than calls to the Helpline the only contact that most members of the public have with EONI is through the Area Electoral Offices. At the year end there were eight such offices located in Belfast (within the Headquarters building), Newtownards, Newtownabbey, Ballymena, Londonderry, Omagh and Banbridge where two offices were co-located.
- 7.2** This section outlines the constituencies for which each office was responsible, gives examples of some of the more unusual work undertaken and makes mention of other changes at each of them.
- 7.3** Each office is managed by an Area Electoral Officer who is both the deputy electoral registration officer and the deputy returning officer for the relevant constituencies. Supported by the staff, the manager has responsibility, under the supervision of the CEO, for all matters relating to the registration of electors and the free and fair conduct of elections.

### **Newtownards Area Electoral Office**

- 7.4** The Newtownards office at 2(B) Regent Street, Newtownards has since September 2007 been responsible for the North Down, Strangford and Belfast East constituencies. Prior to that date Belfast East was the responsibility of the second Belfast Area Electoral Office which has since been closed. Although concerns were expressed by some politicians representing the Belfast East constituency that the transfer of responsibility to the Newtownards office would have an adverse impact on their constituents, no evidence of this has emerged in the intervening six months.
- 7.5** The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent members of staff with further casual staff being used at times of peak activity.
- 7.6** During the year presentations on the benefits of electoral registration were given to a wide range of different groups including the members of three district councils. Strong links were established with the Conflict Transformation Initiative group working in Belfast East and through this a registration event was held in Tullycarnet. Amongst the other registration events undertaken were visits to North Down Training Organisation, Edgumbe Training and Resource Centre and Bloomfield Collegiate School.
- 7.7** Following concerns about the suitability of Newtownards Leisure Centre as a count centre, which were exacerbated by the fact that three rather than two constituencies would in future be counted together, work was undertaken to identify alternative premises for the possible General Election in autumn 2007. That work was suspended when it became clear that no election would be called. The matter will be considered further before the next election at which votes will be counted locally. This is unlikely to be before 2010.

- 7.8 Minor building works were carried out during the year including the erection of new signage, improvements to the CCTV system and alterations to the reception area.

#### **Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office**

- 7.9 The Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office is in fact located at 1-3 Portland Avenue, Glengormley. Since September 2007 it has been responsible for the East Antrim, South Antrim and Belfast North constituencies. Responsibility for the latter was transferred from the now defunct second Area Electoral Office in Belfast. There is no evidence to suggest that the transfer of responsibility has had any adverse impact on those living in the Belfast North constituency. It is noted that when the new Parliamentary constituency boundaries are implemented at the time of the next General Election the Newtownabbey Office will in fact be within the Belfast North constituency.
- 7.10 In addition to the Area Electoral Officer there were three full time posts with additional casual staff being employed as required.
- 7.11 During the year registration forms were supplied to a range of bodies who deal with the public including solicitors, estate agents, credit unions, letting agencies and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. A visit was made to a manufacturer who employs a large number of people with a disability during which everyone working there was given the opportunity to complete an application form and to have their photograph taken for an electoral identity card. Presentations on the benefits of electoral registration were given to a number of youth groups in both Antrim constituencies.
- 7.12 New signage was erected to make it easier for the public to find the office.

#### **Omagh Area Electoral Office**

- 7.13 The Omagh Area Electoral Office is located at 21 Kevlin Avenue, Omagh. It serves the West Tyrone and Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituencies.
- 7.14 It was staffed by an Area Electoral Officer and 2 permanent members of staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.
- 7.15 During the year visits to promote the benefits of electoral registration were made to a large number of organisations throughout the two geographically widespread constituencies, with particular emphasis being given to the registration of young people, those with disabilities and ethnic minority groups. One such event took place in connection with the “Flight of the Earls Festival” organised by Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council. Close contacts were established with interest groups representing migrant workers and those with special needs, and also with the South West College which has three campuses within the office’s area of responsibility. At the year end a number of events facilitated by these contacts were being planned.

7.16 Attempts to erect signage to enable the public to find the office more easily have so far been thwarted by the planners. These attempts will continue until a satisfactory outcome is secured.

#### **Belfast Area Electoral Office**

7.17 The Belfast Area Electoral Office, formerly located at 6-10 William Street, Belfast is now housed on the first floor of the Headquarters building at 15 Church Street, Belfast.

7.18 In addition to the Area Electoral Officer there were two full time members of staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.

7.19 As a result of the decision to close one of the two Belfast Area Electoral Offices the remaining office had responsibility for the Belfast South and Belfast West constituencies. It continued to receive a significant number of visits from electors resident in other constituencies including Belfast North and Belfast East. All such callers were dealt with irrespective of the constituency in which they lived.

7.20 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two permanent staff members with casual staff being employed when necessary.

7.21 During the year close relations were established with An Munia Tober, the group representing Irish travellers, and with groups representing the Polish and Afro communities in Belfast.

7.22 It is a tribute to the staff of the Belfast Office that the relocation of their office took place in March 2008 without any disruption of the service provided to the public.

#### **Ballymena Area Electoral Office**

7.23 The Ballymena Area Electoral office is located at 122 Broughshane Street, Ballymena, the premises occupied since the move from Ballymoney in June 2006. It has responsibility for the North Antrim and Mid Ulster constituencies.

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

7.25 The staff promoted electoral registration in a variety of ways including information mornings in Ballymena, Ballymoney and Magherafelt, advertisements in church bulletins and the provision of information leaflets and registration forms to community groups, post offices, the political parties and groups representing ethnic minority and disability groups. In November 2007 they were present at the polling station in Ballymena for the Romanian elections and encouraged those attending to register as electors here.

**7.26** The Area Electoral Officer and her staff supported the Chief Executive of Moyle District Council in his role as the deputy returning officer for the by-election for The Glens district electoral area which took place on 12 December 2007. Mobile electoral identity card units were deployed in Cushendall and Ballycastle to facilitate registration and card applications ahead of the by-election.

**7.27** New signage was erected at the office.

#### **Banbridge A Area Electoral Office**

**7.28** 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.

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

**7.30** Initiatives to promote registration undertaken during the year included the supply of registration forms to all solicitors and estate agents within the constituencies and a visit to the Millview Resource Centre, Bessbrook where those present, many of whom had a disability, were assisted to complete registration forms and electoral identity card applications.

**7.31** Minor repairs and other works were carried out to the office premises. An application to erect modern signage has, to date, been unsuccessful.

#### **Banbridge B Area Electoral Office**

**7.32** The Banbridge B Area Electoral Office is co-located with the other Banbridge office at 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge. It has responsibility for the Lagan Valley and South Down constituencies.

**7.33** The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two permanent members of staff with additional causal staff being employed when necessary.

**7.34** During the year church groups, youth groups and special schools throughout the constituencies were contacted and provided with materials to assist their members in registering as electors. Visits were made to a number of day centres, resource centres and other premises to encourage registration. In selecting organisations to be visited priority was given to those in areas of low electoral registration.

**7.35** The staff assisted the Chief Executive of Banbridge District Council in his role as deputy returning officer for the by-election in the Dromore District Electoral Area held on 13 February. Prior to that, mobile electoral identity card units were deployed in Dromore and Finnis to take applications to register and for electoral identity cards.

**7.36** Minor repairs and other works were carried out to the office premises. An application to erect modern signage has, to date, been unsuccessful.

### **Londonderry Area Electoral Office**

**7.37** The Londonderry Area Electoral Office is located at 20 Queen Street, Londonderry and has responsibility for the Foyle and East Londonderry constituencies.

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

**7.39** During the year a wide range of activities were undertaken to promote electoral registration in the two constituencies. Presentations were made to the councils in Derry, Limavady and Coleraine, to the “Getting to know the Assembly” event aimed at local community groups in Derry and to pupils at St. Bridgets College in the City. Registration and electoral identity card application units were deployed in Derry, Greysteel, Coleraine and Dungiven for use by the general public and at events in Derry targeted at the ethnic minority and in Coleraine at those with disabilities. A unit was also deployed at Fresher’s Day for the North West Technical College.

**7.40** Following a break-in to the office in September 2007 a number of measures to improve the security of the premises were taken. Whilst a number of pieces of electronic equipment were stolen, no records or personal data was taken. The signage at the office has also been improved.

**PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS AND DEVELOPMENT  
OBJECTIVES 2007/08**

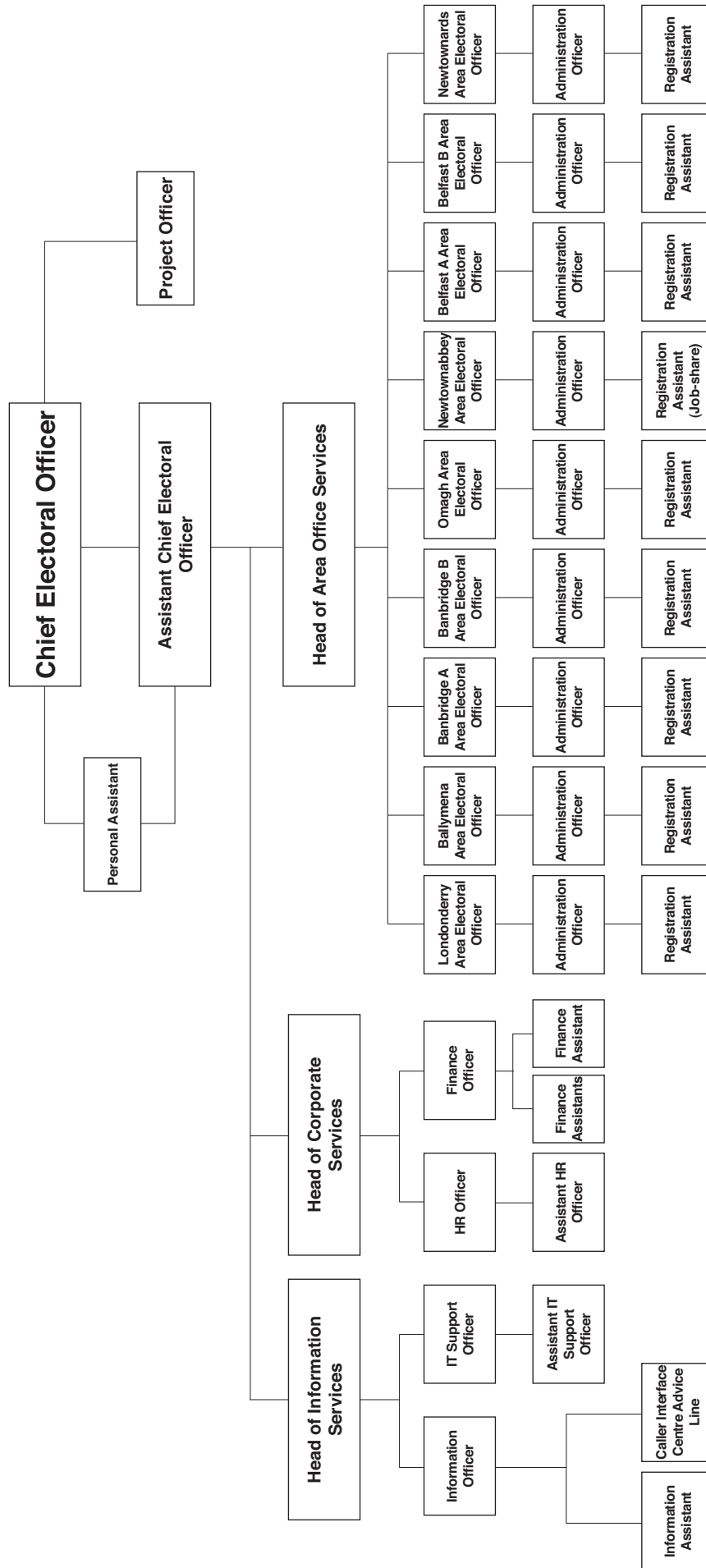
<i>Key Target</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1. By 1 December 2007 to increase the comprehensiveness of the electoral registers by 5% compared with 1 December 2006.	Not Achieved	Although the registered electorate was increased by 4.73%, the comprehensiveness of the register was, because of a rise in the population, increased by 2.6%.
2. To ensure that the registers published on 1 December 2007 are at least as accurate as the ones published on 1 December 2006.	Achieved	
3. To implement the changes to practice and procedure required as a result of the commencement of provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 in accordance with the agreed plan.	Not Applicable	The Northern Ireland Office advised that the changes would not be brought into operation until July 2008. As a result work on this development objective was postponed until 2008/09.
4. To deliver the Electoral Office work programme within the budget available.	Achieved	The budget was underspent by just over 0.5%.
5. By 16 April 2007 to recommend to the Secretary of State whether or not a full canvass should take place in autumn 2007.	Achieved	The CEO's recommendation against a canvass was accepted by the Secretary of State.
6. By 1 June 2007 to submit the Annual Report for 2006/07 to the Secretary of State.	Achieved	Report submitted 31 May 2007.

<i>Development Objective</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1. To progress the implementation of continuous registration in accordance with the agreed plan.	Achieved	
2. To develop comprehensive desk instructions on continuous registration by 31 March 2008.	Achieved	
3. Throughout the year to have in place an outline plan for the conduct of any Northern Ireland wide election.	Achieved	The plan was revised in light of experience gained at the Assembly elections.
4. To progress work on electronic counting to enable a decision to be taken by the Secretary of State no later than 1 October 2007.	Achieved	Following the Scottish elections the CEO advised the Secretary of State against early introduction of electronic counting. This advice was accepted.
5. To develop comprehensive desk instructions for staff on the preparation for and conduct of elections by 31 March 2008.	Achieved	
6. To obtain Charter Mark status by 31 March 2008.	Not Achieved	Assessment completed by 31 March but due to internal processes of awarding body achievement of the award not notified until early April.
7. To establish by 31 March 2008 a pool of individuals suitable to fill posts in connection with any election occurring before 31 March 2009.	Achieved	
8. To take forward with the Association of Electoral Administrators arrangements for professional qualifications for staff.	Achieved	By special arrangement 5 staff members will undertake a Foundation Course exam in July 2008. More than 20 other staff will commence the Foundation Course during 2008/09.
9. To progress the Electoral Office Estate Review in accordance with the agreed plan.	Achieved	The number of Electoral Office premises was reduced by one with a saving of more than £60k pa.

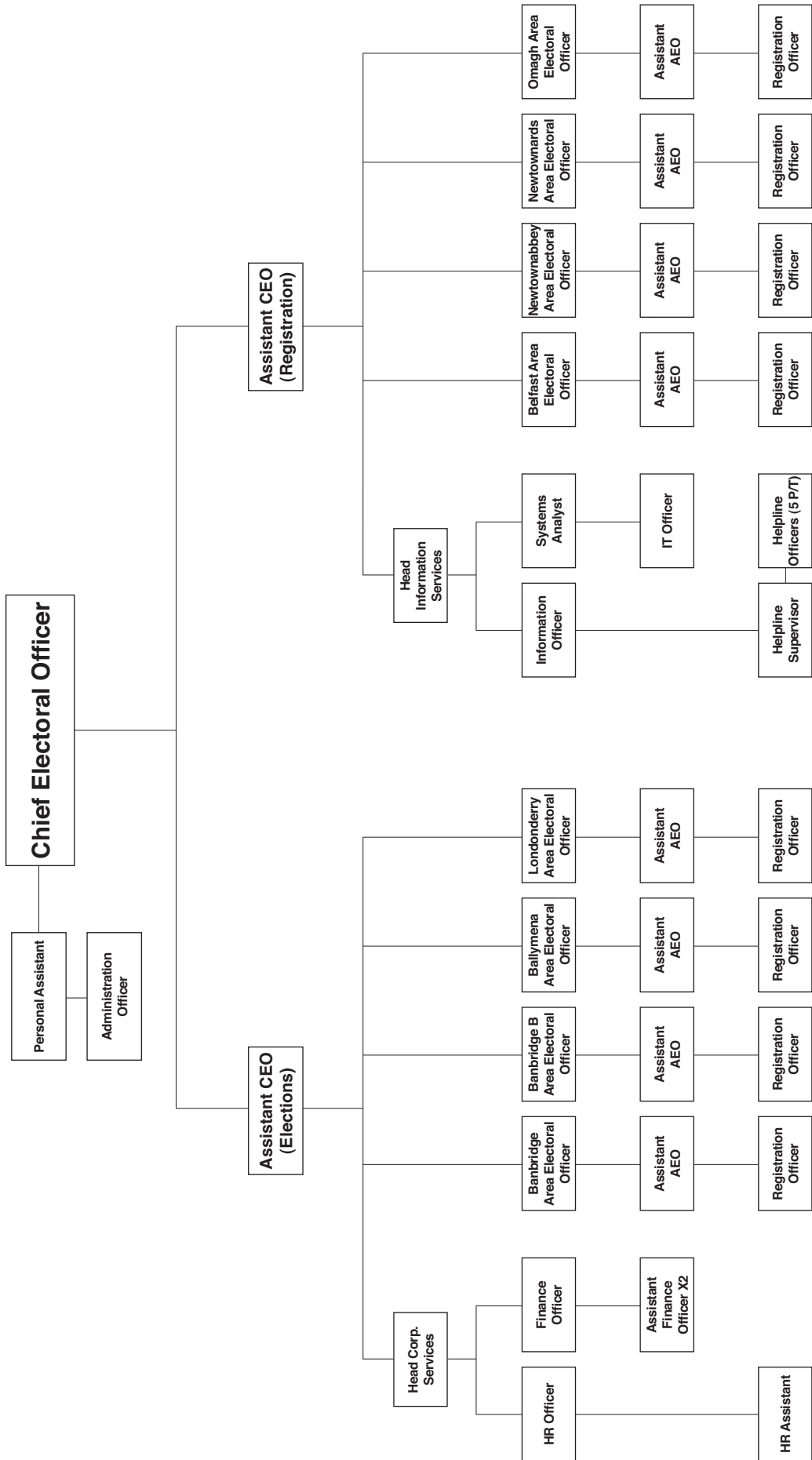
<i>Development Objective</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Comment</i>
10. To review, in liaison with the Electoral Commission, the arrangements for handling telephone enquiries particularly at elections and other peak periods.	Achieved	Following the success at the March 2007 elections it has been agreed that the Electoral Office will run a joint Helpline for all elections and other events.
11. To deliver a minimum of 95% of the agreed Training Plan.	Achieved	
12. To continue to have an annual sick absence level not exceeding 4% (9 days per staff member).	Achieved	The level was 1.9%
13. To implement the action plan for the 2006/07 Staff Survey and to conduct a further survey by March 2008.	Achieved	All agreed actions from the 2006/09 were implemented. A further survey was completed in January 2008.
14. To implement all agreed audit recommendations within the agreed timescales.	Achieved	
15. To issue Part 1 of the Finance Manual by 31 May 2007 and progress work on further parts in accordance with the agreed plan.	Achieved	
16. To introduce EDRMS throughout the organisation by 1 July 2007.	Achieved	
17. To have in place by 1 August a Business Continuity Plan, including an IT Disaster Recovery Plan, and to test it by 1 December 2007.	Achieved	
18. To develop a Disability Action Plan by 30 June 2007 and to commence its implementation.	Achieved	



ELECTORAL OFFICE STRUCTURE AS AT 1 APRIL 2007



ELECTORAL OFFICE STRUCTURE AS AT 31 MARCH 2008



## ANNEX D

## OPERATING COSTS

	£k
<hr/>	
<u>Basic Pay</u>	
Permanent Staff	796.4
Temporary Staff	36.6
Canvassers	0
<hr/>	
Basic Pay Total	833.0
<hr/>	
<u>Overtime</u>	
Permanent Staff	12.6
Temporary Staff	0
<hr/>	
Overtime Total	12.6
<hr/>	
<u>Employers National Insurance</u>	
Permanent Staff	55.2
Temporary Staff	1.3
Canvassers	0
<hr/>	
Employers National Insurance Total	56.5
<hr/>	
Accrued Superannuation Liability Charge	128.7
<hr/>	
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>1,030.8</b>
<hr/>	
Power	36.9
Premises ( Keyholding )	2.0
Maintenance & Minor Works	69.8
Professional Staff Costs	0
Training	31.9
Travel	23.7
Subsistence	2.5
Personnel Costs	40.1
Other Employee Costs	2.8
Hospitality	0.6
Office Services ( Printing, Equipment, Hire, Window Cleaning )	39.9
Computers ( Software, Hardware, Maintenance, Line Rental etc )	281.1
Professional Services	23.8
Materials ( Mainly Stationery Orders )	25.5
Property charges	126.1
Postage	43.9

Telecommunications	19.4
Furniture & Fittings	0
Office Equipment	4.3
Central & Common Services ( Cleaning Offices )	16.9
Estate Management	19.9
Insurance ( Premises )	5.9
Advertising	7.4
Fees	2.3
Transport Costs	4.3
Advisory Services	14.3
Operating Leases ( Rent of Offices & Photocopiers )	253.3
<b>Total Goods &amp; Services</b>	<b>1,098.6</b>
Belfast Area Office Relocation	50.4
Electoral Identity Card	72.5
Non Cash Costs – Depreciation	226.9
Receipts	(185.5)
<b>TOTAL PROGRAMME</b>	<b>2,293.7</b>
Capital	114.1
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>2,407.8</b>









information & publishing solutions

Published by TSO (The Stationery Office) and available from:

**Online**

**[www.tsoshop.co.uk](http://www.tsoshop.co.uk)**

**Mail, Telephone, Fax & E-mail**

TSO

PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN

General enquiries: 0870 600 5522

Order through the Parliamentary Hotline *Lo-call* 0845 7 023474

Fax orders: 0870 600 5533

Email: [customer.services@tso.co.uk](mailto:customer.services@tso.co.uk)

Textphone: 0870 240 3701

**TSO Shops**

16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD

028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401

71 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9AZ

0870 606 5566 Fax 0870 606 5588

**The Parliamentary Bookshop**

12 Bridge Street, Parliament Square

London SW1A 2JX

**TSO@Blackwell and other Accredited Agents**

ISBN 978-0-10-295735-8



9 780102 957358