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**Returning Officers' Expenses, Northern  
Ireland**

**Statement of Accounts 2013-14**

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Presented to the House of Commons pursuant to  
Section 7 of the Government Resources and Accounts  
Act 2000

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 22 July 2014



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Print ISBN 9781474109710

Web ISBN 9781474109727

Printed in the UK by the Williams Lea Group on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office

ID 14071402 07/14 42269 19585

Printed on paper containing 75% recycled fibre content minimum

## RETURNING OFFICER'S EXPENSES, NORTHERN IRELAND

### FOREWORD

#### Background Information

1. These Accounts cover the year 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 and have been prepared in a form directed by HM Treasury.
2. UK Parliamentary Elections are financed from the Consolidated Fund. The account includes payments for printing of election stationery, postage, hire of premises and transportation. Funding for elections is held in separate bank accounts from the departmental commercial bank accounts.
3. The Secretary of State, with the consent of two of the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, specifies in an Order the overall maximum recoverable amount that the Returning Officer in Northern Ireland may recover in respect of services rendered or expenses incurred for or in connection with a Parliamentary Election.
4. Under section 29(3) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by section 68 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006, a Returning Officer is entitled to recover his charges in respect of services properly rendered, or expenses properly incurred, for or in connection with a Parliamentary Election. The Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officer's Charges) (Northern Ireland) Order 2010 (S.I. 2010 No. 869) which came into force on 16 March 2010 set the overall maximum recoverable amount that the Returning Officer may recover in respect of each of the eighteen Parliamentary Constituencies in Northern Ireland. Under the Returning Officer's Accounts (Parliamentary Elections) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 1991 the Returning Officer must submit his account to the Northern Ireland Office within the period of twelve months commencing with the day of the declaration of result of the election to which the charges in the account relate.

#### Review of Activities

5. During the period final payments were made for the Parliamentary By-Election for the Constituency of Mid Ulster held on 7 March 2013. Combined elections to the European Parliament and Local Councils were scheduled for 22 May 2014. Election Accounts for both were opened on 20 December 2013. There were no transactions in either account in the period of this report.
6. £12,000 was received from the consolidated fund during 2013-14 to fund final payments from the Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013 Account. Surplus advances of £722 were surrendered from this account to the consolidated fund during the period and the account was closed on 11 February 2014.
7. The cost of candidates mailing expenses are funded separately from Returning Officer's Charges for all elections. These amounted to £15,832 during 2013-14.

**Statement of  
Accounting  
Officer's  
Responsibilities**

8. The Northern Ireland Office is required to prepare a statement of accounts for each financial year in respect of Returning Officer's Expenses in the form and on the basis directed by HM Treasury. The accounts are prepared on a cash basis and must properly present the receipts and payments for the financial year and the balances held at year end.
9. HM Treasury has appointed the Northern Ireland Office's Accounting Officer as the Accounting Officer for Returning Officer's Expenses (Northern Ireland). The relevant responsibilities as Accounting Officer, including the responsibility for propriety and regularity of the public finances for which the post holder is answerable and for the keeping of proper records, are set out in HM Treasury's *Managing Public Money* guidance.
10. I was appointed Accounting Officer for the Northern Ireland Office on 9 June 2014.

**Sir Jonathan Stephens KCB  
Accounting Officer**

**11 July 2014**

## GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2013-14

### 1. Scope of Responsibility

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is a Statutory Office Holder and is funded by the Northern Ireland Office (the "Department"). He is assisted by the staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (the "EONI"), the administrative structure created to support him in the discharge of his duties. The funding covers the expenses incurred in performance of his statutory duties and the cost of the staff employed in the EONI. The cost of running UK Parliamentary elections is funded by HM Treasury. Funding for all elections is held in separate bank accounts from the Department's commercial bank accounts. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is accountable to Parliament for all expenditure by the Chief Electoral Officer.

As Accounting Officer, I have personal responsibility for the robustness of the control and governance arrangements operated by the Chief Electoral Officer. The Governance Statement outlines how I have discharged my responsibility to manage and control the resources made available to the Chief Electoral Officer during the course of the year. This sound governance system, as outlined in this Statement, supports the achievement of the Chief Electoral Officer's and the wider Department's policies, aims and objectives, whilst safeguarding public funds and Departmental assets in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to me in *Managing Public Money*.

I also have responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control operated by the Chief Electoral Officer. My assessment of the effectiveness of the governance arrangements is informed by: the work of the internal auditors; the Chief Electoral Officer who has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework; managers within the Department who have sponsorship responsibility for the Chief Electoral Officer; and comments made by the external auditors in their management letter and other reports. I am also advised on the Chief Electoral Officer's system of internal control by the Northern Ireland Office's Audit and Risk Committee.

### 2. Purpose of Governance Framework

The Chief Electoral Officer has agreed a Framework Document with the Department which outlines the roles and responsibilities of each party, including the governance arrangements established in relation to the administrative and financial support provided by the Department to the Chief Electoral Officer. This framework was agreed in 2011 and will be reviewed again not later than November 2014, but may be reviewed before then if necessary.

In addition, the Chief Electoral Officer has internal governance policies and procedures designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives; the Chief Electoral Officer can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The Chief Electoral Officer operates an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of his aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The Framework Document continued to be supported within the EONI by policies and guidance that draw on best practice and Departmental guidance on matters such as: Anti Fraud and Whistleblowing; Gifts and Hospitality; Financial Management; Procurement; Risk Management and Information Assurance.

### **3. Management Board**

The Departmental Management Board has a corporate responsibility for setting objectives, agreeing priorities and implementing ministerial policy, including ensuring that the Chief Electoral Officer discharges his statutory duties and complies with his governance responsibilities. The Management Board also has responsibility for monitoring the Chief Electoral Officer's financial performance and ensuring that he complies with key policies, such as those relating to risk management, information assurance and workforce planning. Further details of the Management Board's governance arrangements can be found in the Northern Ireland Office's Annual Report and Accounts at:

[www.gov.uk/nio](http://www.gov.uk/nio).

The sponsor deputy Director is the key link with the Chief Electoral Officer and the Management Board. The sponsor deputy Director provides a relationship management role and supports the Accounting Officer.

Below the Departmental Management Board the Chief Electoral Officer is supported by his own Board comprising the senior EONI staff. Two trade union representatives are also invited to attend all meetings; the minutes of which are made available to all staff and on the EONI website. The EONI Board, which meets monthly or more often as required, has corporate responsibility for the EONI Strategic Risk Register which is reviewed on a monthly basis and more frequently when appropriate.

The EONI Board members play an important role in managing corporate governance and audit arrangements in accordance with the framework in place for promoting accountability and assurance. They are responsible for ensuring that adequate processes are in place within their business area to identify potential risks that should be considered for inclusion in the Risk Register.

In addition to taking all strategic business decisions, the EONI Board take as standing agenda items the review of performance against targets and development objectives, finance, contracts and procurement, staffing issues, risk management and complaints. The equality and human rights aspects of any matter are considered by the EONI Board as part of the normal decision making process.

### **4. EONI Board Assessment of Effectiveness**

There were no significant changes to the composition or practices of the EONI Board during 2013-14. The Board has continued to take a robust approach to its meetings, including having a tightly focused and strategic agenda. The introduction of any new or revised policies and procedures are presented to the Board for approval and endorsement. During the reporting period, the Board demonstrated its effectiveness in monitoring performance against targets and objectives by the achievement of six of the seven targets. Work on the seventh target, relating to the retention of a Customer Service Excellence award, was not pursued due to budgetary restrictions. The Board also achieved twelve of the thirteen development objectives set for the financial year. The thirteenth objective related to the evaluation and implementation of registration performance standards; however work in this area was temporarily suspended during the year at the request of the Electoral Commission.

Towards the end of the reporting year, the Board completed a self-assessment of its effectiveness. The assessment identified areas for improvement whilst providing reassurance of the overall efficiency. The Board will consider how to take forward improvements in the next reporting period.



## **5. Audit and Risk Committee**

The EONI is not a public body, and because of its size it would not be appropriate for the Chief Electoral Officer to be supported by an independent Audit and Risk Committee; however, the Northern Ireland Office Audit and Risk Committee provided this advisory function to the Accounting Officer during 2013-14.

The role of the Audit and Risk Committee is to support the Accounting Officer in monitoring the corporate governance and control systems (including financial reporting) operating in the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies. The Audit and Risk Committee met five times throughout 2013-14 and received regular updates on the management of the governance arrangements of the Chief Electoral Officer, including details of internal audits completed and progress on the implementation of recommendations.

The Chief Electoral Officer is due to attend the Audit and Risk Committee in the next reporting period so that the Committee can test and challenge the governance arrangements operated by the Chief Electoral Officer.

On the basis of the issues discussed and evidence presented at its meetings, the Audit and Risk Committee concluded that the assurances it received throughout the year were satisfactory, and it was not aware of any significant internal control issues for inclusion in the Returning Officer's Expenses 2013-14.

## **6. Internal Audit**

During 2013-14, internal audit services were provided by Ministry of Justice. The Head of Internal Audit for the EONI is required to submit regular reports to the Chief Electoral Officer and report any significant internal control problems to the Audit and Risk Committee.

In year, the internal audit services undertook planned audits of five areas agreed by the Chief Electoral Officer and the Department as suitable for detailed examination. All audits received a satisfactory rating. The auditors made a total of fourteen recommendations which were accepted by the Board. Six of the recommendations were implemented by 31 March 2014; the other eight will be implemented by 31 August 2014.

The internal audit opinion for 2013-14 reports a reasonable<sup>1</sup> level of assurance that EONI's overall risk control and governance framework is adequate to enable the achievement of its objectives in 2013-14 and that the EONI's key risks are being effectively measured. The opinion is based on the agreed programme of work which has covered a range of areas, identified good levels of control and found only a small number of significant control issues. The opinion is based primarily on the work conducted during the year but also takes into account internal audit's confidence in the extent to which agreed actions to remedy weaknesses are implemented by due dates.

## **7. Information Assurance**

I am responsible for ensuring that information risks are assessed and mitigated to an acceptable level. Information is a key business asset for the Chief Electoral Officer and he continues to make Information Assurance a priority.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of reasonable: Our work identified moderate/significant rated findings that are isolated to specific systems and processes and when taken in aggregate we believe they are not pervasive to the system of internal control as a whole. Consequently we can give reasonable assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of governance, risk management and internal control.

In his role as Information Asset Owner, the Chief Electoral Officer manages information assurance and risk across his organisation. Additionally, he or his representative attends the Security Managers' Forum, comprising of representatives from each of the Department's business areas and other sponsored bodies which meet annually. The purpose of this Forum is to improve and implement approved policies and guidance in relation to security and information assurance and to provide a mechanism for promoting and sharing best practice across the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies.

During 2013-14, all of the Chief Electoral Officer's employees were required to complete the annual mandatory Data Handling e-learning package, "Responsible for Information", provided by Civil Service Learning. No information assurance incidents occurred.

I am satisfied that the Chief Electoral Officer has implemented the necessary internal controls and measures, policies and training to ensure that his employees continued to comply with Government standards.

## **8. Stewardship Statements**

Each deputy Director in the core Department and senior official in each sponsored body signs a stewardship statement bi-annually, providing assurance on governance, risk management and the operation of internal controls within their business areas. These stewardship statements clearly set out the controls in place and the steps taken to monitor the effectiveness of the controls.

During 2013-14, the Chief Electoral Officer reported that he had operated effective internal controls and that no significant weaknesses had been identified. In addition to relying on the assurances provided by the Chief Electoral Officer, governance meetings were held with the sponsor deputy Director to monitor the internal controls and discuss the management of risk. The sponsor deputy Director in turn reported to the Accounting Officer on their assessment of the effectiveness of the internal controls operated by the Chief Electoral Officer.

I am satisfied that the statements presented by the sponsor deputy Director and the Chief Electoral Officer provide me with an appropriate level of assurance.

## **9. Risk Management**

As Accounting Officer, I acknowledge my overall responsibility for the effective management of risk within the Northern Ireland Office and its sponsored bodies. In meeting this responsibility, I am supported by the Management Board, which I chair, and the Audit and Risk Committee. The Management Board owns and maintains the Departmental risk register, which sets out the key strategic risks facing the wider Department and the controls in place to manage these risks, and reviews this document on a quarterly basis. The register is also provided to the Audit and Risk Committee for periodic review who also receives regular updates on the Department's sponsored bodies.

Registers that identify, assess, and set out mitigating actions to significant risks, are in place across the Department and its sponsored bodies, including the EONI. The senior risk owner within the EONI is the Chief Electoral Officer who delegates accountability for risk management to his senior managers who in turn are responsible for personally managing the risks in their respective business area.

Risk management is a standing agenda item at the EONI Board, with the Board viewing the register as a living document, to be monitored and discussed on a monthly basis. The EONI Board members play a crucial role in ensuring that risk-related issues are properly addressed

when plans and policies are being prepared or revised in their business area. The EONI Strategic Risk Register is regularly submitted to the Department's sponsor team who report any significant risks to the Audit and Risk Committee. The effectiveness of the risk management system in place has been demonstrated through the manner in which the Chief Electoral Officer has continued to deliver his targets and objectives despite the challenges of a full canvass, combined elections and tight financial constraints.

During the financial year, I received assurance first hand through discussions with the sponsoring deputy Director. I also received assurance through written stewardship statements provided by the sponsoring deputy Director and the Chief Electoral Officer.

## **10. Review of effectiveness**

As Accounting Officer, I have responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control within the Department and its sponsored bodies. The Chief Electoral Officer's system of internal control is based on a framework of regular management information, financial regulations, administrative procedures including segregation of duties, and a system of delegation and accountability.

During 2013-14, the Corporate Governance Team, together with the sponsor deputy Director and other support areas, continued to work closely with the Chief Electoral Officer and his employees to strengthen governance arrangements. Regular meetings between the sponsor team and the Chief Electoral Officer were held and the sponsor team continued to keep under review the Framework Document that set out the Chief Electoral Officer's relationship with the Department to ensure robust governance arrangements were in place.

I sought assurance that the Chief Electoral Officer operated sound governance arrangements from the sponsoring deputy Director who was required to provide me with written assurance that they had reviewed the extent to which these governance requirements were met both mid-year and at the end of the financial year.

For the period 2013-14, I am able to report that there were no significant weaknesses in Chief Electoral Office's system of internal controls which affected the achievement of the EONI's objectives, the Chief Electoral Officer's statutory duties or the Department's key policies, aims and objectives. In addition, I am satisfied that the Chief Electoral Officer exercised control over the election expenses through detailed review of expenditure.

**Sir Jonathan Stephens KCB**  
**Accounting Officer**

**11 July 2014**

## **Returning Officer's Expenses, Northern Ireland 2013-14**

### **THE CERTIFICATE AND REPORT OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**

I certify that I have audited the financial statements of Returning Officer's Expenses, Northern Ireland for the year ended 31 March 2014 under the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. The financial statements comprise the Receipts and Payments Account and the related notes. These financial statements have been prepared under the accounting policies set out within them.

#### **Respective responsibilities of the Accounting Officer and auditor**

As explained more fully in the Statement of Accounting Officer's Responsibilities, the Accounting Officer is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements in accordance with the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 and HM Treasury directions made thereunder. My responsibility is to audit, certify and report on the financial statements in accordance with the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. I conducted my audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland). Those standards require me and my staff to comply with the Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards for Auditors.

#### **Scope of the audit of the financial statements**

An audit involves obtaining evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. This includes an assessment of: whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the circumstances of the Returning Officer's Expenses, Northern Ireland account and have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed; the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by the Accounting Officer in preparing that account; and the overall presentation of the financial statements.

In addition I read all the financial and non-financial information in the Foreword and Governance Statement to identify material inconsistencies with the audited financial statements and to identify any information that is apparently materially incorrect based on, or materially inconsistent with, the knowledge acquired by me in the course of performing the audit. If I become aware of any apparent material misstatements or inconsistencies I consider the implications for my certificate.

I am required to obtain evidence sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the receipts and payments recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

#### **Opinion on regularity**

In my opinion, in all material respects the receipts and payments recorded in the financial statements have been applied to the purposes intended by Parliament and the financial transactions recorded in the financial statements conform to the authorities which govern them.

## **Opinion on financial statements**

In my opinion:

- the financial statements properly present the receipts and payments of Returning Officer's Expenses, Northern Ireland account for the year ended 31 March 2014; and
- the financial statements have been properly prepared in accordance with the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 and HM Treasury directions issued thereunder.

## **Opinion on other matters**

In my opinion the information given in the Foreword for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

## **Matters on which I report by exception**

I have nothing to report in respect of the following matters which I report to you if, in my opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- I have not received all of the information and explanations I require for my audit; or
- the Governance Statement does not reflect compliance with HM Treasury's guidance.

## **Report**

I have no observations to make on these financial statements.

**Sir Amyas C E Morse**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**

**18 July 2014**

**National Audit Office**  
**157-197 Buckingham Palace Road**  
**Victoria**  
**London**  
**SW1W 9SP**

**RETURNING OFFICER'S EXPENSES – NORTHERN IRELAND  
RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2014**

	Note	2013-14		2012-13	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Receipts</b>	<b>2</b>				
Advances from the Consolidated Fund		12,000		145,206	
Candidates Deposits		-		2,000	
Other Receipts		124		354,545	
		<u>12,124</u>	12,124	<u>501,751</u>	501,751
<b>Payments</b>					
Constituency Claims	<b>3</b>	13,968		191,312	
Other Payments – includes					
Candidates Mailing	<b>4</b>	15,832		19,857	
	<b>5</b>		<u>29,800</u>	<u>211,169</u>	211,169
Excess of (payments over receipts)/ receipts over payments before amounts to be surrendered to the Consolidated Fund			(17,676)		290,582
Less: amounts surrendered to the Consolidated Fund in respect of:					
Forfeited Deposits	<b>6</b>	-		500	
Surplus Advances	<b>6</b>	722		397,726	
			<u>(722)</u>	<u>(398,226)</u>	
Excess of (payments over receipts)/ receipts over payments			<u>(18,398)</u>	<u>(107,644)</u>	
<b>Statement of Balances as at 31 March 2014</b>					
Balance at 1 April 2013			18,398		126,042
Less: Excess of (payments over receipts)/ receipts over payments			<u>(18,398)</u>		<u>(107,644)</u>
Balance at 31 March 2014	<b>7</b>		<u>-</u>		<u>18,398</u>

The notes on pages 11 & 12 form part of these accounts

**Sir Jonathan Stephens KCB  
Accounting Officer**

**11 July 2014**

## NOTES TO THE ACCOUNT

1 These accounts have been prepared on a receipts and payments basis in accordance with the accounts direction issued by HM Treasury dated 19 February 2007.

<b>2 Receipts</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2012-13</b>
	<b>£</b>	<b>£</b>
Advances from the Consolidated Fund (EONI)	12,000	145,206
Monies recouped from District Councils re their share of costs 2011 Combined Polls transferred to Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2011 Account	-	349,259
Recharge from District Councils 2011 Elections Account to Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2011 Account to cover expenses for Local Government Elections 2011	-	68
Deposits Income – Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013	-	2,000
Recharge from Parliamentary Election 2010 Account to Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2011 Account	-	3,963
Transfer of funds from Parliamentary Elections 2010 Account to Parliamentary By-Election Belfast West 2011 Account	-	156
Miscellaneous Receipts	124	1,099
	<u>12,124</u>	<u>501,751</u>
<b>3 Constituency Claims: Payments to the Returning Officer</b>		
Advances	-	-
Final Payments	13,968	191,312
	<u>13,968</u>	<u>191,312</u>
<b>4 Other Payments</b>		
Candidates Mailing Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013	15,832	-
Miscellaneous	-	2,878
Share of payments on behalf of 2011 Combined Polls	-	16,979
	<u>15,832</u>	<u>19,857</u>
<b>5 Expenditure Analysed by Election</b>		
Parliamentary Elections 2010	-	9,746
Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2011	-	59,919
Parliamentary By-Election Belfast West 2011	-	362
Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013 (see note 8)	29,800	124,163
Cost of Local Government 2011 Combined Polls	-	8,153
Cost of Alternative Vote referendum 2011 Combined Polls	-	8,826
	<u>29,800</u>	<u>211,169</u>
<b>6 Surrenders to Consolidated Fund</b>		
Parliamentary Elections 2010	-	1,442
Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2011	-	396,284
Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013	722	-
Forfeited Deposit - Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013	-	500
	<u>722</u>	<u>398,226</u>
<b>7 Statement of Balances</b>		
Cash at Bank - Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013 Account	-	18,398
	<u>-</u>	<u>18,398</u>

## 8 Parliamentary By-Election 2013 Expenditure

Constituency	Maximum	Cumulative	Actual 2013-14	Actual 2012-13
	£	£	£	£
Mid Ulster	148,500	135,571	13,968	121,603

This note discloses the final payments made for this By-Election during 2013-14 (see note 5) as well as the cumulative amount compared to the maximum amount that could have been paid. In addition to the amounts disclosed above, the following payments related to this By-Election have been made. Because of their nature these payments have not been categorised against the constituency.

Candidates Mailing	<u>15,832</u>
Total Parliamentary By-Election Mid Ulster 2013 Payments in 2013-14 (see note 5)	<u>29,800</u>

## 9 Related Party Transactions

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is a Statutory Office Holder appointed under section 8 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. He is supported in the performance of his duties by staff appointed under provision of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962. Employees of the Chief Electoral Officer are referred to collectively as 'The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland' (EONI).

During the year, transactions were conducted with the Consolidated Fund as described in the accounts, as provided for by the funding arrangements for election expenses.

In addition, neither the Chief Electoral Officer nor the EONI had any material transactions with other entities which, for reporting purposes, are regarded as related parties.

None of the key managerial staff or other related parties had undertaken any material transactions with the Chief Electoral Officer or the EONI during the year.









ISBN 978-1-4741-0971-0



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