

# Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2011-2012

*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 on 13  
September 2012*

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The Rt. Hon Owen Paterson MP  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland  
Northern Ireland Office  
11 Millbank  
London  
SW1P 4PN

20 June 2012

Dear Secretary of State,

I have the honour, in accordance with section 9(1) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, to present this Report on how I have discharged my functions for the year ending 31 March 2012.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Shields', written in a cursive style.

Graham Shields  
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

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

## FOREWORD

I am pleased to present my second Annual Report which outlines the work of my staff in the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland during the year ending 31 March 2012.

This has been a very busy year, during the course of which elections were held for the Northern Ireland Assembly and local government, as well as the Alternative Vote referendum.

The unprecedented challenges presented by the triple combination of polls placed huge demands on my staff and I am, as always, extremely grateful for their unstinting effort and commitment in delivering free and fair results. It is also noteworthy that the number of electors registered in Northern Ireland is currently at its highest ever and this is also in no small measure due to the hard work of my staff throughout the course of the year.

Following last year's elections, and in the wake of some criticism about the perceived slowness of the election counts, I initiated a review of election planning which will be completed in autumn of 2012. This will allow sufficient time for any changes to be put in place before the next scheduled elections in 2014.

Finally, I am pleased to report that all the Business Plan Targets and Development Objectives were achieved. This would not have been possible without the considerable assistance received from a range of stakeholders, including political parties, the Electoral Commission, the Northern Ireland Information Service and both the Constitutional and Political Group and Corporate Governance Unit at the Northern Ireland Office.



Graham Shields  
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

20 June 2012

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# **SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION**

## **Electoral Administration in Northern Ireland**

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

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

1.2 The main duties of the Chief Electoral Officer are:

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



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

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

### **Role of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland**

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

### **Role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland**

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

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

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

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

### **Role of the Electoral Commission**

1.7 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process and the regulation of party and election finance. The Electoral Commission also has sole responsibility for the running of referendums in the United Kingdom.

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

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

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

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

### **Funding Arrangements**

- 1.10 The salary costs of the Chief Electoral Officer, as an independent statutory officeholder, are met from the Consolidated Fund. The operating costs, except for the costs of running elections, are provided by the Northern Ireland Office out of monies voted by Parliament.
- 1.11 The cost of UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections are financed from the UK Consolidated Fund. Funding for the Assembly and Local Government elections in Northern Ireland are deemed to be a cost of devolution and funds for these are found from within the Northern Ireland Block. In practice, funding for Assembly elections is provided by the Northern Ireland Executive through agreed funding mechanisms and District Councils meet the cost of their own elections. From a budgeting perspective, funding for elections is treated as non voted money.
- 1.12 The Chief Electoral Officer is under a duty to account to the Principal Accounting Officer for the Northern Ireland Office for use of all allocated funds. The Northern Ireland Office's Principal Accounting Officer is the Director General. Operational expenditure by the Chief Electoral Officer is accounted for in the annual accounts for the Northern Ireland Office, which are audited by the National Audit Office. Expenditure on elections is accounted for in the annual Returning Officers' Expenses which are also audited by the National Audit Office before being presented to Parliament.
- 1.13 A revised Framework Document outlining the respective roles and responsibilities of the Chief Electoral Officer and the Northern Ireland Office was agreed in November 2011 and will be reviewed as necessary.

## **SECTION 2 - PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS**

- 2.1 This section summarises the performance achieved against the five Targets and twenty one Development Objectives set out in the Business Plan 2011/12 which can be viewed at [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk).
- 2.2 The five Targets were achieved in full.
- 2.3 The fourteen development objectives were achieved in full. Further information can be found at Annex A.

## **SECTION 3 – REGISTRATION**

### **Statistics**

- 3.1 The revised register published on 1 December 2011 contained 1,227,121 electors, a net increase of 24,921 (2.1%) in the electorate compared with the previous year. By 31 March 2012 that number had risen to 1,235,962 the highest ever figure in Northern Ireland.
- 3.2 During the period of this report 43,869 individuals were registered in Northern Ireland for the first time, 33,051 changed their qualifying address whilst 21,074 were removed from the register as a result of death or becoming ineligible. 6,836 other modifications were made to the register. The total number of changes made to the registration information held was 104,830.

### **Continuous Registration**

#### **Overview**

- 3.3 During the year there were further refinements in the practices and procedures for the system of continuous registration. These included, for example a revised system for making effective use of the information received from the Business Services Organisation as explained in paragraph 3.5.

#### **Information by Public Authorities**

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

## **Business Service Organisation**

3.5 The main source of information on changes of address of registered electors continued to be the Business Services Organisation (BSO). On a quarterly basis that organisation provides information on all those registered with any part of the Health Service who had, according to that organisation's records, changed their name or address. No medical or other sensitive information was provided. On receipt of such notification a letter was sent to all the individuals reminding them to submit an application if they were not already registered or to update the details of their name and address if they had changed since the date of their last application. During the year more than 122,000 such letters were issued. Concern over the volume of letters issued to those already registered and the increasingly poor level of response led to a change in the methodology for processing the information received from BSO. A pilot system involved checking the information against that already held by EONI, removing records of those already registered and keeping records to enable reminders to be issued. This resulted in a 20% reduction in the number of initial letters issued. The savings in terms of postage were redeployed to issuing reminder letters which resulted in an increase in response of 50%. This successful methodology will be continued in all Area offices in the next reporting year.

## **Department of Work and Pensions**

3.6 The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) supplies an annual database showing the National Insurance number, full name, date of birth and address of anyone over 16 with a Northern Ireland postcode and quarterly updates of information on those attaining 16 years. This information is invaluable to my staff in verifying information given on the registration form and is used to make early contact with those who leave school aged 16, many of whom would otherwise be missed during the Schools Initiative outlined below. Problems were encountered in obtaining this information in the reporting year which were not resolved until early 2012. This delay caused difficulties in verifying the accuracy of the register.

- 3.7 During the course of the year my staff wrote to 526 persons recorded on the DWP database with a National Insurance number the same as that of another person on the database. As a result 228 erroneous entries were removed and 76 entries were amended.

### **Registrar General**

- 3.8 The Registrar General for Northern Ireland continued to provide weekly lists of all those whose deaths had been registered in Northern Ireland, whilst the Senior Coroner provided monthly lists of those whose death was awaiting an inquest. Using this information 12,046 deceased persons were removed from the register. Information was also provided on the 6,704 marriages and civil partnerships that took place in Northern Ireland during the course of the year.

### **Post Primary Schools/ Further Education Colleges**

- 3.9 The Schools Initiative was undertaken between September 2011 and January 2012. During that period all but 2 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland with more than 10 pupils received a visit from Electoral Office staff.
- 3.10 The success of the Schools Initiative in Northern Ireland attracted interest from the Cabinet Office and Mark Harper, Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, visited Grosvenor Grammar School in east Belfast on 7 December 2011 to observe the registration initiative in operation.
- 3.11 During the course of the year Electoral Office staff attended fresher events at Further Education College campuses throughout Northern Ireland. By February 2012 11,227 attainments had been added to the electoral register, largely as a result of the Schools Initiative and the engagement with further education colleges.

### **District Councils**

- 3.12 The Electoral Office maintains a database of all residential accommodation in Northern Ireland. To assist in maintaining its accuracy all district councils

were required to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with information on new residential properties on a monthly basis. This process appears to have been working satisfactorily.

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

### **National Fraud Initiative**

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

### **Northern Ireland Office**

3.15 The NIO continued to provide information on all those in Northern Ireland who became British citizens. During the year letters were sent by the Chief Electoral Officer to 348 individuals from 65 countries who were not already registered. By 31 March 2012 83% of them had been registered.

3.16 The previous nationalities of these new electors are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Previous Nationalities of New British Electors**

	2011/12	2010/11		2011/12	2010/11
Philippines	92	172	Lebanon	3	-
China	68	53	Sudan	1	7
India	34	67	Australia	2	1
Hong Kong	5	27	Algeria	1	3
Zimbabwe	3	3	Ghana	1	2
Turkey	12	6	Chile	1	-
Bulgaria	1	2	Nepal	2	1
Ukraine	10	13	Germany	2	1
Kosovo	1	1	Vietnam	1	-
USA	7	5	Syrian Arab Republic	4	-
South Korea	3	2	Russian Federation	9	8
Belarus	2	1	Nepal	2	1
Nigeria	1	-	Bangladesh	3	6
Thailand	4	13	Malaysia	2	-



Albania	1	2	Poland	5	1
South Africa	6	11	Malawi	1	1
Brazil	2	4	Peru	2	-
Pakistan	5	17	Ireland	1	-
Morocco	1	2	New Zealand	2	1
Canada	1	2	Iran	1	1
Argentina	1	2	Republic of Serbia	2	-
Egypt	1	4	Mexico	1	-
Jamaica	1	2	Namibia	-	1
Macedonia	1	-	Sudan	7	-
Saudi Arabia	3	2	Democratic Republic of Congo	3	-
Kenya	1	1	Denmark	1	-
Iraq	3	2	Guyana	1	-
Afghanistan	2	4	Paraguay	1	-
Romania	3	2	El Salvador	1	-
Fiji	2	1	Moldova	1	-
Jordan	1	1	Iceland	3	-
Tunisia	1	2	Somalia	1	-
Albania	1	-	Venezuela	-	4
Sri Lanka	-	1	Mongolia	-	1
Guinea - Bissau	-	1	Yugoslavia	-	1
Uzbekistan	-	1	Qatar	-	1
Rwanda	-	1	Hungary	-	2
Trinidad & Tobago	-	2	Turkmenistan	-	2
Gambia	-	2	Estonia	-	1
Dominican Republic	-	1	Colombia	-	1
Mauritius	-	1			

### Other Registration Initiatives

- 3.17 Following the combined elections in May 2011 a number of pollcards were returned to EONI by Royal Mail as undeliverable. Registration review letters were issued to over 4,000 electors based on this information. 2,500 electors were subsequently removed from the register after no response was received.
- 3.18 Following the withdrawal of the free Prize draw incentive, the Chief Electoral Officer obtained permission from NIO to implement a new initiative offering iTunes vouchers to those registering in the 16-17 age range. Using information received from the quarterly DWP database, letters were sent to 11,578 persons who were not currently registered enclosing a registration form

and offering the chance to win a £25 iTunes voucher. The closing date for the receipt of forms is outside the period of this report.

### **Electoral Identity Cards**

3.19 The production of electoral identity cards in-house continued throughout the year. A total of 25,583 electoral identity cards were issued during the course of the year.

### **Meeting the Registration Objectives**

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

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

“to secure, so far as reasonably practicable –

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

### **First Registration Objective**

3.22 The total electorate on 1 December 2011 was 1,227,121. The Registrar General and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency advised that the estimated eligible population on that date was 1,397,700. The register published on 1 December 2011 was, on that basis, 87.8% comprehensive in comparison with the register published on 1

December 2010 which was 86.7% comprehensive. The increase of 1.1% reflects the success of the registration work undertaken.

3.23 The ways in which it is intended to offer those individuals who are not registered the opportunity to do so are outlined in the Electoral Office Business Plan 2012/13 which can be viewed at [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)

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

### **Second Registration Objective**

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

3.26 The Electoral Commission has arranged a further assessment of the accuracy of the register and their research will commence in May 2012. The results will be published in November 2012.

3.27 There is, however, no reason to believe that there has been any significant change in the accuracy of the register over the period of this Report. The work described above and elsewhere in the Report all tended to maintain the high level of accuracy.

### **Third Registration Objective**

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

## **Assessment**

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

## **Recommendation about a Canvass**

3.30 Having regard to the fact that the comprehensiveness of the register published in December 2011 showed an increase of 1.1% compared with the register published in December 2010, no recommendation for a canvass in the year 2012/13 was made to the Secretary of State.

## **SECTION 4 - ELECTIONS**

### **Introduction**

- 4.1 The Northern Ireland Assembly and local government elections and the Alternative Vote (AV) referendum were held on 5 May 2011. This was the first occasion on which there was a triple combination of polls in Northern Ireland and it created an unprecedented challenge for the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff.
- 4.2 The Chief Electoral Officer and his staff were subjected to criticism from sections of the media and some politicians during the NI Assembly count because of delays in the completion of the verification process and the announcement of the first stage STV results. There was also criticism about the length of time taken to complete the AV referendum count, with Northern Ireland being the last region of the United Kingdom to declare a result.
- 4.3 Much of the criticism was unfair and unreasonable and many aspects of the planning process worked extremely well; polling arrangements being a very good example. It is nevertheless clear that, with the benefit of hindsight, some things could have been done better and lessons can be learned. This is particularly relevant because of the real possibility of further combined elections in the future.
- 4.4 The key facts and figures in connection with the running of the polls were provided to the Electoral Commission and are included in its statutory report which is available on [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk). The results and other statistical information can be viewed on [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk).

### **Belfast West Parliamentary By-Election June 2011**

- 4.5 A by-election for the Belfast West parliamentary constituency was held on 9 June 2011. The count was commenced immediately after the close of polls and the result declared shortly after 1am on 10 June 2011.

## Electoral Offences

- 4.6 Throughout the year, 20 cases of alleged electoral fraud were reported to the PSNI. 23 cases of failure to submit election expenses returns and/or declarations in relation to the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections and local government elections held in May 2011 were reported to the Public Prosecution Service.
- 4.7 The nature and outcome of the electoral offences is summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2 – Nature and Outcome of Alleged Electoral Offences 2011/12**

Nature of Investigation	No. Reported	Outcome			
		Prosecution	Caution	No Further Action	On going
Registration Fraud	6	-	-	2	4
Absent Voting Fraud	13	-	1	11	1
Mis-use of electoral register	1	-	-	1	-
Failure to submit election expenses returns	23	-	-	23	-

## Election Review

- 4.8 With the next scheduled election not due to take place until June 2014, the Chief Electoral Officer took the opportunity to initiate a review of all operational plans and processes for future elections. The review started in October 2011 and is scheduled for completion in the autumn of 2012. It is intended that all process changes arising from the review will be in place by March 2013.
- 4.9 The review is being conducted internally by EONI staff under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer. Where appropriate, there has been consultation with local politicians and other key stakeholders. A quality assurance role is being provided by the NIO and the Electoral Commission.

- 4.10 The review of procedures for future counts will include an examination of the possible use of electronic counting (e-counting). A large-scale demonstration of e-counting, to which all stakeholders will be invited, is planned for mid-2012.

## **SECTION 5 – CENTRAL SERVICES**

### **Premises**

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

### **Staff**

#### **Recruitment**

- 5.2 There were no recruitment campaigns, other than temporary election staff, due to the current recruitment freeze. At the combined elections in May 2011, upwards of 7,000 staff were employed to work at polling stations and count venues.
- 5.3 A number of internal temporary promotions were put in place to cover internal positions arising as a result of the ongoing election review and maternity leave. There were no resignations or retirements during the course of the year.

#### **Training**

- 5.4 A training plan for 2011/12 was drawn up by the HR Section from personal development plans for each staff member in agreement with line managers. The NICS's Centre for Applied Learning was the main training provider, however, where external providers were required, procurement procedures were applied to ensure the best value for money.
- 5.5 All premises officers were required to attend refresher training on H&S awareness and two staff gained the first aid at work certificate, whilst a number of staff were trained on emergency first aid to ensure there were appropriate first-aiders and appointed persons in EONI.



- 5.6 During the year four staff members undertook to attain the Certificate of Electoral Administration, and two staff were in the final stages of completing the course.
- 5.7 All staff completed a refresher on the Protecting Information e-learning programme through the National School of Government website and have successfully achieved a certificate.

### **Equality monitoring and other equality issues**

- 5.8 A fair employment monitoring return was submitted in April 2011 to the Equality Commission.
- 5.9 The Section 75 annual progress report was completed and submitted to the Equality Commission in August 2011.
- 5.10 During the year the Equality Commission also requested a revised Equality Scheme and EONI implemented an equality working group to undertake an Audit of Inequalities to develop an Action Plan. The final report on the assessment of the key inequalities across our business functions was subject to a consultation exercise which finished in March 2012. EONI intends to submit its revised Equality Scheme by 1 May 2012.

### **Sick Absence**

- 5.11 Levels of sick absence were monitored by the Management Board at all its monthly meetings. Sick absence levels in relation to short-term and work related long-term absence continued to be low (1.7%). The absence rate for long-term non-work related sickness was 3.5%.

### **Staff Survey**

- 5.12 A staff survey report was prepared by an external statistician from results to questionnaires issued to all permanent employees, including a proportion of casual staff, in September 2011. The purpose of the survey was to gather

views about jobs, EONI as an employer and other work related matters. Overall, the results obtained were similar in many respects to survey results and research from other public sector organisations. Indeed, there are some areas where EONI's results were better than those from similar surveys but there were opportunities for improvement and an action plan was approved by the Board in November 2011 which included a review of EONI's communication strategy. A further staff survey will be undertaken when the election review is completed.

## **Funding**

- 5.13 The running costs for elections is non-voted money and this is accounted for in the annual Returning Officer's Expenses Account. It does not form part of EONI funding.
- 5.14 The running costs of District Council elections are met by each of the 26 District Councils.
- 5.15 Approximately 120 separate procurement exercises were carried out. The largest contracts awarded was for the purchase of additional polling screens, lights and ballot boxes for the 2011 combined elections and referendum at a cost of over £0.5m. Based on prompt payment statistics 811 invoices were sent to Financial Services Division and the prompt payment target was achieved.

## **Stakeholder and Media Relations**

### **Media**

- 5.16 Sole responsibility for all matters relating to public awareness of elections and registration remained with the Electoral Commission.
- 5.17 The Chief Electoral Officer issued a number of press releases during the year and gave an extensive number of printed and broadcast interviews during the election period.

5.18 Area Electoral Officers continued to develop good relationships with their local newspapers and radio stations. These continue to be used to good effect to give free publicity for local registration and election matters.

5.19 The Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues received invaluable support in their dealings with the media from staff of the Northern Ireland Information Service within the Northern Ireland Office. These staff also played a vital role in advising on the arrangements for the media at the combined elections and referendum in May 2011.

### **Political Parties**

5.20 The Northern Ireland political parties were consulted on all planned initiatives by the Electoral Office and some provided valuable and constructive comments.

5.21 The Chief Electoral Officer attended all meetings of the Assembly Parties Panel, the meeting convened by the Electoral Commission to discuss electoral matters. He gave information on changes made to electoral law and practice and on forthcoming initiatives.

### **Electoral Commission**

5.22 A mutually beneficial and constructive working relationship continued to exist at all levels between the Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues and the Head of the Commission's Belfast Office and his staff.

### **Disability Groups**

5.23 EONI continues to include organisations representing disability groups in all consultation exercises and meetings took place on a range of issues including a revised Equality Scheme with organisations including MENCAP, RNIB and Disability Action. As part of our membership with Employers for Disability NI we liaised with this organisation and other groups to encourage

participation in the democratic process e.g. accessibility signage at the combined elections in 2011.

### **Northern Ireland Office**

5.24 The Chief Electoral Officer worked closely with the staff from the Constitutional and Political Group at the Northern Ireland Office throughout the year. There was daily contact on a range of issues including suggested amendments to various aspects of electoral legislation.

5.25 The Chief Electoral Officer also attended regular meetings of the Electoral Policy and Co-ordination Group at the Cabinet Office in London.

### **Helpline**

5.26 The Helpline at Headquarters dealt with 37,912 enquiries during the year. Customer service standards were achieved or exceeded throughout the year.

### **Website**

5.27 There were 123,119 visits made to the website during the year and 87,351 documents were downloaded. (Note: a breakdown of the number of registration forms downloaded by language is not available due to changes in the website statistics software).

### **Records Management**

5.28 14 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and 19 under the Data Protection Act were received.

### **Electoral Identity Cards**

5.29 There were 25,583 Electoral Identity Cards issued in 2011/2012.

## **Customer Service**

5.30 Rates of customer satisfaction remained high throughout the year with an average satisfaction rate of 99%. The Electoral Office successfully retained the Customer Service Excellence award in March 2012.

## **IT System**

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

## **SECTION 6 – CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

### **Management Board**

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

### **Customer Service Excellence**

- 6.3 The Electoral Office successfully made the transition from Charter Mark to Customer Service Excellence (CSE) in March 2011 by obtaining CSE accreditation. I am pleased to report that, following an assessment in March 2012, the Electoral Office has been further accredited for a period of one year commencing 1 April 2012.

### **Complaints**

- 6.4 During the year 92 formal complaints were received compared with 102 in 2010/11.
- 6.5 The nature and outcome of the formal complaints is summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3 – Formal Complaints Received 2010/11**

<b>Nature of Complaint</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Registration evidence requirements/ tone of letter	6	Evidence requirements and tone of letter revised
Registration issues/difficulties encountered	5	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Receipt of BSO letter/tone of letter/Removal letters	1	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable/ tone of letter revised
Mis-use of electoral register	1	Relevant Legislation explained/confirmation that data not used unlawfully
Could not vote/problems voting/not on register at polling station	14	Relevant legislation explained/ apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Late registration procedures/deadlines	1	Relevant legislation explained
Postal Voting/ Postal Vote Packs/Deadlines/Rejection of Postal Vote	26	Relevant legislation explained/ explanation/apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Advertising of postal votes	1	Referred to Electoral Commission
Poor service provided by poll staff	6	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Poll cards	6	Explanation/apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Ballot papers	1	Relevant legislation explained
Location/change of location of polling station	7	Explanation issued
Party workers at polling stations	4	Relevant legislation explained
Forms of electoral identification	1	Relevant legislation explained
Election posters	1	Explanation issued
Non-receipt/ problems with Electoral Identity Card	1	Explanation and apology issued
Breach of security at polling station	1	Apology issued
Complaint about security cameras at polling station	1	Letter of explanation issued

Damage to polling station	1	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Delay of results of poll	1	Letter of explanation issued
Complaint about government bodies	1	Acknowledgement sent
Delay in payment for working at poll	1	Apology issued/remedial action taken
Decision not to re-employ for election work	1	Letter of explanation issued
Unsatisfactory performance as Presiding Officer	1	Letter explaining duties issued
Mis-use of information on the marked register	1	Referred to PSNI
None use of fada in name	1	Explanation/remedial action taken
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	

### **Other Plans and Policies**

6.6 There were developments in relation to EONI's policy on Corporate Social Responsibility. EONI is committed to being a socially responsible organisation and joined Business in the Community during the reporting year. EONI developed an action plan in relation to engagement opportunities with the wider community and volunteering challenges for staff that made a positive impact on society. A number of staff participated in the Environment Carer Initiatives, Time to Read programme and the 2012 Christmas appeal to support Action for Children Northern Ireland.

### **Charitable Donations**

6.7 Under the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy and Customer Service Excellence principles Electoral Office staff select, by secret ballot, a different cross community charitable organisation to support each year. For 2011/12 the NI Children's Hospice was chosen. Through a variety of events a total of £6,402 was raised during the year.



## **Internal Audit**

- 6.8 The Chief Electoral Officer and the Management Board continued to benefit from the constructive reports produced by ASM our internal auditors.
- 6.9 During the year they undertook planned audits of four areas agreed by the Board as suitable for detailed examination. In all of these a satisfactory assurance rating was given.
- 6.10 The 12 recommendations made by the auditors were considered by the Management Board, who because of the small size of the Electoral Office acted as the audit committee. All recommendations were accepted and 8 have been implemented. Work is ongoing in respect of implementation of the 4 outstanding recommendations.
- 6.11 Future internal audits will be completed by the Ministry of Justice Internal Audit and Assurance.

## **Boundaries**

- 6.12 The Chief Electoral Officer is an assessor to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland. During the year he attended a number of meetings of the Commission and provided them with information and advice to assist them in the discharge of their duties.

## SECTION 7 – THE AREA OFFICES

### Introduction

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

**Table 4 – Area Electoral Offices**

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

- 7.3 Each office was managed by an Area Electoral Officer who was both the deputy registration officer and deputy returning officer for either 2 or 3 constituencies. As such, these officers had, under the supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer, responsibility for all matters relating to electoral registration and Westminster, European Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly elections. By law, the Chief Executive of each district council was the deputy returning officer for any local government election. Each Area Electoral

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

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

### **Londonderry/Derry Area Electoral Office**

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

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

7.7 During the year the electorate of the Foyle constituency increased by 1,844 whilst that of East Londonderry was increased by 1,085. There was a monthly average of 320 personal callers to the office.

7.8 In addition to participation in general registration initiatives such as the Schools Initiative in which 23 post-primary schools were visited, staff also attended the three further education colleges within their area of responsibility to provide registration and electoral identity card clinics. All post primary schools were successfully visited within the allocated timescales.

7.9 In addition to the general registration initiatives the office participated in a number of events aimed at encouraging registration amongst nursing home occupants and young people who are first-time registrants but shown as living alone at their home addresses.

### **Omagh Area Electoral Office**

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

- 7.11 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent staff and by casual staff during particularly busy periods.
- 7.12 During the year West Tyrone constituency increased by 901 whilst Fermanagh and South Tyrone increased by 1,443. There was a monthly average of 234 callers to the office.
- 7.13 The Area Electoral Officer and his staff visited a total of 25 post primary schools as part of the Schools Initiative during the reporting period. The office also provided full day registration and electoral identity card facilitation at each of South West College's three campuses, Omagh, Enniskillen and Dungannon, as well as targeting by post the 116 students from the area registered at North West Regional College and the 61 attending the Southern Regional College.
- 7.14 The Office conducted a review of all registered, as well as new electors, currently resident in all nursing homes. Staff are also currently involved in a pilot signature refresh of all registered postal voters throughout both parliamentary constituencies.

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

- 7.15 The Banbridge A Area Electoral Office is co-located with the other Banbridge office at 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge. It has responsibility for the Upper Bann and Newry and Armagh constituencies.
- 7.16 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two permanent members of staff with additional casual staff being employed as required.
- 7.17 During the year the electorate in Upper Bann increased by 1,653 and Newry and Armagh increased by 1,327. There was a monthly average of 280 callers at the Banbridge A and B offices.

7.18 29 post primary schools and 4 Further Education Colleges were visited between September and November 2011 resulting in 1,946 new registrations and 2,002 Electoral Identity Card applications.

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

7.19 The Banbridge B Area Electoral Office is co-located with the other Banbridge office at 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge. It serves the Lagan Valley and South Down constituencies.

7.20 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two full time members of staff with additional assistance, as required, from casual staff.

7.21 During the year the electorate in South Down increased by 1,476 whilst that of Lagan Valley increased by 1,100.

7.22 During the course of the year a variety of registration initiatives were pursued, including writing to all new students at Further Education Colleges, those living in a dwelling with a single occupant registered with a birthday between November 1994 and February 1995. Registration enquiries were also pursued in respect of all newly completed properties as advised by the 4 District Council Building Control offices. Follow-up enquiries were also made in relation to data supplied by the Registrar's Office in relation to notification of marriages and civil partnerships.

### **Belfast Area Electoral Office**

7.23 The Belfast Area Electoral Office is situated on the first floor of the Electoral Office Headquarters at 15 Church Street, Belfast. It serves the Belfast West and Belfast South constituencies.

7.24 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by five permanent members of staff, one of whom is on a temporary sabbatical. Additional casual staff were employed as required.

- 7.25 During the year the electorate of the Belfast South constituency increased by 1,035, whilst that of Belfast West increased by 1,309.
- 7.26 There was a monthly average of 556 personal callers to the office. This remains the highest number of callers at any area office and reflects the fact that many electors, registered outside the two constituencies for which the Belfast office has responsibility, find it convenient to call there when in the city centre.
- 7.27 In addition to the general registration initiatives the office participated in a number of events aimed at encouraging registration amongst nursing home occupants and young people who are first-time registrants but shown as living alone at their home addresses.

#### **Newtownards Area Electoral Office**

- 7.28 The Newtownards office at 2(B) Regent Street, Newtownards serves the North Down, Belfast East and Strangford constituencies.
- 7.29 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by four permanent members of staff with further casual staff being engaged as required.
- 7.30 During the year the electorate of the Belfast East constituency increased by 1,214, whilst that of North Down increased by 890. The electorate of the Strangford constituency increased by 1,081. There was a monthly average of 316 personal callers to the office.
- 7.31 A total of 19 post primary schools were visited as part of the Schools Initiative. A total of 1,927 young people were added to the register as a result of this process and 1,761 electoral identity cards were issued.
- 7.32 Further Education Colleges were visited and this, combined with a mail out of registration forms, resulted in 253 new registrants being added to the register.

7.33 In addition to the general registration initiatives the office participated in a number of events aimed at encouraging registration amongst nursing home occupants and young people who are first-time registrants but shown as living alone at their home addresses.

### **Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office**

7.34 The Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office at 1-3 Portland Avenue, Glengormley serves the East Antrim, South Antrim and Belfast North constituencies.

7.35 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by 3 full time and 1 part-time staff member. Additional casual staff were employed as required.

7.36 During the year the electorate of East Antrim constituency increased by 665, whilst that of Belfast North increased by 1,231. The electorate of the South Antrim constituency increased by 1,353. There was a monthly average of 300 personal callers to the office.

7.37 In addition to visiting 27 post primary schools as part of the Schools Initiative, staff from the office also visited Further Education Colleges in their area of responsibility to encourage registration of first time voters. 1,953 additions to the register were made as a result of the school visits, whilst 772 new registrants were added following visits to the Further Education Colleges.

7.38 A review of nursing homes was carried out in January 2012, with 45 premises contacted to update information on residents.

7.39 Work has been ongoing to identify and contact the occupants of those premises which show only one person resident and, the occupants of all recently completed new properties have been written to.

## **Ballymena Area Electoral Office**

- 7.40 The Ballymena Area Electoral Office is located at 122 Broughshane Street, Ballymena and serves the constituencies of Mid Ulster and North Antrim.
- 7.41 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by 2 permanent members of staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.
- 7.42 During the year the electorate in the Mid Ulster constituency increased by 975 whilst that of North Antrim increased by 846. There was a monthly average of 224 personal callers to the office.
- 7.43 Staff from the office visited all 21 post primary schools and 4 Further Education Colleges in the two constituencies during the Schools Initiative. This resulted in an additional 1,569 young people being added to the register.
- 7.44 Ongoing initiatives including attempts to update the details of those living in nursing homes and also writing to addresses where the property is identified as having only a single, newly registered, young person resident.



### Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Targets and Development Objectives 2011/12

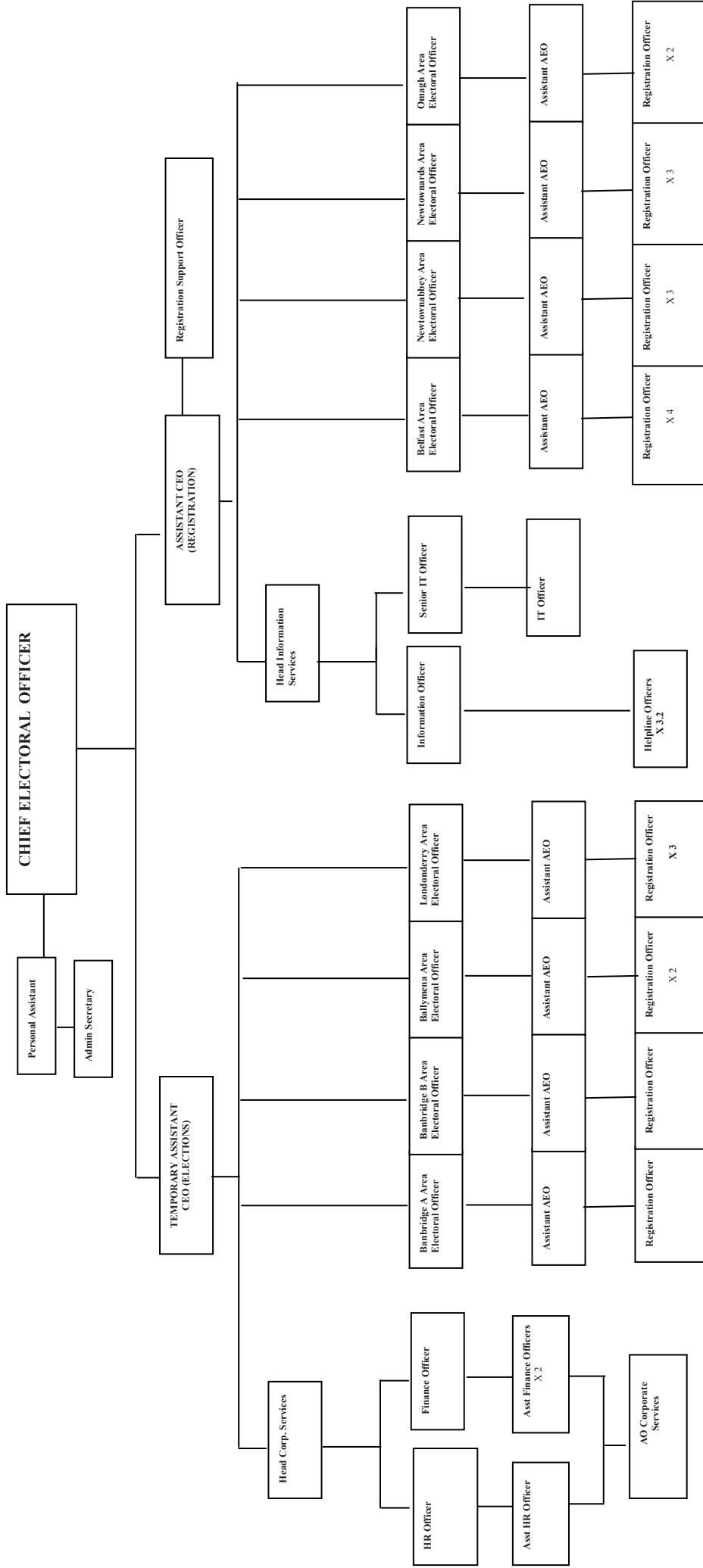
<b>OT</b>	<b>On Target</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
<b>NA</b>	<b>Not Achieved</b>
<b>NP</b>	<b>Not Proceeding</b>

<b>Targets</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. To deliver free and fair combined NI Assembly and local government elections and AV referendum within the budget allocated.	<b>A</b>	Electoral Commission assessed combined elections and AV referendum as free and fair. All completed within budget.
2. To submit the report for the year to 31 March 2011 to the Secretary of State by 30 June 2011.	<b>A</b>	Submitted 30 June 2011.
3. To Publish on 1 December 2011 a register that contains more electors and is at least as accurate as the December 2010 register.	<b>A</b>	Register published 1 December 2011 contains more electors and at least as accurate.
4. To operate the Electoral Office efficiently, effectively and within budget throughout the year.	<b>A</b>	A number of efficiency measures were implemented. The office remained within budget at year end.
5. To run a free and fair by-election for Belfast West.	<b>A</b>	Belfast West by-election was run freely and fairly.

<b>Customer Service Development Objectives</b>		<b>Status</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1.	To maintain high levels of customer service.	A	Customer Service Excellence Award achieved for a further year.
2.	By 31 December 2011 to develop a course in customer care suited to the particular needs of the Electoral Office and its customers and to have it accredited by a recognised independent authority.	A	In house training course developed in customer care by 31 October 2011 and delivered to all EONI staff.
<b>Registration Development Objectives</b>		<b>Status</b>	<b>Comments</b>
3.	At the combined elections and referendum in May 2011 to issue a registration forms to all unregistered persons who attend to vote.	A	Achieved. Over 400 forms received as a result of this initiative.
4.	By 31 December 2011 to carry out registration visits to at least 85% of further education colleges and at least 95% of post primary schools with at least 10 pupils of registration age who are not registered.	A	85% of further education colleges and just over 95% of post primary schools visited.
5.	To continue to evaluate initiatives aimed at meeting the registration objectives set in legislation.	A	All initiatives evaluated for cost/benefit and for meeting registration objectives.
6.	By 31 March 2012, to formulate a consistent approach to improving the quality of the property database.	A	A consistent formulation for address fields completed and circulated to AEOs.
<b>Elections Development Objectives</b>		<b>Status</b>	<b>Comments</b>
7.	By 31 March 2012 to have commenced a review of practices and procedures in light of lessons learned at the combined elections and AV referendum.	A	A comprehensive review of election planning commenced in September 2011.

8.	By 31 March 2012 to have reviewed and implemented security procedures and physical security throughout the EONI estate.	A	Review carried out by Premises Manager and IT Security officer. Security procedures reviewed and updated. Physical security work completed at St. Anne's House, Belfast.
9.	By 31 March 2012 to review the recruitment, testing requirements and training of casual workers for elections, registration and other duties.	A	Online recruitment, testing and training solution being investigated as part of the Election Review project. Recommendations to be presented to the project board in June 2012.
10.	By 31 December 2011 to close the account for the AV referendum.	A	The AV referendum account was submitted to Election Claims Unit within the deadline for submission. Claim checked and cleared by Election Claims Unit on 28 February 2012.
11.	To monitor and manage the account for the NI Assembly Elections to ensure it can be closed by 30 April 2012.	A	NI Assembly Elections Account monitored and managed. On target to be closed outside the period covered by this progress report.
<b>Corporate Services Development Objectives</b>			
12.	To develop a programme of work to conduct an audit of inequalities to form development of an Equality Action Plan and to prepare an Equality Scheme for submission to the Equality Commission by 1 May 2012.	A	Final draft Equality Scheme following consultation submitted to April Management Board for approval.
13.	By 31 March 2012, to review procedures for the issue of Electoral Identity Cards.	A	New procedures on the issue of Electoral Identity cards to be implemented on 1 July 2012 when information booklets are next due for publication.
14.	To commence a review of the EONI office estate.	A	The review has been completed and the final report will shortly be forwarded to the NIO.

ELECTORAL OFFICE STRUCTURE AS AT 1 APRIL 2011



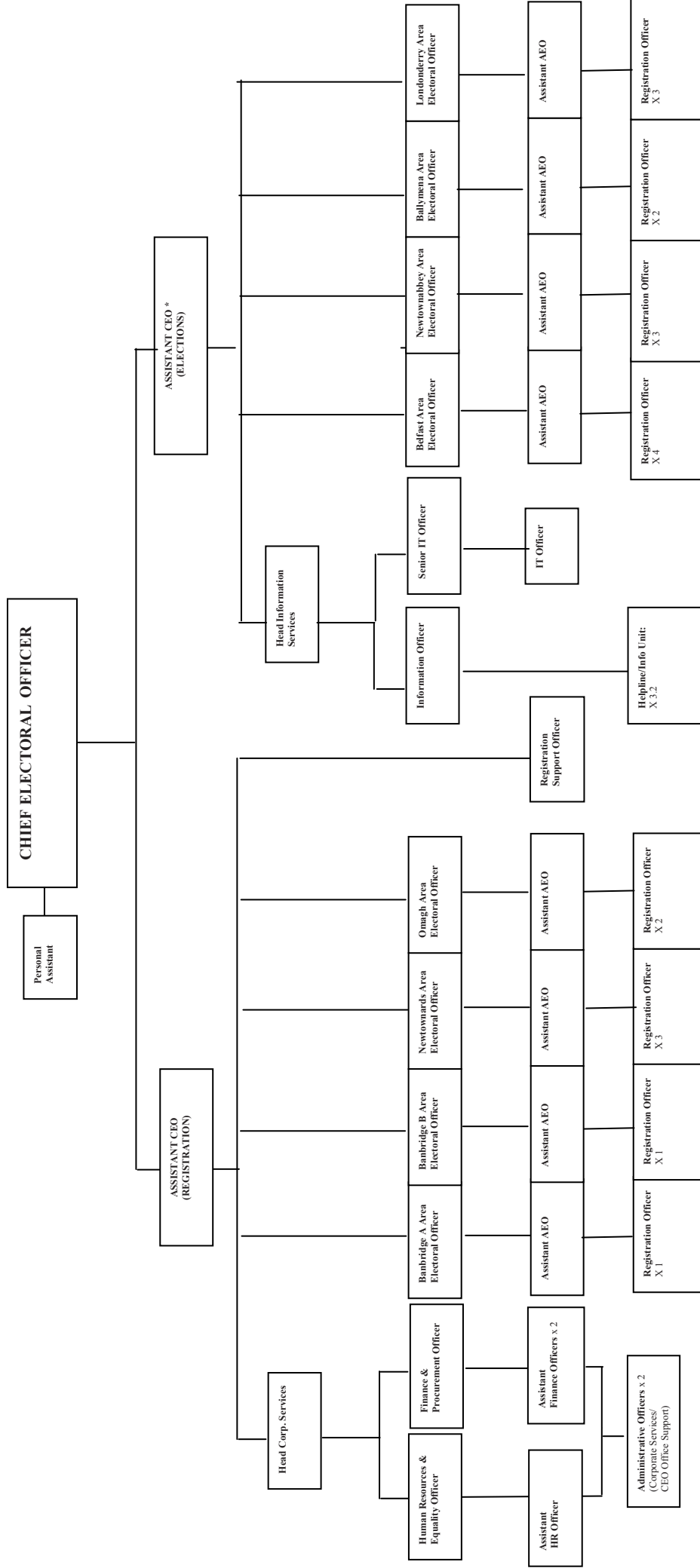
PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES:

Upper Bann Newry & Armagh	Lagan Valley South Down	North Antrim Mid Ulster	Foyle East Londonderry
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PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES:

West Belfast South Belfast	North Belfast East Antrim South Antrim	East Belfast Strangford North Down	West Tyrone Fernagh & South Tyrone
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ELECTORAL OFFICE STRUCTURE AS AT 31 MARCH 2012



PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES:

Upper Bann Newry & Armagh	Lagan Valley South Down	North Antrim Mid Ulster	Foyle East Londonderry
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PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES:

West Belfast South Belfast	North Belfast East Antrim South Antrim	East Belfast Stranmillis North Down	West Tyrone Fermanagh & South Tyrone
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\* Temporary

## OPERATING COSTS

	<b>£k</b>
<u>Basic Pay -</u>	
Permanent Staff	1,194.1
Temporary Staff	48.7
<b>Basic Pay Total</b>	<b>1,242.8</b>
<u>Overtime -</u>	
Permanent Staff	4.3
<b>Overtime Total</b>	<b>4.3</b>
<u>Employers National Insurance -</u>	
Permanent Staff	93.7
Temporary Staff	1.4
<b>Employers National Insurance Total</b>	<b>95.1</b>
Accrued Superannuation Liability Charge	219.2
<b>Total Staff</b>	<b>1,561.4</b>
Power	41.1
Premises ( Key holding )	1.4
Maintenance & Minor Works	70.4
Training	13.1
Travel	13.2
Subsistence	1.8
Personnel Costs	10.5
Other Employee Costs	4.2
Hospitality	0.5
Office Services ( Printing, Equipment, Hire, Window Cleaning )	47.0
Computers ( Software, Hardware, Maintenance, Line Rental etc )	223.7
Professional Services	27.0
Materials ( Mainly Stationery Orders )	20.1
Property charges	108.9
Postage	139.0
Telecommunications	28.7
Office Equipment	1.1
Central & Common Services ( Cleaning Offices )	13.3
Estate Management	5.4
Insurance ( Premises )	6.2
Advertising	1.5
Fees	7.3
Transport Costs	2.0
Advisory Services	13.5
Operating Leases ( Rent of Offices & Photocopiers )	233.1

NIAO Fees	7.3
<b>Total Goods &amp; Services</b>	<b>1,041.3</b>
Electoral Identity Card	7.6
Encouraging Registration (Prize Draw)	1.0
Non Cash Costs	159.8
Receipts	(162.9)
<b>TOTAL PROGRAMME</b>	<b>2,608.2</b>
Capital	16.1
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>2,624.3</b>



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