

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2006-2007

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

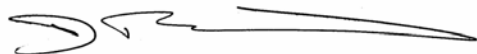
The Rt Hon Peter Hain MP
Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
11 Millbank
London
SW1P 4QE

31 May 2007

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 2006.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Douglas Bain', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Douglas Bain CBE TD Advocate
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

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FOREWORD

This is the Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland (CEO) for the year to 31 March 2007 which has been prepared as required by section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. A copy of it has been submitted to the Secretary of State in accordance with that provision.

Whilst the Report is technically about how I discharged my functions as CEO during the year the work has very largely been undertaken by my dedicated staff in the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) who deserve substantial credit for their performance and in particular for the successful way in which they ran the unexpected Northern Ireland Assembly elections in March 2007. I have also received considerable assistance from a wide range of stakeholders including the Electoral Commission, the political parties, the media and the Northern Ireland Information Service and the Rights and International Relations Division of the Northern Ireland Office. Without their support little would have been possible.

I was appointed CEO on 1 June 2006 and must also pay tribute to my colleague June Butler, the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer, not only for her work whilst Acting Chief Electoral Officer for the two months prior to my appointment but also for all the assistance and advice she has given me as I came to terms with my new responsibilities.

Douglas Bain

Chief Electoral Officer

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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 UK. The system in Northern Ireland is administered centrally by the CEO who is a statutory officeholder independent of Government. He is assisted by the staff of EONI, the administrative structure created to support him in the discharge of his duties. The CEO is both the returning officer and registration officer for all elections in Northern Ireland. 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 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
- 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, including those as registration officer.

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
- 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 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 set standards for well-run elections.
- 1.8 In April 2007 the Commission unveiled its new corporate plan which sets 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 2007-8 to 2011-12 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
 - fair boundary arrangements for elections.

Funding

- 1.9 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 Northern Ireland Assembly and district council elections is found from the Northern Ireland block.

SECTION 2 - PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS

- 2.1 This section summarises the performance achieved against the six key targets and twenty-two administrative targets set out in the Business Plan 2006-07. The plan may be viewed at www.eoni.org.uk.
- 2.2 Of the six key targets, five were achieved in full. The remaining target, which related to continuous registration, was amended during the year when it was decided not to proceed with a high cost and high risk bespoke IT system. Further details on continuous registration are given in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.14 below.
- 2.3 Fourteen of the administrative targets were achieved in full whilst good progress was made towards achieving the majority of the remainder. In most cases the target would have been achieved but for the need to divert staff resources to deal with the Assembly elections in March which had not been taken into account when the targets were set.
- 2.4 Further details of performance against key and administrative targets are at Annex A.

SECTION 3 - REGISTRATION

Annual Canvass 2006

- 3.1 The annual canvass took place in autumn 2006 and resulted in the publication on 1 December of a new register of 1,075,116 electors. This represented a fall of 81,936 compared with December 2005. The fall was not unexpected given the trend in recent years and the fact that in 2005 more than 91,000 individuals, who had failed to complete a registration form, were nonetheless “carried forward” to the new register by virtue of the provisions of the Electoral Registration (Northern Ireland) Act 2005. These provisions ceased to have effect in February 2006.
- 3.2 The canvass was conducted largely in the same way as in 2005 using, in addition to EONI permanent staff, 853 casual staff. The overall cost was £1.5m or £1.40 per registration.
- 3.3 Following the canvass all staff were debriefed and a number of learning points were identified for consideration before the next full canvass which is scheduled for 2010.

Rolling Registration

- 3.4 Rolling registration continued to operate throughout the year. Individuals notified EONI of their eligibility to register or of changes in their particulars and the appropriate revisions were made to the register on a monthly basis. EONI continued to receive regular notification of deaths from the Registrar General and amended the register accordingly.
- 3.5 There was a marked increase in the level of rolling registration following the announcement of the Assembly elections as a result of the St Andrew’s Agreement. The register published on 1 February 2007, which determined entitlement to vote at the March elections, showed an increase of more than 40,000 from the December 2006 register. This increase was due, in no small part, to an extensive media campaign by the Electoral Commission and to

work on the ground by the political parties. In an innovative approach the CEO agreed to a request from the Andersonstown News to provide electoral registration forms for inclusion, free of charge, in an edition of that paper which included articles aimed at encouraging registration. A number of other local newspapers later provided the same service.

3.6 Processing the more than 40,000 forms received as a result of “the election effect” put considerable strain on the staff at the area electoral offices who were at that time already fully occupied preparing for the March elections. It is a tribute to their dedication that the work of publishing the revised register was completed on time.

3.7 In February 2007, after the cut-off date for registration for the March elections, three sentenced prisoners submitted electoral registration forms. Under current UK domestic law sentenced prisoners are not entitled to register and their applications were refused. They sought, and were granted, judicial review of the decision although one decided not to proceed with his case. At the hearing the two remaining prisoners sought to challenge the compatibility of the relevant domestic law, in accordance with which their applications to register had been refused, with their Convention Rights and in particular the right to free elections. Their cases were rejected at first instance and that decision was affirmed by the Court of Appeal.

Continuous Registration

3.8 The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 replaced the requirement for an annual electoral canvass with a process which will be known as “continuous registration”. The next full canvass is scheduled for 2010 with canvasses at least every ten years thereafter. Each year the CEO is required to recommend to the Secretary of State whether or not a full canvass should be conducted.

3.9 Continuous registration is in some ways similar to rolling registration which will in 2007/08 be subsumed within it. The 2006 Act provided the Secretary of State with a power to make regulations requiring specified public

authorities to provide relevant information to the CEO to assist him in his duty of maintaining an accurate and comprehensive electoral register. During the year discussions took place with the NIO and a number of potential information providers on the content of these regulations which came into operation on 31 May 2007.

- 3.10 It was originally envisaged that the information obtained under these new powers would be electronically matched to produce a single comprehensive list of all identified potential additions, deletions and changes to the register. Following a feasibility study it became apparent that the IT solution to this issue would be high cost and high risk. It was therefore decided to proceed with a simplified manual system. The situation will be kept under review.
- 3.11 When the CEO receives information suggesting that a person has become eligible to register or that a person's registration particulars have changed he will write to that person requiring him or her to submit a registration form. When a form is received in response it will be checked and the register will be updated. Where individuals fail to return a form they will risk removal from the register and prosecution. The register will also be updated to take account of deaths notified to the CEO.
- 3.12 To assist individuals in registering, the registration form has been completely revised and simplified and is one of the few public sector forms in Northern Ireland to be awarded the Plain English Campaign Crystal Mark for clarity. Later this year it is intended to make the new form available in Ulster Scots and Irish and also in a range of other languages to assist the increasing number of the population who do not have English as their first language.
- 3.13 As part of the continuous registration process it is intended to make the new registration form widely available not only through the normal public sector outlets but also through private sector organisations such as those involved in property sales and letting. By far the majority of changes each year are changes of address.

- 3.14 Whilst good progress has been made on continuous registration, development and roll-out of this unique approach to electoral registration was inevitably delayed as a result of the calling of the Assembly elections. Further information on how the new process will work will be given during the coming year.

Electoral Identity Card

- 3.15 During the year 6,902 new cards were issued bringing the total issued since the scheme was established in 2002 to 112,087 or 10% of the electorate. Discussions took place with representatives of the licensed trade in Northern Ireland on use of the card as proof of age by young people seeking entry to licensed premises. These were ongoing at the year end. Confirmation was also obtained from all airlines flying out of Northern Ireland that the card was an acceptable form of identification on their domestic flights. Promoting the card, particularly amongst young people, is likely to be an effective way of increasing registration levels for this and other hard to reach groups. The total cost of providing cards in the current year was £90k. That figure includes the cost of deploying mobile sites at over forty locations in the run up to the Assembly elections.

Meeting the Registration Objectives

- 3.16 Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, which was commenced on 16 October 2006, requires the CEO 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.
- 3.17 The relevant registration 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.”

3.18 The “required information” is defined in that provision as meaning the person’s name, qualifying address, date of birth, signature and national insurance number. The provision gives no guidance on the methodology for making the required assessment.

3.19 Accurate and comprehensive registers are the foundations upon which the electoral process is built and it is essential that every effort is made to ensure that as a consequence of the introduction of continuous registration there is no reduction in either of them. There can be no question of sacrificing accuracy to achieve a pretended increase in comprehensiveness.

First registration objective

3.20 At 1 December 2006, following the annual canvass, the number of individuals on the UK Parliamentary register was 1,075,116. Using an assessment by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency of the eligible population that represented 80.9% of the eligible electorate. By 1 April 2007 the number of individuals registered had increased to 1,122,330: the highest number of individuals who had completed a registration form in a 12-month period since the change from household to individual registration in 2002. An official estimate of the eligible electorate at the year end is not available but it is believed that the percentage registration was around 85%.

3.21 During the year the practice of rigorously checking all registration forms against information available to EONI from other sources continued. Where discrepancies were identified the individual was asked to provide an explanation. Where no satisfactory explanation was forthcoming the application to register was rejected. As a result of the 2006 Act, and to guard

against the risk that fraudulent registration could be used to assist in creating a false identity for criminal purposes, new procedures were introduced under which those who had not previously been registered were required to produce evidence of their eligibility. At the year end plans were in place to further tighten these procedures, to bring them into line with best practice guidance on the prevention of identity theft. Arrangements were in place throughout the year under which the Registrar General provided information on all deaths in Northern Ireland. Where deceased individuals were registered their names were removed from the register.

Second registration objective

- 3.22 There is no easy way to measure a negative such as that set out in the second registration objective. At the year end there were no individuals on the electoral register who were known to be ineligible and there was no reason to believe that there were a significant number of ineligible persons on the register.

Third registration objective

- 3.23 In the time available it was not possible to devise a methodology for assessing the accuracy of the register as required by the third of the registration objectives. The Electoral Commission have agreed to commission an independent survey to measure accuracy in future years and the results of this will be used to inform future assessments.
- 3.24 Inaccuracy in the registers can arise in a number of ways. First, individuals may deliberately or by mistake provide incorrect information. The enhanced checks now in place provide good assurance that few such inaccuracies will go undetected and be reflected in the registers. Second, inaccuracies can arise when individuals fail to advise EONI of changes of their name or address or that they have become ineligible to be registered. The annual canvass eliminated any such inaccuracies occurring before the October registration deadline and the number of changes notified since then indicates that it is unlikely that there are a significant number of changes of which EONI have

not been advised.. The continuous registration process to be rolled out this year is likely to lead to a reduction in the number of changes that go undetected. Finally, inaccuracy can occur due to clerical errors by EONI staff. One benefit of the extensive database now available within EONI is that it provides a resource against which all applications are checked and so reduces the risk of information being incorrectly recorded. Against that background it is assessed that the third registration objective has been largely achieved.

SECTION 4 - ELECTIONS

Northern Ireland Assembly Elections March 2007

- 4.1 Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly were announced following the St Andrew's Agreement and were held on 7 March. The 2006/07 Business Plan proceeded on the assumption that no Northern Ireland-wide elections would take place during that year and EONI staff again demonstrated their commitment and flexibility in delivering a well run election in addition to performing their other duties.
- 4.2 The key facts and figures in connection with the running of the elections were provided to the Electoral Commission and are included in its statutory report which is available on www.electoralcommission.org.uk. The results and other statistical information can be viewed on www.eoni.org.uk.
- 4.3 Overall the election was well conducted with 90% of voters surveyed post election on behalf of the Electoral Commission being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience. The political parties and the media all expressed their overall satisfaction at the way in which the election was conducted.
- 4.4 Following the election the CEO benefited from comments and suggestions from the parties, his staff and others and will be progressing a number of these with the NIO over the coming year.

Other Elections

- 4.5 District council by-elections were held in two district electoral areas and were conducted, with the council Chief Executives acting as Deputy Returning Officer, without significant issue.

Electoral Fraud

- 4.6 Electoral fraud is still perceived to be an issue by a significant proportion of the population in Northern Ireland. Whilst in a survey conducted by the Electoral Commission for their report on the Northern Ireland Assembly elections, 64% of those interviewed agreed with the statement that the system of registering and voting in Northern Ireland had helped to overcome electoral fraud, 25% still believed that electoral fraud was taking place. Personation has very largely been eliminated as a result of the requirements to produce photographic identification when voting in person but the absent voting process is more vulnerable to abuse as the elector never has to come face to face with an EONI employee. To guard against this risk all absent vote applications at the Assembly elections were rigorously checked as were the declarations of identity returned with completed ballot papers. Whilst only three instances of an apparent postal vote fraud were identified there is no way of knowing the extent to which knowledge of the extensive checks made deterred other fraudulent practices. The three cases are the subject of on-going police investigations.
- 4.7 During the year a case of electoral fraud arising from the 2005 elections resulted in the offender being sentenced to 4 months imprisonment. The sentence received extensive media coverage and may itself have had a general deterrent effect.
- 4.8 Although not fraudulent, a number of instances of failure by election agents to submit their return of expenses in relation to the 2005 elections came to court during the year and resulted in conviction. In one case a fine of £1,000 was imposed. When writing to election agents after the 2007 Assembly elections reminding them of their obligations, the CEO drew attention to that sentence. All returns of election expenses were received on time.

SECTION 5 - CENTRAL SERVICES

Premises

- 5.1 EONI continues to have its Headquarters in Belfast and to deliver its services from there and from nine area electoral offices, each of which serves two Parliamentary constituencies. In both Belfast and Banbridge two area offices are co-located. The other offices are in Londonderry, Ballymena, Omagh, Newtownabbey and Newtownards.
- 5.2 On 1 June 2006 the office serving the North Antrim and Mid Ulster constituencies was moved from Ballymoney to Ballymena. The new office provides better facilities both for the public, particularly those with disabilities, and for staff. In other offices minor works were carried out, such as the installation of a chairlift at the Newtownards office, to bring the premises up to modern standards.
- 5.3 During the year a review of the Electoral Office estate was completed and published on www.eoni.org.uk. It recommended that in light of the impact of the Review of Public Administration (RPA), the possible changes to Parliamentary and local government boundaries and the changes to the work of the area offices as a result of the abolition of the annual canvass and the move to continuous registration, careful consideration should be given to locating EONI offices outside Belfast in buildings occupied by the new district councils and to reducing their number from six to three provided arrangements could be made to ensure that there was no significant reduction in the service provided to the public. However, the estate review concluded that no business case in relation to the proposals could be prepared until the uncertainties surrounding the RPA and the boundaries had been removed. The Assembly parties have been asked to submit their views on these proposals and their responses are awaited.

Staff

- 5.4 There were no significant changes in the number or grading of the EONI permanent staff during the year. More than 850 casual staff were engaged for the annual canvass. At the Assembly elections upwards of 3,700 casual staff worked at polling stations whilst more than 1,000 were employed to count the votes.
- 5.5 Building on the staff survey conducted at the end of 2005/06 a further survey, using the same questions, was carried out in January 2007. To encourage staff to complete the survey honestly and openly arrangements were made for the questionnaires to be analysed independently without ever being seen by management. The survey showed a marked improvement in almost all areas compared with the previous year. The Board considered the findings at its February meeting and agreed an action plan to address the issues identified. The survey report can be viewed on www.eoni.org.uk.
- 5.6 Sickness absence continued to be closely monitored with a well-defined process for encouraging and assisting staff to return to work. Over the year the sick absence rate was 2.6% which equates to an average less than six days per member of staff.
- 5.7 To address concerns about the standard of internal communication an internal newsletter 'The Declaration' was launched in December 2006. It provides a mixture of business and social news and has proved popular with staff.
- 5.8 Posts within EONI are graded using the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) grades. For many years there has been unease about whether the current grading of a number of the posts properly reflects their responsibilities. The CEO has accordingly initiated a grading review of EONI posts. The review will be undertaken by independent consultants from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) using JEGS, the Cabinet Office job evaluation and grading tool. The first phase of the review started in May 2007.

5.9 The staff of EONI have terms and conditions of service almost identical with those enjoyed by staff of the NICS. During the year the law was changed to transfer EONI staff to the statutory pension scheme in place for the NICS. All EONI staff are recruited by open competition run in accordance with NICS procedures. There can be no doubt that EONI staff perform a very important public function. In short they are civil servants in all but name. Yet, apparently for historical reasons, EONI staff do not enjoy civil service status. Consequently, they do not have the opportunity to apply for civil service jobs and in practice, due to the small size of EONI, they have virtually no career development opportunities. As a consequence some able staff are lost to the organisation. Conferring civil service status would be to the benefit of the tax payer in Northern Ireland, EONI, the staff and the NICS. EONI would benefit from new blood from the NICS who had experience outside the electoral sphere whilst the NICS would be enriched by some of the exceedingly able EONI staff. Further the present arrangement is wasteful of the time of the CEO and EONI staff. Limited resources necessarily have to be diverted from the core role to a range of functions such as human resources, IT and finance. Whilst that work is carried out to a high standard there are inevitable diseconomies of scale and duplication of effort. Public money is not being used to best effect. EONI staff and their trade union, NIPSA, fully support the case for civil service status. During the year an approach was made to DFP in an attempt to secure civil service status for EONI staff. Shortly after the year end DFP intimated that they were not, at present, minded to pursue the transfer of EONI staff to the NICS. The matter will be further explored over the coming year.

Funding

Operating costs

5.10 Total EONI expenditure, other than on elections, for 2006/07 was £3,283,700 which represents an underspend of less than 1% of the agreed budget. This excellent result reflects very well on all those involved. Details of the expenditure are at Annex B.

Election expenses

- 5.11 The budget for the Assembly elections was set at £2.7m. The final outcome is not yet known as some invoices are still awaited. It is clear that the final figure will be very close to the £2.7m available. It will be published on www.eoni.org.uk when available.

Stakeholder and Media Contact

- 5.12 During the year the CEO attended or was represented at all meetings of the Assembly Parties Panel, the discussion group convened by the Electoral Commission which provides a useful opportunity to exchange views on electoral issues. A number of separate meetings were held with individual parties on a range of subjects.
- 5.13 Throughout the period the CEO was in regular contact with Seamus Magee, Head of the Commission's Belfast Office, and with Karamjit Singh, the Commissioner who takes a special interest in Northern Ireland matters. He also attended meetings of the Electoral Leadership Forum chaired by Sam Younger, the Commission's Chairman, in London and Edinburgh and met with him in Belfast to discuss the Assembly elections. A close working relationship with the Commission has been established to the mutual advantage of both organisations.
- 5.14 The CEO and his staff were in regular contact with the staff of the Rights and International Relations Division of the NIO to assist them in their role of developing policy on electoral matters. The staff of that organisation provided valuable support and assistance to the CEO throughout the year.
- 5.15 People with disabilities are currently under-represented on the electoral register. To start to address this issue regular meetings were established between the CEO and a number of representative interest groups including RNID, RNIB and Help the Aged. It is planned to build on this beginning in the coming year.

- 5.16 EONI has continued to consult widely on significant policy issues such as the proposal to count UK Parliamentary elections overnight. As a result of that consultation process, undertaken in 2006/7, the CEO in May 2007 announced his decision that in future such counts would take place overnight.
- 5.17 Contact with the public has been maintained throughout the year by a much more extensive use of both the written and broadcast media. The media handling of all significant announcements or events is now carefully planned with assistance from the staff of the Northern Ireland Information Service. One example of the increased involvement of the media was the decision to allow live TV coverage of the counts at the Assembly elections. Whilst there are lessons to be learned from this experience, the feedback from the media was very positive and it was their view that this increased coverage enhanced viewer interest in the electoral process.
- 5.18 To assist senior EONI staff to deal more effectively with the media, specialist training was provided to all Area Electoral Officers (AEOs) prior to the Assembly elections. These AEOs and their staff replicated at local level many of the contacts made by the CEO. For example, the Ballymena AEO spoke on the benefits of registration to a disability awareness seminar whilst in Londonderry the AEO was present at the technical college freshers' day, at an awareness day organised by RNIB and at an Incore seminar focussing on participation in the electoral process by those from minority ethnic communities. There was similar involvement by other AEOs.
- 5.19 Increasingly the public use the web to access public services. The EONI website was redesigned during the year to make it more accessible to users with disabilities and to bring it up to modern standards. During the period 24 August 2006 to 31 March 2007 there were 72,482 hits on the site. Figures for the period 1 April to 23 August 2006 are not available. The site address was changed to www.eoni.org.uk to make clear the independence of the CEO and EONI from government.

SECTION 6 - CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

6.1 During the year new corporate governance arrangements were introduced.

Management Board

6.2 Although the CEO is an independent statutory officeholder an advisory Management Board comprised of the five senior EONI officials was established. Appropriate training in their responsibilities was provided for Board members. The Board meets monthly, or more frequently as required, to monitor progress against targets and objectives, to review the financial situation and to take decisions on important issues. Two NIPSA representatives are invited to attend all meetings, the minutes of which are made available to all staff.

Management Statement

6.3 A new Management Statement, incorporating a new Financial Memorandum, was agreed with the NIO and signed by the CEO on 9 August 2006.

Meeting Structure

6.4 To supplement the Management Board the Head of Area Office Services now chairs regular meetings of the nine AEOs to discuss and decide on issues relevant to their work. At the year end plans were in place to introduce more structured team briefing throughout EONI to build on these higher level meetings and the widespread informal briefings that take place in most parts of the Office.

Audit

6.5 Because of the small size of EONI it was decided that a separate Audit Committee was inappropriate. The Audit Committee function is undertaken by the Management Board who determine the Management Response to all audit recommendations and monitor compliance with the agreed

implementation plan. During the year the internal auditors carried out a number of audits in line with the agreed audit programme. No major defects were identified but a number of recommendations were made almost all of which were accepted by the Board and either have been, or are being, implemented. The internal auditors also provided helpful advice on a number of issues referred to them by the CEO.

Risk Management

6.6 The management of risk is now an integral part of the management both of formal projects and of the day to day business of EONI. Awareness training was delivered to all staff in April 2007. A risk management strategy was introduced during the year. A Board level risk register was maintained and reviewed quarterly or more frequently when appropriate.

Equality

6.7 EONI continued its efforts to make all its services available equally to all those in our community and to ensure equal opportunity for all its staff. The statutory Annual Report on action taken was submitted to the Equality Commission and can be viewed on www.eoni.org.uk. Since its submission further work has been undertaken on the introduction of a revised and simplified electoral registration form which will, later this year, be made available in a range of languages other than English. Work on preparing a Disability Action Plan commenced. All papers considered by the Management Board identified any equality issues arising from the proposals made. During the year the good practice of replying to letters in the language used by the correspondent was adopted

Human Rights

6.8 The CEO and his staff in EONI remained committed to upholding the human rights of the people of Northern Ireland and in particular the right to free elections guaranteed by Article 3 of the First Protocol to the Convention. They must, however, do so within the statutory framework set by Parliament.

The human rights implications of any new course of action were considered by the Management Board and all Board papers identified any potential human rights considerations.

Boundaries

- 6.9 The CEO is, by law, an assessor to both the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland and to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. During the year he provided a range of statistical information and attended a number of meetings with them to advance their important work.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS 2006/07

Key Targets

Objective	Outcome	Comments
1. To prepare, publish and maintain an up-to-date accurate and comprehensive electoral register for Northern Ireland each year.	Achieved	The register published on 1 December 2006 was based on the highest number of completed registration forms received since the introduction of individual registration.
2. Subject to approval by Parliament of new enabling legislation, to implement new arrangements for electoral registration including appropriate computer based facilities.	Part achieved	The required primary legislation came into force in October 2006 and the secondary legislation in May 2007. Following an evaluation of the IT options it was decided not to procure a bespoke system.
3. To conduct Parliamentary, Northern Ireland Assembly, European and District Council elections and referendums in Northern Ireland effectively, impartially within statutory timetables and to prevent electoral fraud.	Achieved	Successful elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly were conducted in March 2007.
4. To design, publish and maintain a Polling Station Scheme.	Achieved	The Scheme was revised throughout the year in light of representations received.

5. To provide advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on electoral matters.	Achieved	It has been confirmed that the advice provided was of the required standard.
6. To provide advice to the Local Government Boundary Commissioner and to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.	Achieved	It has been confirmed that the advice provided was of the required standard.

Administrative Targets

Target	Outcome	Comment
7. To operate with improved efficiency within the budget for administrative costs allocated by the NIO (£3.6m).	Achieved	The cost of delivering the service was £3.38m.
8. To implement recommendations from external and internal audit for improvements in financial control by autumn 2006.	Part achieved	More robust arrangements for implementation of audit recommendations were introduced. Some recommendations relating to registration were not possible to implement due to the new process for continuous registration.
9. To develop, install and test by March 2007 a Business Continuity Plan to cater for serious loss of essential staff and/or facilities.	Part achieved	Whilst good progress was made throughout the year work on this target had to be suspended as a result of the Assembly elections. The work is now scheduled for completion this summer.

10. To design and implement improvements to the EONI website with particular focus on making information more accessible to people with disabilities.	Achieved	The website was redesigned and brought up to best practice standards. The layout and contrast were improved to make the site easier to access for those with visual impairment.
11. To maintain the EONI established standards for dealing with complaints, responding to requests for information and advice.	Achieved	An improved complaints process was introduced.
12. To provide standard forms in Braille and large type on request and in languages other than English were reasonably required.	Achieved	The good practice of responding in the language used by the correspondent was adopted and plans were made to provide forms in a range of languages other than English.
13. To produce a training needs analysis and complementary training plan for EONI for 2006/07.	Achieved	–
14. To ensure that every member of staff is afforded the opportunities to meet the targets set in their personal development plan.	Part achieved	Work in connection with the un-scheduled Assembly elections in March 2007 meant that some planned training could not be delivered.
15. To ensure that the performance of all staff is assessed and reported in accordance with approved standards and prescribed timetables.	Achieved	A new performance management process was introduced and fully implemented.

16. To review and revise as necessary EONI's Human Resources policies to ensure that all its obligations with regard to the recruitment, employment and management of staff are addressed fully, are understood and implemented throughout the organisation, and are endorsed by the Trade Unions.	Part achieved	This target would have been met but for the un-scheduled Assembly elections in March 2007.
17. Taking account of the results of the staff survey conducted in March 2005, to develop a comprehensive communications strategy leading to an improved information pathway between the senior management team and the whole body of staff by March 2007.	Achieved	The staff survey conducted in early 2007 confirmed that there had been a significant improvement in communications as a result of the action taken following the 2005 survey.
18. To develop an intranet facility for EONI by the end of 2006.	Not achieved	Following the appointment of the new CEO it was decided to explore other less costly alternatives, including an internal newsletter, making this target inappropriate.
19. To provide a basis for measuring and recording the effectiveness and efficiency of the IP Telephony system introduced in 2005.	Achieved	New measurement arrangements were in use by September 2006.
20. To produce, by end March 2007, plans whereby voters with disabilities can gain appropriate and satisfactory access to polling stations and Area Electoral Offices.	Part achieved	Whilst good progress was made with improving access to both polling stations and EONI premises some further work is required.
21. To publish the EONI Annual Equality report by autumn 2006.	Achieved	Report published in July 2006.

22. To complete, by end of 2006, an assessment, as agreed with the Equality Commission, of the impact on both its staff and customers of information and communications technology in EONI.	Achieved	Completed July 2006
23. In light of the new approach to registration, to review by the end of March 2007, the computer database supporting the register and associated electors details and how it is presently used, with a view to ensuring that the system will contribute as effectively and efficiently as possible to the new arrangements.	Not achieved	In view of the decision not to procure a bespoke IT system to support continuous registration this target was no longer appropriate.
24. To establish and test by the end of February 2007 a Disaster Recovery Plan for EONI's registration and elections computer system.	Part achieved	The diversion of resources as a consequence of the un-scheduled Northern Ireland Assembly elections in March 2007 made this target unattainable. The work is now scheduled for completion this summer.
25. To produce performance assessment reports for all EONI staff in line with the prescribed procedures and timetables.	Achieved	-
26. To agree with the NIO the Management Statement for EONI and to establish reporting and review procedures of EONI performance in accordance with the Management Statement.	Achieved	The Management Statement was signed on 9 August 2006.

<p>27. To maintain and build on EONI's existing network of contacts with outside organisations and representative groups and to establish new contacts as required.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>	<p>Much improved relations with the Electoral Commission were established. Regular meetings held with a number of interest groups. Work on establishing an EONI stakeholder map deferred as a result of the Assembly elections.</p>
<p>28. To examine ways to extend and enhance contact in relations with the news and public information media.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>	<p>Relations with the media improved significantly and their requests for interviews and meetings were almost invariably met. Media relations training was provided to Area Electoral Officers.</p>

OPERATING COSTS

	£k
<u>Basic Pay -</u>	
Permanent Staff (includes help-line staff)	755.5
Temporary Staff in Offices	206.7
Canvassers	479.9
Basic Pay Total	1442.1
<u>Overtime -</u>	
Permanent Staff	32.5
Temporary Staff	1.8
Overtime Total	34.3
<u>Employers National Insurance -</u>	
Permanent Staff	53.2
Temporary Staff	9.8
Canvassers	4.2
Employers National Insurance Total	67.2
A.S.L.C	72.7
Total Staff	1616.3
Power	44.3
Premises (keyholding)	2.1
Maintenance And Minor Works	53.3
Professional Staff Costs	0
Training	30.7
Travel	44.6
Subsistence	2.7
Personnel Costs	4.0
Other Employee Costs	5.4
Hospitality	1.8
Office Services (Printing/equiment hire/window cleaning)	178.9
Computers (software,hardware maintenance, line rental etc)	224.0
Professional Services	19.8
Materials (mainly stationery orders)	20.4
Property charges	119.6
Postage	337.7
Telecommunications	19.3
Furniture & Fittings	0
Office Equipment	2.3

Central & Common Services (cleaning offices)	16.5
Estate Management	9.4
Insurance (premises)	6.6
Advertising	19.8
Fees	3.2
Transport Costs	3.4
Advisory Services	13.7
Operating Leases (rent of offices & photocopiers)	237.2
Total Goods & Services	1420.7
Electoral Identity Card	90.0
Non Cash Costs - Depreciation	277.5
Receipts	(192.1)
TOTAL PROGRAMME	3212.4
Capital	71.3
GRAND TOTAL	3283.7