



**The Chief Electoral Officer**

**for**

**Northern Ireland**

**Annual Report**

**2003-04**



## Foreword

This is the Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in accordance with section 14 of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962.

This Report relates to the year from 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. The Report is an account of the operations of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland during that period and provides an assessment of the achievements and a comparison of its progress against the objectives, targets and performance measures set out in its Corporate and Business Plan 2003-04.

It will be clear from the facts and circumstances recorded in the report that 2003-04 was an exceptionally difficult year. I am, however, very pleased to report that staff as ever reacted positively, professionally and effectively to the numerous challenges with which they were faced and that all the administrative activities were carried out comprehensively, efficiently and in good time. I must pay particular tribute to the small band of permanent staff who give so much to ensure that registration and elections run smoothly and to the several thousand part-time staff who deliver the service during the annual canvass and on polling days.

DENIS STANLEY  
CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER



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# 1

## Introduction

1.1 The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland (the CEO) is the Registration Officer for the whole of Northern Ireland. He is also the Returning Officer for all elections and referendums in Northern Ireland. He holds a Crown appointment, being appointed under statute by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He is independent of Government in his interpretation and administration of electoral law.

1.2 The CEO is required to carry out the functions conferred on him by law. His main duties in this regard are;

- a. Preparing and maintaining an accurate Electoral Register which also serves to select a panel for jury service.
- b. Ensuring the smooth running of elections and referendums in Northern Ireland and maintaining the public perception of an impartial and independent electoral service.
- c. Preparing polling station schemes.
- d. Minimising the scope for electoral abuse.
- e. Providing advice to the Secretary of State on all electoral matters.
- f. Providing advice to the Local Government Boundary Commission and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.
- g. Ensuring that services are delivered efficiently and effectively with due consideration for value for money.

1.3 The CEO is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of law on equality, disability, data protection and freedom of information are properly addressed in all the activities carried out on his behalf.

1.4 The CEO may delegate the performance of his functions. Accordingly the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) was established to help the CEO deliver electoral services. The CEO has delegated the day-to-day administration of his functions to the staff of the EONI, however he remains responsible for overall organisation, management and staffing.



1.5 The operations of the EONI are funded by the Northern Ireland Office and the costs of running elections by HM Treasury. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is accountable to Parliament for all expenditure by the EONI.

1.6 With the establishment of the Electoral Commission in 2000, responsibility for voter education and awareness was taken over by that body and funding withdrawn from the EONI.



2

## Performance against Key Targets

The Corporate Aim of the EONI is to support and enhance the democratic process in Northern Ireland through the provision of professional, comprehensive, effective and efficient electoral services which are viewed by all as independent and impartial.

To meet this aim the CEO defined a number of main objectives which encapsulate his statutory functions. These objectives were in turn translated into specific operational targets for 2003-04. Performance against these targets in the year is described in the table below. Performance against other administrative targets is described in section 15.

Objective	Target	Outcome
<p>To prepare, publish and maintain an up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive Register of Electors in Northern Ireland</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To compile a Register at 1 December 2003, with reference to 15 October 2003, which is not less complete in respect of eligible applicants than the Register at 1 September 2003.</li> <li>2. To compare all dates of birth on registration forms with previously obtained personal identifiers and request and obtain clarification on all inconsistent data</li> <li>3. To implement arrangements with Dept of Work and Pensions to compare all national insurance numbers provided by registered electors by March 2004</li> <li>4. To publish a Register at 1 December 2003 and revisions of the Register at the first of each month.</li> </ol>	<p>The Register published on 2 February 2004 (see Target 4 and Outcome below) was 2.6% below the Register at 1 September 2003.</p> <p>Accomplished.</p> <p>The process was started but could not be completed due to difficulties with the DWP database.</p> <p>The annual electoral canvass in autumn 2003 had to be interrupted because of the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly in November 2003. Publication of the Register was set back by Parliament to 2 February 2004 and this was duly met. Revisions of the Register were published each month</p>



Objective	Target	Outcome
<p>To conduct Parliamentary, Assembly, European and District Council elections and referendums in Northern Ireland effectively, impartially, within statutory timetables and to prevent electoral fraud.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In the event of any election held up to 1 June 2004 to take all the preliminary statutory action required strictly in accordance with the legislation and statutory timetables.</li> <li>2. In the event of any election held up to 1 April 2004 to operate all the polling stations listed in the current polling station scheme during the whole of the prescribed duration of the election so that each polling station is manned during the whole period by a Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk and to provide appropriate absent voting facilities</li> <li>3. Not less than 90% of people who voted should view the election arrangements as effective and impartial.</li> </ol>	<p>Accomplished.</p> <p>Accomplished.</p> <p>Accomplished. Based on complaints lodged with the EONI and on the evidence included in the Electoral Commission's report on the NI Assembly elections in November 2003.<sup>1</sup></p>
<p>To design, publish and maintain a polling station scheme.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To evaluate the polling station arrangements within one month of any election up to end February 2004 and consult on and implement changes as appropriate.</li> <li>2. Not less than 90% of electors should view the arrangements as satisfactory.</li> </ol>	<p>Accomplished, in conjunction with the EONI Equality Impact Assessment of the polling station scheme.</p> <p>Accomplished. Based on complaints lodged with the EONI and on the evidence included in the Electoral Commission's report on the NI Assembly elections in November 2003.<sup>1</sup></p>
<p>To implement and maintain arrangements to eliminate electoral fraud.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To investigate all reported attempted fraud, assess and take action as appropriate to reinforce or improve the relevant control(s) on fraud.</li> <li>2. To identify, collect and present evidence in respect of each fraud sufficient to sustain prosecution.</li> </ol>	<p>Accomplished.</p> <p>No prosecutable fraud was detected.</p>



Objective	Target	Outcome
To provide advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on electoral matters.	To take a view from the Secretary of State on the timeliness, quality and range of advice given.	Accomplished.
To provide advice to the Local Government Boundary Commission and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.	To take the views of the Commissions on the timeliness, quality and range of advice given.	Accomplished.

## 3

# Electoral Registration

### 3.1 The Electoral Register

The CEO is by law required to publish a completely fresh Electoral Register not later than 1 December each year. Following postponement of the Assembly election scheduled for 1 May 2003, the Northern Ireland Office discussed with the EONI the possibility of an Assembly election taking place in the autumn. The advice given to the Department was that it would be virtually impossible to run the annual canvass and, at the same time, put in place arrangements for the successful running of a major election. The Department accepted this advice and a clause was inserted in the Act which postponed the re-scheduled election of 29 May giving the Secretary of State the power to defer the annual canvass to a later date. Following the announcement of the new date of the Assembly election on 21 October 2003, secondary legislation was introduced by the Secretary of State to postpone the publication of the new Register to 2 February 2004.

As the date of Assembly elections was not announced until late October, the annual canvass was already well underway. Election legislation, however, requires that the Register to be used at any election is that which applies on the first day of the month in which nominations are taken. As legislation also stipulates that no amendments to



the Register are to be made in October or November (because of the annual canvass), the Register used at the Assembly election on 26 November was that published on 1 September. There were people not on this Register, but who completed registration forms in September or October as part of the annual canvass and expected to vote on 26 November, but were not able to do so. As soon as the 1,052,082 individually named poll cards were sent out, many people in the latter category contacted the EONI to ask why they were not included and to seek redress. There was little staff could do other than explain the legislative position and either confirm that the elector would be on the February 2004 Register, or send a registration form for completion.

It was unfortunate that some people were unable to vote because of this date awkwardness, however, the Electoral Commission had for the previous 12 months been running a major publicity campaign on registration with the theme “Secure your vote or lose it”. This was aimed at ensuring as many people as possible took advantage of the opportunities to register, including under the Rolling Registration system.

A breakdown of the Register as published on 1 December 2002, 1 September 2003 and 2 February 2004 by constituency is given below.

<b>CONSTITUENCY</b>	<b>01/12/2002</b>	<b>01/09/2003</b>	<b>02/02/2004</b>
BELFAST EAST	50929	51852	50005
BELFAST NORTH	49937	51355	49114
BELFAST SOUTH	49349	50707	49403
BELFAST WEST	48153	50873	47183
EAST ANTRIM	54569	55477	54727
EAST LONDONDERRY	55466	56202	55260



FERMANAGH AND SOUTH TYRONE	63010	64355	62993
FOYLE	62801	65312	62404
LAGAN VALLEY	65939	67921	65642
MID ULSTER	58810	60113	58950
NEWRY AND ARMAGH	66802	68740	67433
NORTH ANTRIM	69728	70493	69942
NORTH DOWN	56606	57426	56137
SOUTH ANTRIM	62349	63644	62983
SOUTH DOWN	68317	70155	68515
STRANGFORD	65558	66314	64796
UPPER BANN	67595	68816	67713
WEST TYRONE	56507	57796	55960
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1072425</b>	<b>1097551</b>	<b>1069160</b>

The above table shows that 1,069,160 electors registered in autumn 2003, against 1,072,425 who registered in autumn 2002; a reduction of 0.3%. The number of electors on the Register at 1 September 2003 was 1,097,551 and against this figure the reduction in respect of the February 2004 Register is 2.6%. The increase between 1 December 2002 and 1 September 2003 can, however, largely be accounted for by the efforts made by political parties to ensure that as many of their supporters as possible registered in the run-up to the Assembly election. Figures from research carried out by the Electoral Commission indicate that about 87% of the eligible electorate appear on the Register. The Commission is also of the view that the information held on the Register is accurate and contains few fraudulent entries.



### **3.2 The Autumn Canvass 2003**

From early September personal registration forms, pre-printed with the names and addresses of the 1.09 million electors who were on the Register at the beginning of September 2003, along with detailed guidance notes, were progressively distributed by 1,000 canvassers. The canvassers then revisited each address a week to ten days after they had delivered the registration forms to answer questions, assist electors in the completion of the form if requested, and collect forms for processing. Where there was no answer on this second call, canvassers left further blank forms and pre-paid return envelopes, together with a covering letter explaining how to submit the form. Canvassers also called at each house in their area where no electors were previously registered and left blank forms for completion.

In late October further personal registration forms were sent to the 276,600 previous electors who had not by that point returned a form; these were accompanied by further explanatory notes and a pre-paid return envelope. Blank forms were also sent to dwellings from which no response had been received by then. Although the date of publication of the new Register had by that time been postponed to 2 February 2004, because of contractual arrangements the post out of reminders had to go ahead. In the period up to the announcement of the date of the election the Electoral Commission had been running a major publicity campaign on television, in the newspapers and on public billboards on the theme “Secure Your Vote or Lose It”. This was then switched to a campaign focusing on the four forms of photographic identification needed at the election on 26 November.

### **3.3 Publication of the Register**

In compliance with normal practice, when the new Register was published as directed by Parliament on 2 February 2004 copies were placed in each of the nine Area Electoral Offices and in the 26 District Council offices for public inspection so that electors could check that names and addresses were properly recorded; copies were also made available to political parties, MPs, MEPs, MLAs and Councillors. Through the normal system of Rolling Registration anyone not on the Register was able to apply to have their name added or a change recorded (such as a new address or married name) at any time outside the canvass period.



### 3.4 Data Comparison

The personal data supplied by each elector during the annual canvass were compared with the information supplied previously. In particular, the following checks had been agreed with Ministers.

a) Date of Birth

All dates of birth given by electors in 2002 were compared with the dates of birth given in the 2003 canvass or under Rolling Registration. Follow-up action was taken where differences appeared and only confirmed dates of birth entered on to the database.

b) National Insurance Numbers

Unfortunately, technical problems were experienced with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in Great Britain who administer National Insurance records throughout the United Kingdom. Some tests were conducted against the DWP National Insurance number database but these did not produce sufficiently robust results and the EONI had difficulty interpreting the DWP data in respect of mismatches and omissions. These problems were investigated by the Social Security Agency in Northern Ireland in conjunction with EONI but despite making every effort to resolve them with DWP a check against the full EONI database could not be completed. It, however, remains a target of the EONI that a full check will be carried out of all National Insurance numbers against DWP records as soon as possible.



## 4

# The Assembly Elections

### 4.1 General

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly are the largest which the EONI is required to administer. The usual complexities of the single transferable vote system of proportional representation are exacerbated by the large number of candidates in each constituency; six MLAs are returned for each of the 18 Westminster constituencies. Consequently the count in any constituency can become very drawn out.

The Notice of Election was published on 23 October in the three Northern Ireland daily newspapers with nominations taken on 3 and 4 November. In total 256 candidates submitted nomination papers. The largest number of candidates was 19 in the East Antrim and North Down constituencies and the smallest number was 11 in the Newry & Armagh constituency. Nominations were taken by the nine Area Electoral Officers, each of whom had been appointed as a Deputy Returning Officer for two constituencies. There were no problems with the nomination process, other than the volume of candidates to be handled. Care had been taken in preparing for the election originally planned for 1 May to minimise the references to that date on the stationery and other specialised requisites. Thus wastage was minimised and changes at short notice from one date to another were accommodated with the least possible disruption.

The Northern Ireland Assembly election cost £2.4M which includes £958K for candidates election communication, but excludes security force costs. 83 candidates forfeited their deposits.

### 4.2 Polling Staff

In the four weeks between the announcement of the election and polling day on 26 November about half of the Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks who had been recruited to work when the election was planned for May withdrew. This was largely due to the time of year, with only a limited period of daylight, and a reduction in the fees set for this election by the Northern



Ireland Office. The Presiding Officer's fee was reduced to £135 from the £190 which had obtained previously and that of poll clerks was reduced to £90 from £112. This was on the grounds that on the previous occasion a Parliamentary general election had been combined with district council elections. The time of year and the reduction in fees, together with the need for all part-time staff to have full business insurance if they used their cars on election day, were sufficient to dissuade many from working on 26 November.

The Electoral Office was therefore faced with a major crisis in the run-up to the election and had to embark on a crucial campaign to find sufficient polling staff. This included enlisting the help of Ministers, the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office and the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to encourage civil servants to volunteer as polling staff. In the end, sufficient staff were found and each of the 1532 polling stations opened on time. It was, however, very precarious but achieved mainly due to the great efforts of EONI staff and the help of senior Departmental colleagues. The Northern Ireland Office was asked to look at more permanent arrangements in respect of the use of civil servants as election staff.

#### **4.3 Procedures at the Polling Station**

The Assembly election was the first major election in Northern Ireland at which all those voting in person had to provide one of four approved forms of photographic identity. In addition, Presiding Officers could, where they had doubt about the identity of the would-be voter, ask the person the statutory question "What is your date of birth?"

Election day, despite all the problems in finding so many polling staff at the last minute, went well. There were few queues and most electors produced the correct forms of photographic identification. All polling stations closed at 10.00pm and there were very few reports of electors being refused ballot papers because of having to queue. Most locations were peaceful throughout the day, but at three polling places in Londonderry civil unrest broke out with petrol and paint bombs being thrown at the buildings and then at the police called in to protect the electors and staff inside. Unfortunately this is a recurrent problem as, despite moving location from previous trouble spots, the unrest simply



reappears at the new location. In the end it is people in the local area, particularly the old and vulnerable, who are inconvenienced and have their democratic rights threatened by the trouble makers.

#### **4.4 The Electoral Identity Card**

The Electoral Identity Card is one of the four forms of photographic identity permitted by legislation for use by electors at polling stations. Applications for the Card could be made by post or in person at a number of fixed centres and mobile sites (the latter operated during September, October and November in preparation for the Assembly election in November). Around 57,000 cards were issued in 2003-04, bringing the total since January 2003 to more than 90,000. Fixed centres operated permanently in each of the Area Electoral Offices whilst mobile units visited towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland. The detailed programme was advertised in the local press in the week before each mobile unit visit.

#### **4.5 Absent Voting**

In addition to the changes for electors voting at polling stations, the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 also introduced changes in the way in which the identity of absent voters is checked. Under existing Northern Ireland legislation absent votes (i.e. postal and proxy votes) have for some years only been available on medical grounds, because of short absence abroad due to work or holiday, being a student studying away from home or where a recent move of home within the Province makes it impracticable for the voter to attend his assigned polling station. It is now necessary for the voter applying for an absent vote to provide three personal identifiers (date of birth, National Insurance number and signature) which must match those supplied during registration. When the ballot paper is returned the date of birth and signature on the accompanying declaration of identity are again checked against those supplied at registration (National Insurance number is not required by legislation at this juncture). These extra identity checks now greatly slow the processing of absent votes, although not to the point of adversely affecting either electors or their votes. The table below shows the number of absent votes (postal and proxy) by constituency.



CONSTITUENCY	ABSENT VOTES ISSUED
BELFAST EAST	502
BELFAST NORTH	620
BELFAST SOUTH	573
BELFAST WEST	543
EAST ANTRIM	477
EAST LONDONDERRY	1427
FERMANAGH & SOUTH TYRONE	4327
FOYLE	1434
LAGAN VALLEY	1022
MID ULSTER	2814
NEWRY & ARMAGH	1863
NORTH ANTRIM	1061
NORTH DOWN	563
SOUTH ANTRIM	557
SOUTH DOWN	1701
STRANGFORD	709
UPPER BANN	1118
WEST TYRONE	2942
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>24253</b>



#### 4.6 The Count

Counts took place on a constituency basis with two constituencies sharing a single count centre under control of the Deputy Returning Officer responsible for both constituencies. The details are summarised below.

CONSTITUENCIES	DEPUTY RETURNING OFFICER	COUNT CENTRES
FOYLE & MID ULSTER	Patricia Murphy	Templemore Sports Complex Buncrana Road LONDONDERRY BT48 7QL
NORTH ANTRIM & EAST LONDONDERRY	Jacqui Reid	The Joey Dunlop Centre 33 Garryduff Road BALLYMONEY BT53 7DB
WEST TYRONE & FERMANAGH & SOUTH TYRONE	Martin Fox	Omagh Leisure Complex Old Mountfield Road OMAGH
UPPER BANN & NEWRY & ARMAGH	Amanda Mason	Banbridge Leisure Centre Downshire Road BANBRIDGE
SOUTH DOWN & LAGAN VALLEY	Majella Morgan	Dromore Community Centre Lurgan Road DROMORE
EAST ANTRIM & SOUTH ANTRIM	Heather Wilson	Valley Leisure Centre 40 Church Road NEWTOWNABBEY BT36 7LJ
STRANGFORD & NORTH DOWN	Jeanette Murray	Ards Leisure Centre William Street NEWTOWNARDS BT23 4EJ
BELFAST NORTH & BELFAST WEST	Gareth Quinn	Alexander Hall Kings Hall Complex Lisburn Road BELFAST
BELFAST SOUTH & BELFAST EAST	Sharon Allen	As above



A complication arose in respect of the Joey Dunlop Centre in Ballymoney which had been agreed earlier in the year with the police as the venue for the Mid Ulster and North Antrim counts (these are the two constituencies administered by the Area Electoral Office in Ballymoney). However, in August the police informed the EONI that for operational reasons they wanted the Mid Ulster count relocated to the Templemore Sports Complex in Londonderry and to meet this demand, it became necessary to relocate the East Londonderry count to the Joey Dunlop Centre. The EONI is, of course, always anxious to accommodate the police where possible, but the late change did add complications for the Deputy Returning Officers in Ballymoney and Londonderry as each had to conduct a count in respect of one of the other's constituencies involving unfamiliar candidates and agents.

Although it had been hoped that each of the counts would have been completed the day after the election, because of the large number of candidates in most of the eighteen constituencies all counts had to be carried through into a second day. In some, few if any candidates were deemed elected at the earliest stages and in two (East Londonderry and North Down) no one was deemed elected and few eliminated until the very late stages. There was intense worldwide press interest and at times, it seemed, an expectation by the media that everything should be run to meet broadcasting schedules. Understandably the delays caused adverse comment in the press and amongst some candidates but the responsibility of the EONI is to ensure a correct result rather than be rushed into the possibility of making mistakes. There were few complaints from electors.

The names of those candidates elected as MLAs are given below.

**Belfast East:**

Peter Robinson	DUP
Reg Empey	UUP
Robin Newton	DUP
David Walter Ervine	PUP
Naomi Rachel Long	Alliance
Michael Stewart Copeland	UUP



**Belfast North:**

Nigel Alexander Dodds	DUP
Gerry Kelly	Sinn Fein
Nelson McCausland	DUP
Fred Cobain	UUP
Alban Maginness	SDLP
Kathy Stanton	Sinn Fein

**Belfast South:**

Michael McGimpsey	UUP
Simon Mark Peter Robinson	DUP
John Esmond Birnie	UUP
Carmel Hanna	SDLP
Alex Maskey	Sinn Fein
Alasdair McDonnell	SDLP

**Belfast West:**

Gerry Adams	Sinn Fein
Alex Atwood	SDLP
Bairbre de Brún	Sinn Fein
Fra McCann	Sinn Fein
Michael Ferguson	Sinn Fein
Diane Dodds	DUP

**East Antrim:**

Roy Beggs	UUP
Sammy Wilson	DUP
Ken Robinson	UUP
Sean Neeson	Alliance
David William Hilditch	DUP
Thomas George Dawson	DUP



**East Londonderry:**

Gregory Campbell	DUP
David McClarty	UUP
Francis Brolly	Sinn Fein
George Robinson	DUP
Norman Hillis	UUP
John Dallat	SDLP

**Fermanagh and South Tyrone:**

Thomas Beatty (Tom) Elliott	UUP
Arlene Isobel Foster	DUP*
Tommy Gallagher	SDLP
Michelle Gildernew	Sinn Fein
Maurice Morrow	DUP
Hugh Thomas O'Reilly	Sinn Fein

\* Elected as UUP candidate, became a member of the DUP with effect from 15 January 2004

**Foyle:**

John Mark Durkan	SDLP
William Hay	DUP
Mitchel McLaughlin	Sinn Fein
Mary Bradley	SDLP
Pat Ramsey	SDLP
Mary Nelis	Sinn Fein

**Lagan Valley:**

Jeffrey Mark Donaldson	DUP*
Edwin Cecil Poots	DUP
Billy Bell	UUP
Seamus Anthony Close	Alliance
Patricia Lewsley	SDLP
Norah Jeanette Beare	DUP*

\* Elected as UUP candidate, became a member of the DUP with effect from 15 January 2004



**Mid Ulster:**

Robert Thomas William McCrea	DUP
Martin McGuinness	Sinn Fein
Francis Joseph Molloy	Sinn Fein
Geraldine Mary Dougan	Sinn Fein
Billy Armstrong	UUP
Patsy McGlone	SDLP

**Newry and Armagh:**

Paul Leslie Berry	DUP
Conor Terence Murphy	Sinn Fein
Danny Kennedy	UUP
Dominic Bradley	SDLP
Davy Hyland	Sinn Fein
Patricia (Pat) O’Rawe	Sinn Fein

**North Antrim:**

Ian Richard Kyle Paisley	DUP
Ian Paisley Jnr	DUP
Robert James Coulter	UUP
Mervyn Storey	DUP
Philip McGuigan	Sinn Fein
Sean Farren	SDLP

**North Down:**

Robin Leslie Cree	UUP
Eileen Bell	Alliance
Alan Robert McFarland	UUP
Robert Law McCartney	UKUP
Peter James Weir	DUP
Alex Easton	DUP



**South Antrim:**

David Wilson Boyd Burnside	UUP
Samuel Wilson Clyde	DUP
Paul Girvan	DUP
Jim Wilson	UUP
Thomas Burns	SDLP
David R J Ford	Alliance

**South Down:**

Jim Wells	DUP
P J Bradley	SDLP
Dermot Nesbitt	UUP
Caitriona Ruane	Sinn Fein
Willie Clarke	Sinn Fein
Margaret Ritchie	SDLP

**Strangford:**

Iris Robinson	DUP
John David (known as Lord Kilclooney) Kilclooney	UUP
George Ennis	DUP
Jim Shannon	DUP
David Mason McNarry	UUP
Kieran McCarthy	Alliance

**Upper Bann:**

David Trimble	UUP
David Simpson	DUP
Stephen Moutray	DUP
Samuel Gardiner	UUP
Dolores Kelly	SDLP
John O'Dowd	Sinn Fein



#### **West Tyrone:**

Charles Kieran Deeny	Independent
Pat Doherty	Sinn Fein
Thomas Ernest Buchanan	DUP
Derek Robert Hussey	UUP
Barry McElduff	Sinn Fein
Eugene Anthony McMenamin	SDLP

#### **4.7 Substitutions**

There were no substitutions to the Assembly during the year.

## **5**

# **District Councils**

#### **5.1 Newry and Mourne**

A by-election took place on 18 June 2003 for the Crotlieve DEA of Newry and Mourne District Council following the resignation of Councillor Hugh Carr. The count took place on the morning of 19 June and Paul McKibben (SDLP) was elected as a Councillor.

#### **5.2 Belfast**

A co-option took place on 1 October 2003 for the Oldpark DEA of Belfast City Council following the resignation of Councillor Gerard Brophy. Carol Ni Chuilin (Sinn Fein) was co-opted as a Councillor.

#### **5.3 Ballymoney**

A co-option took place on 6 October 2003 for the Bushvale DEA of Ballymoney Borough Council following the death of Councillor John Ramsey. William Johnston (DUP) was co-opted as a Councillor.

#### **5.4 Magherafelt**

A co-option took place on 9 October 2003 for the Magherafelt Town DEA of Magherafelt District Council following the resignation of Councillor John Kelly. Sean McPeake (Sinn Fein) was co-opted as a Councillor.



## 6

# Polling Station Scheme

The Polling Station Scheme as revised after the synchronised elections of June 2001 remained largely extant for the November Assembly election, with the exception of a few polling places which were no longer available and for which alternatives had to be found. In addition, some representations were received from electors and from political parties about more suitable polling places. Also, where access for disabled electors was a difficulty, consideration was given to alternative places. At present there are 1532 polling stations in 612 polling places across Northern Ireland. Although there were few complaints from able bodied electors in respect of any of the polling places, some of the schools and halls used do not offer easy access for disabled electors. This is a great cause of concern to the EONI and the adequacy of access to polling places and stations has been further assessed as part of the Equality Impact Assessment carried out in accordance with the EONI's Equality Scheme.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, it was planned to seek alternative locations for approximately 70 polling places but this has proved problematic as often there are few suitable alternatives in many localities.

## 7

# Electoral Fraud

The effects of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 became more apparent throughout the year. The Electoral Commission regard the Electoral Register as largely accurate (albeit 13% incomplete). This is in great part due to the introduction of individual registration and the need for each elector to supply the three personal identifiers. These factors, coupled with the computer system implemented in 2002 which is capable of detailed analysis of the records of all electors, including the scanned images of their registration and absent voting application forms, has meant that the opportunity for fraud is greatly reduced. In addition, the need for specific photographic identity to be produced by all electors voting at polling stations has almost entirely removed the opportunity for personation. The Electoral Commission in their statutory report on the Assembly election say that they could find little evidence of fraud at the poll.<sup>1</sup>



**8**

## **Advice to the Secretary of State**

The CEO, together with senior colleagues met Ministers on a number of occasions during the year to discuss important electoral matters. Moreover, senior officials from the Northern Ireland Office were in frequent contact, seeking advice and comment from the EONI on a range of electoral issues. Information and guidance were provided promptly (and the EONI believes on a comprehensive and considered basis). A good working relationship exists between the EONI and Ministers and with all levels in the Northern Ireland Office.

**9**

## **The Boundary Commission**

The Parliamentary Boundary Commission continued sitting throughout the year looking at electorate change since the last recommendations were made in 1995 and how this might affect the number and dimension of Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. As an assessor to the Commission the CEO supplied registration and other data as required; deliberations are, however, likely to take some time to complete.

**10**

## **Information Technology**

The EONI's main computer system, Electoral Registration Operating System (EROS), provides a database for the Register and associated information but additionally supports an integrated election management system. This system is widely used elsewhere in the United Kingdom but had to be tailored and refined to meet the needs of individual registration in Northern Ireland. The November Assembly election was the first full-scale election managed here on the EROS system and necessitated special care over the implementation and monitoring of programs and reports being used under Northern Ireland legislation for the first time. The date of the election coinciding with the annual canvass and postponed publication



of the Register added further complications to the task. The EROS system was adapted with great speed to cope with the legislative changes precipitated by this election, including the postponement of publication of the new Register to 2 February 2004. A further adaptation allowed electors who had been issued with an Electoral Identity Card to be recorded on the registration database. Despite some difficulties the new procedures were implemented successfully.

Throughout the year considerable effort was also devoted to the introduction of a computerised payroll and accounts system. The former had been implemented in January 2003 and the latter tested thoroughly on the 2002-03 accounts for full implementation on 1 April 2003. A consultancy exercise was also undertaken in order to introduce new Human Resources software to integrate fully with the payments and accounts systems. This improved considerably financial administration and was put to good use at the November Assembly election.

## 11

## Staffing

The core staffing complement in the EONI was significantly increased during 2003-04 to deal with the administrative impact of the Electoral Fraud Act. A full-time Administrative Assistant on permanent appointment, a full-time Administrative Officer (on an 18-month contract) and an additional Administrative Assistant (also on an 18-month contract basis) were recruited for each of the nine Area Electoral Offices. All these positions were filled by open competition.

Two new additional positions were also created in Headquarters during the year – an Assistant IT Support Officer (2 year contract) and an Assistant Information Officer (permanent post). Both positions were also filled by open competition.

The total number of permanent and fixed term staff at the 31 March 2004 was 46, of which 22 are based in EONI headquarters.



## 12

# Funding and Expenditure

### 12.1 Funding

Expenditure on elections is funded by HM Treasury through the Northern Ireland Office. Expenditure at any election is governed by the Fees and Charges approved by Parliament for that election and all legitimate expenditure within these limits is met.

The costs of registration work and the general expenditure incurred in maintaining the organisation and an office infrastructure capable of delivering electoral services is met from the Northern Ireland Office estimates, approved annually by Parliament. However, because the 2003-04 baseline for the EONI was in place before the full costs of implementing the Electoral Fraud Act were known, the Department provided further resources as in-year pressures in order to facilitate delivery of the EONI statutory functions. These financial pressures had to be assessed along with all the other demands on the Department's budget and, unfortunately, decisions on the full extent of funding did not take place until the final quarter of the year.

This method of funding leaves the service deliverer with great uncertainty, particularly in the demand-led environment in which the EONI operates, until very late in the financial year. Nevertheless, the EONI managed, with a great deal of hard work and long hours at all levels, plus cuts in areas such as training, to administer the CEO's statutory functions successfully. The EONI has made strong representations to the Department for the current baseline to be revised as part of the 2004 Spending Review. In the longer term, it is understood that the Department is planning to look at the way the EONI is funded, in the context of recommendations made by the Electoral Commission.



## 12.2 Expenditure in 2003-04

The CEO has no statutory duty to prepare formal accounts. Expenditure by the EONI is accounted for in the annual accounts of the Northern Ireland Office which are subject to audit by the National Audit Office. However, the EONI's operations and systems are subject to independent internal audit, the reports of which are made available to the Department. In light of this report and other internal control mechanisms the CEO provided the Northern Ireland Office Accounting Officer with a statement of assurance about the use of resources in 2003-04.

### The Electoral Office (including Registration)

	£K	£K
Pay – Permanent staff	815	
Pay – Temporary staff	1133	
Costs of the EONI office estate	511	
Printing and Stationery	161	
Postage	162	
ID Card	818	
Capital Expenditure	135	
Other costs	<u>445</u>	
	<b>4180</b>	
Receipts		<u>218</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b><u>3962</u></b>

### The NI Assembly Elections – November 2003

	£K
Pay and costs – Poll, Count & Temporary Administrative staff	704
Postage	199
Other ( including Hire of Premises)	576
Postage - Candidates addresses	<u>958</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>2437</u></b>



## 13

# Efficiency and Effectiveness

The EONI constantly seeks to improve the electoral service and to utilise resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. In pursuit of these objectives a Change Programme has been in place for some time which is progressively examining all aspects of electoral administration in order to illuminate options for better and more efficient ways of working and provide outline plans for implementing agreed changes where appropriate.

A number of alternative approaches to registration were developed in the year via the Change Programme. These have the potential, not only to yield substantial cash savings but, building on the increased confidence in its integrity, provide opportunities for streamlining the registration process and presenting electors with a more “user friendly” procedure.

The Change Programme is also aimed at delivering management improvements and began initial consideration of corporate and project planning, risk assessment, financial management, performance measurement and analysis, staff development and training, IT and information management systems, and openness and public accountability in reporting. It also took account of all current and ongoing Government initiatives for improving performance in these areas. Throughout the year staff in the EONI kept in regular contact with electoral administrators in Great Britain and in the Republic of Ireland in order to take full account of best practice, including that promulgated by the Electoral Commission.

An internal evaluation was conducted of each EONI project immediately after completion with special attention given to external research and analysis of electoral administration in Northern Ireland, particularly that conducted by the Electoral Commission. The EONI also conducted internal evaluations of performance after the conclusion of the 2003 annual canvass and in the wake of the November Assembly election and took a very active part in a seminar organised by the Electoral Commission after the election. This sought immediate perspectives on the conduct of the election from a wide range of interested parties including politicians and the media and provided positive feedback on all aspects of the administration.



## 14

# Equality

The EONI has implemented an Equality Scheme<sup>2</sup> approved by the Equality Commission. The Scheme demonstrates the EONI's commitment to the fulfilment of its obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, that is the promotion of equality of opportunity and of good relations.

During the year the EONI addressed a number of general and particular duties deriving from the Scheme. It has given special attention to ensuring that adequate resources were provided to allow proper compliance with the Scheme and that effective internal arrangements were in place to fulfil its duties under the Scheme and that progress was monitored and reviewed throughout the year. More particularly, the EONI has continued to deliver the planned programme of communication and training on this Scheme for staff. In addition, in line with the agreed plan in the Scheme for review, all the policies, powers, duties and functions of the CEO as they are implemented by the EONI were examined. A comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the Polling Station Scheme was also conducted. The EQIA included extensive public consultation and review with a wide range of stakeholders. A draft report of the EQIA was prepared and has been made widely available for consultation.



15

## Administrative Targets

The following administrative targets were set in the Business Plan.

Target	Outcome
<b>Financial management</b>	
To manage the workload in 2003-04 within a running costs budget (to cover salaries and administrative expenditure) to financial limits agreed with the Northern Ireland Office (including in-year adjustments).	Achieved.
To maintain accounting system to ensure that it meets the needs of Parliament, Ministers, the Northern Ireland Office and the EONI.	Achieved.
To maintain a financial fraud prevention culture at all levels.	Achieved.
To agree an audit programme with the Northern Ireland Office by September 2003.	Achieved.
To review the EONI financial delegations, by December 2003.	Achieved.
To prepare a draft Corporate Plan for 2004-2007 and a draft Annual Business Plan for 2004-05 by March 2004.	Due to uncertainty about the resources available for 2004-05 it was not possible to prepare plans within the target time.
<b>Quality of Service</b>	
To reply to at least 95% of letters within 10 working days of receipt.	Achieved.
To attend to callers at any EONI location within five minutes.	Achieved.
To acknowledge at least 95% of Rolling Registration claims within three working days from the date of the relevant hearing.	Achieved.
To respond to telephone enquiries on the same day or at the latest within 24 hours.	Achieved.
To reply, within seven working days, to those who raise matters of concern with the CEO. (In exceptional cases when an interim reply is necessary, a full reply will be issued within 10 days).	Achieved.
To provide timely and appropriate information to the press, community groups and individuals who have an interest in the work of the EONI. This will continue to be done by way of press briefings, media interviews and presentations to community groups. Individuals who approach the EONI for information will be answered in person, by telephone or letter, as appropriate.	Achieved.
To provide clear and straightforward information about EONI service in simple textual format, (similarly in Braille, in large type and on tape cassette for those with sight difficulties) and provide a central telephone enquiry point.	Achieved.
To continue to operate the Complaints procedures and to send out information about the procedure upon request.	Achieved.
To conduct, by December 2003, pilot Equality impact assessments.	Achieved.
To produce, by December 2003, an EONI Charter Statement.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 prevented completion of a number of strategic objectives and targets.



Target	Outcome
To produce, by March 2004, a plan for assisting voters with disabilities to gain access to polling stations and Area Electoral Offices.	Not achieved due to resource constraints.
To revise and update, by March 2004, the EONI Quality Service Plan using, inter alia, the European Business Excellence Model, to include recommendations on how to improve further leadership, business processes and customer satisfaction.	Not achieved due to resource constraints.
<b>Human Resources</b>	
To keep under review pay and grading arrangements to ensure that they meet the needs and circumstances which are likely to obtain throughout the year.	Achieved.
To keep under review staffing levels to ensure they are consistent with the volume of work.	Achieved.
To manage absenteeism with the aim of ensuring that the average level for the year is no higher than 4%.	Achieved.
To conduct regular meetings with trade union representatives in accordance with the established EONI / trade union arrangements.	Not achieved as it has not been possible to hold meetings with NIPSA representatives due to industrial action in the NICS.
To conduct a staff opinion survey and to implement such practicable improvements as the survey results suggest.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 prevented completion of a number of strategic objectives and targets. However the Senior management Team meets regularly with Area Electoral Officers at Team Leaders Meetings.
To conduct regular reviews of health and safety matters, and arrange training as appropriate.	Achieved
To prepare an EONI staff handbook by September 2003.	Achieved
To prepare, by December 2003, a service level agreement with the Northern Ireland Office for the provision of central personnel support services.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the NI Assembly elections to November 2003 prevented completion of a number of strategic objectives and targets
To monitor the completion and updating of Personal Development Plans throughout the year.	Achieved.
To continue induction and job-related training for all staff.	Achieved.
To computerise the training records of all staff.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 prevented completion of a number of strategic objectives and targets
To arrange, by September 2003, appropriate training for all staff tutors.	Not achieved due to resource constraints.
To implement, by October 2003, a leadership training programme for middle and senior management on the subject of "Managing Change".	Not achieved due to resource constraints.



To review, by December 2003, the EONI in-year Training Plan, in response to needs identified in the staff opinion survey.	Not achieved due to resource constraints.
To establish the national standard set by Investors in People through the regular analysis of training needs, the issuing of quarterly training reports leading to an annual training report and the production of a new training plan in March 2004.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 seriously disrupted proposed training programmes.
To review by December 2003 the arrangements with the Department's Training and Development Branch for the provision of training services.	Not achieved due to resource constraints.
<b>Internal Communications</b>	
To maintain the system of monthly Team Leaders' meetings	Achieved.
To review, by December 2003, the Internal Communication Plan in light of the staff opinion survey.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 seriously disrupted proposed training programmes.
<b>Information Systems</b>	
To complete by December 2003 a feasibility study and business case in respect of an integrated telephone system serving all EONI locations.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 prevented completion of a number of strategic objectives and targets
To examine by December 2003 how the new computer system could best be developed to meet the needs of staff.	An ongoing programme of minor enhancements was carried out.
To review by December 2003 the EONI contingency plans in the event of a major disruption at St Anne's House.	Not achieved. The pressures created by the postponements of the Northern Ireland Assembly election to November 2003 prevented completion of a number of strategic objectives and targets.

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<sup>1</sup> The Electoral Commission: The Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2003 – The official report on the Northern Ireland Assembly elections 26 November 2003 [April 2004]

<sup>2</sup> The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland: Equality Scheme – Approved by the Equality Commission 10 June 2003