



**THE ELECTORAL OFFICE**  
**FOR**  
**NORTHERN IRELAND**

**BUSINESS PLAN 2011-12**

## FOREWORD

by

**Graham Shields, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland**

2011/12 will be a demanding year for the Electoral Office. We will, for the first time, run simultaneous elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly and local government, as well as a referendum on the introduction of the Alternative Vote system for Westminster elections.

In addition, we will continue our work to maintain the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the electoral registers and will again undertake the Schools Initiative which has proved to be so successful in securing the registration of young people.

The targets and development objectives set out in the Business Plan for 2011/12 are challenging but I have no doubt my staff will demonstrate their usual dedication in doing everything practicable to secure their achievement.



Graham Shields  
Chief Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

31 May 2010

# **EONI BUSINESS PLAN 2011 - 2012**

## **Introduction**

This Business Plan follows the same format as last year. After outlining the planning process followed for its preparation, the planning assumptions made in drawing it up and the Electoral Office Targets for 2011/12 are set out. It goes on to list the Development Objectives for the year. These are the significant areas of new work which it is intended to complete during the year.

The Plan does not include the routine work carried out by the Electoral Office in connection with electoral registration or the preparation for, and conduct of, free and fair elections. These matters are dealt with either in Area Office or business unit plans or in the forward job plans of individual members of staff.

The Plan is available on request, in other formats and languages. Please phone 0800 4320 712 (textphone 028 9044 6698) or email [info@eoni.org.uk](mailto:info@eoni.org.uk). It can be viewed on [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk).

## **Planning Assumptions**

In drawing up this Business Plan the planning assumptions set out below have been made. The Targets and Development Objectives are set on the basis that these assumptions will turn out to be correct. If that does not prove to be so then changes to them may be required:

1. Combined NI Assembly and local government elections and AV referendum will take place on 5 May 2011.
2. There will be no significant changes to the law or practice relating to electoral registration.
3. The Secretary of State will not order a canvass of electors.

4. Sufficient funding for the combined elections and AV referendum, registration activities and the running of the Electoral Office purposes will be made available.
5. There will be a Parliamentary by-election for Belfast West.

## **Targets**

1. **To deliver free and fair combined NI Assembly and local government elections and AV referendum within the budget allocated.**

Providing free and fair elections and referendum in all 18 constituencies at a cost within the election budget allocated is the key target for 2011/12.

2. **To submit the report for the year to 31 March 2011 to the Secretary of State by 30 June 2011.**

The Chief Electoral Officer has a statutory obligation to submit an annual report to the Secretary of State. Submitting it by 30 June will enable it to be laid in both Houses of Parliament and published before the recess.

3. **To publish on 1 December 2011 a register that contains more electors and is at least as accurate as the December 2010 register.**

The accuracy and comprehensiveness of the registers are statutory objectives.

4. **To operate the Electoral Office efficiently, effectively and within budget throughout the year.**

The office will continue to build on the efficiency measures taken during the last year and will stand ready to make further savings, where practicable, without adversely effecting customer service.

**5. To run a free and fair by-election for Belfast West.**

Providing a free and fair by-election with the budget allocated is a key target.

## **Development Objectives**

### **Customer Service**

**1. To maintain high levels of customer service.**

The Customer Service Excellence award was awarded to EONI on 1 April 2011. We will endeavour to maintain the high standards required to obtain this prestigious award.

**2. By 31 December 2011 to develop a course in customer care suited to the particular needs of the Electoral Office and its customers and to have it accredited by a recognised independent authority.**

Whilst some aspects of the work of customer-facing Electoral office staff is common to anyone dealing with the public other aspects are of a specialist nature. To ensure that all staff are equipped with the necessary skills it is intended to develop and have accredited a new training course.

### **Registration**

**3. At the combined elections and referendum in May 2011 to issue a registration form to all unregistered persons who attend to vote.**

At all elections some people attend to vote at the polling station but cannot do so because they are not on the electoral register. It is intended to provide all such persons with a registration form and pre-paid envelope to assist them in registering before the next election.

- 4. By 31 December 2011 to carry out registration visits to at least 85% of further education colleges and at least 95% of post primary schools with at least 10 pupils of registration age who are not registered.**

An amendment to the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2008 which came into force in 2010 gave the Chief Electoral Officer power to obtain information on those attending FE colleges. This information was used successfully in 2010 to encourage registration by those who left school at 16 years of age. This initiative and the Schools Initiative which was so successful in 2010/11 will be undertaken again with only minor modifications.

- 5. To continue to evaluate initiatives aimed at meeting the registration objectives set in legislation.**

We will continue to build on this work to develop further registration initiatives.

- 6. By 31 March 2012, to formulate a consistent approach to improving the quality of the property database.**

The property database holds approximately 720,000 records. We will aim to improve the consistency of the address formats held on the database.

## **Elections**

- 7. By 31 March 2012 to review practices and procedures in light of lessons learned at the combined elections and AV referendum.**

The Electoral Office is committed to working with the Northern Ireland Office and the Electoral Commission to improve the efficiency of the electoral process in Northern Ireland. Work to be jointly undertaken will include, for example, an examination of the possibility of using electronic counting or constituency based counting at future elections. We will also work with the Electoral Commission to see if performance standards for elections and electoral registration can be developed to meet the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland.

The review process will commence in the Autumn of 2011.

- 8. To review security procedures and physical security throughout the EONI estate.**

The review will consider the physical security of EONI premises, and also examine process for ensuring information security and staff compliance with these processes.

- 9. By 31 March 2012 to review the recruitment, testing requirements and training of casual workers for elections, registration and other duties.**

Several thousand casual staff are employed at elections. At other times it is necessary to use casual staff to cover for sickness or to deal with workload peaks. A pool of staff willing to undertake such work will be established following a review of current staffing, open recruitment competition and testing where appropriate.

- 10. By 31 December 2011 to close the account for the AV referendum.**

- 11. To monitor and manage the account for the NI Assembly Elections to ensure it can be closed by 30 April 2012.**
- 12. To develop a programme of work to conduct an audit of inequalities to inform the development of an Equality Action Plan and to prepare an Equality Scheme for submission to the Equality Commission by 1/5/2012.**

EONI is required by law to complete this process, advance notification of which is due to be received in August 2011.

- 13. By 31 March 2012, to review procedures for the issue of Electoral Identity Cards.**

The review will examine the application process for the issue of Electoral Identity Cards with a view to enhancing its integrity and efficiency.

- 15. To commence a review of the EONI office estate.**

The leases on most offices in the EONI estate are due to expire in late 2012/ early 2013. This provides an opportunity to examine the size and locations of our premises across Northern Ireland to ensure the most efficient and effective use of financial and human resources. The review will, in due course, take account of the recommendations of the Boundary Commission review into the parliamentary constituency boundaries which is due to be completed in 2013.