

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2009-2010

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

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The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP
Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
11 Millbank
London
SW1P 4PN

1 July 2010

Dear Secretary of State,

I have the honour, in accordance with section 9(1) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, to present this Report on how I have discharged my functions for the year ending 31 March 2010.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Bain CBE TD Advocate
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

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Belfast
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FOREWORD

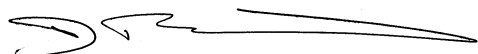
This, my fifth and final Annual Report outlines the significant achievements of my colleagues in the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland in the year to 31 March 2010.

During that year a free and fair election for the European Parliament was conducted and all the Business Plan Targets and Development Objectives that remained relevant were achieved.

That would not have been possible without the co-operation so willingly given by a wide range of organisations many of whom are mentioned in the Report. But above all it could not have been achieved without the unstinting support I continued to receive from my staff at all levels and at all locations. I can say without hesitation that they are the most dedicated colleagues with whom it has been my pleasure to work during my more than 30 years service in the public sector.

One former colleague deserves special mention. June Butler retired from the post of Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections) in autumn 2009 after many years of making a real contribution to electoral services in Northern Ireland. It was fitting that her work was recognised by the award of a MBE in the Birthday Honours List 2010.

I was most fortunate that she has been replaced by someone of the calibre of Graham Shields who took up post in January 2010 on his retirement as a District Commander in the PSNI.



Douglas Bain CBE TD Advocate
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

1 July 2010

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SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

Electoral Administration in Northern Ireland

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

Role of the Chief Electoral Officer

1.2 The main duties of the Chief Electoral Officer are:

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

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

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

Role of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

1.4 The Electoral Office is the name given to the group of permanent and casual staff who support the Chief Electoral Officer in the performance of his duties. It 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 Chief Electoral Officer;
- providing staffing and other resources necessary to maintain the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland; and
- consulting as necessary with the Chief Electoral Officer and the Electoral Commission on legislation and policy proposals.

1.6 The Secretary of State is supported in this role by the Minister of State and officials from the Rights, Elections and Legacy Division of the Northern Ireland Office.

Role of the Electoral Commission

1.7 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Its aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. It also regulates party and election finance and in Great Britain set standards for well-run elections and electoral registration.

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

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

1.9 The Commission has a range of functions in Northern Ireland. Its key role is to monitor and regulate party and election finance, including donations and loans to political parties and regulated donees. It also has a statutory duty to report on the main elections in Northern Ireland. The Commission has sole responsibility for public awareness of electoral registration and elections and undertakes media activity to promote it. It has no executive functions in relation

to the registration of electors or the conduct of elections. These are the sole responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Funding Arrangements

1.10 The salary costs of the Chief Electoral Officer, as an independent statutory officeholder, are met from the Consolidated Fund. 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 any Northern Ireland Assembly elections is found from the Northern Ireland block. District councils meet the cost of their own elections.

SECTION 2 - PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS

- 2.1 This section summarises the performance achieved against the three Targets and 19 Development Objectives set out in the Business Plan 2009/10 which can be viewed at www.eoni.org.uk.
- 2.2 The three Targets were achieved in full.
- 2.3 All but one of the 19 Development Objectives were achieved in full. Work on the remaining anonymous registration objective was suspended when the Northern Ireland Office again postponed introduction of the required legislation.
- 2.4 Further details of performance against Targets and Development Objectives are at Annex A.

SECTION 3 – REGISTRATION

Statistics

- 3.1 The revised register published on 1 December 2009 contained 1,170,336 electors a net increase of 27,789 in the electorate compared with the previous year. By 31 March 2010 that number had risen to 1,185,427 the highest ever figure in Northern Ireland.
- 3.2 During the period of this report 51,298 individuals were registered in Northern Ireland for the first time, 27,501 changed their qualifying address whilst 21,571 were removed from the register as a result of death or becoming ineligible. 7,269 other modifications were made to the register. The total number of changes made to the registration information held was 107,639 a reduction of 23% compared with the unusually high figure in 2007/08 but higher than that in 2006/07 which was the first year of continuous registration.

Continuous Registration

Overview

- 3.3 The year was one of further development of the practices and procedures for the system of continuous registration that replaced the annual canvass in Northern Ireland. All such changes were designed to make it easier for individuals to register whilst safeguarding the controls in place to secure the accuracy of the register and to prevent fraudulent registrations.

Information by Public Authorities

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

authority. Whilst some have questioned the need for such confirmation of the information provided, it is the view of the Chief Electoral Officer that because of the inaccuracy of a small percentage of the information received it would be unsafe to proceed to change the register without confirmation by the elector concerned.

Business Service Organisation

- 3.5 The main source of information on changes of address of registered electors was the Business Services Organisation. On a quarterly basis that organisation provides information on all those registered with any part of the Health Service who had, according to that organisation's records, changed their name or address. No medical or other sensitive information was provided. On receipt of such notification a letter was sent to all the individuals reminding them to submit an application if they were not already registered or to update the details of their name or address if they had changed since the date of their last application. During the year more than 121k such letters were issued.
- 3.6 Following concerns about occasions on which several such letters were sent to the same individual processes were introduced to eliminate, so far as practicable, duplication. These were successful.

Department of Work and Pensions

- 3.7 Although the decision implemented last year to allow all Area Offices access to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) data held by the Electoral Office resulted in improvements to the registration process it was not satisfactory in all cases. DWP provide an annual 'dump' of relevant data on all those who have a national insurance number and who have an address in Northern Ireland. This is supposed to be supplemented by quarterly information on those resident in Northern Ireland who attain 17 years of age. No information is provided during the year on those who move to or leave Northern Ireland, who change address within Northern Ireland or who change

their name. The information on which Electoral Office staff take decisions is therefore neither current nor complete.

- 3.8 To address these shortfalls the Chief Electoral Officer sought direct online access to the relevant parts of the DWP database. Many local authorities in Great Britain already have such access. Whilst DWP were content to allow such access their proposed charges for so doing were unaffordable within the Electoral Office budget.
- 3.9 In view of the decision not to proceed with that request the Chief Electoral Officer next asked that the quarterly updates of information should be in respect of those attaining 16 rather than 17 years. In this way it was hoped that it would be possible to contact those who leave school at 16 many of whom are missed during the Schools Initiative described below. This change was agreed by DWP but at the year end had not been implemented for reasons which were unclear to the Chief Electoral Officer.
- 3.10 Difficulties and delays occurred during the year as a result of DWP's failure to comply with their statutory duty to provide the required information. It is understood that these failures were due to concerns about the transmission of personal data. As a consequence a number of the quarterly updates were not received which meant that the Electoral Office was unable to contact new 17 year olds to encourage them to register.
- 3.11 A number of registration initiatives were undertaken during the year using the information that was provided by DWP. When applying to register as an elector individuals must give their national insurance number or state that they do not have one. A check of the registration database revealed that there were 3,413 electors who had stated that they did not have a national insurance number. Comparison with the DWP database disclosed that 1,109 of these individuals did in fact have a national insurance number. A letter was sent to each of them asking that they provide their number. 390 individuals who failed to do so were removed from the register.

- 3.12 In the period between the last annual canvass in 2006 and the first running of the Schools Initiative in autumn 2008 few persons registered as electors when reaching registration age. The names of all persons in this cohort with dates of birth between December 1989 and July 1991 were available from the DWP database. These names were checked against the Electoral Office database and letters encouraging registration were sent, in November 2009, to the 10,520 individuals who were not registered. As a result 2,823 young people were registered for the first time whilst eight others updated their registration particulars. A further 6,000 similar letters were issued in March 2010.
- 3.13 Using the quarterly updates on those attaining aged 17 that were received, letters encouraging registration were sent to 11,744 young people between April and December 2009. As a result 3,443 young people were registered for the first time and 18 other modifications were made to the register. Unfortunately, because of their concerns about the provision of personal information, DWP declined to provide any updates after December 2009 so that it was not possible to continue with the successful initiative.

Registrar General

- 3.14 The Registrar General for Northern Ireland continued to provide weekly lists of all those whose deaths had been registered in Northern Ireland, whilst the Senior Coroner provided monthly lists of those whose death was awaiting an inquest. The Registrar General in the Republic of Ireland provided six monthly lists of those who had died in his jurisdiction whose last address was in Northern Ireland. Using this information 12,463 deceased persons were removed from the register.

Post Primary Schools

- 3.15 The Schools Initiative, run with such success in 2008/09, was undertaken again, with minor modifications, between September and December 2009.

- 3.16 During that period all but four post-primary schools in Northern Ireland with more than 10 pupils of registration age received a visit from Electoral Office staff. Despite approaches by the Chief Electoral Officer and politicians these four schools refused to facilitate a visit by Electoral Office staff during the normal school day. Their attitude to the registration of their pupils is difficult to comprehend and it is to be hoped that this tiny minority will in future afford their pupils the same opportunity to register as the vast majority of schools.
- 3.17 Despite that lack of co-operation by these four schools, the Schools Initiative was again highly successful. By January 2010 13,197 attainers (young people under age 18 years) had been added to the electoral register largely as a result of it.

District Councils

- 3.18 The Electoral Office maintains a database of all residential accommodations in Northern Ireland. To assist in maintaining its accuracy all district councils were required to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with information on new residential properties on a monthly basis. Some appeared to find it difficult to comply with this legal requirement whilst the quality of information available from some others was a cause for concern.
- 3.19 In an attempt to find a better way of keeping the property database up to date, Electoral Office staff worked closely with those responsible for the POINTER database which is intended to provide a comprehensive property database for use by all public sector organisations in Northern Ireland. Some 7,443 apparent mis-matches between the Electoral Office and POINTER databases were identified as a result of which 3,058 properties were removed from the Electoral Office database. Unfortunately, information obtained from the POINTER database on properties that had, according to it, been demolished but at which electors were registered proved to be inaccurate and unsafe to use.

Northern Ireland Office

3.20 The NIO continued to provide information on all those in Northern Ireland who became British citizens. During the year letters were sent by the Chief Electoral Officer to 747 individuals from 63 countries who were not already registered. By 1 July 2010 94.3% of them had been registered.

3.21 The previous nationalities of these new electors is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Previous Nationalities of New British Electors

	2009/10	2008/09		2009/10	2008/09
Philippines	391	104	Georgia	-	1
China	69	27	Afghanistan	3	1
India	49	21	Pakistan	5	1
Hong Kong	20	11	Romania	4	1
Zimbabwe	4	7	Switzerland	-	1
Turkey	9	7	Indonesia	-	1
Bulgaria	7	7	Libya	-	1
Ukraine	7	6	Tunisia	3	1
Kosovo	1	5	Taiwan	-	1
USA	12	5	Cuba	1	1
South Korea	4	4	Iraq	4	1
Belarus	1	4	Lebanon	4	1
Nigeria	3	4	Sudan	9	1
Thailand	11	3	Australia	1	1
Albania	2	3	Algeria	-	1
South Africa	29	3	Costa Rica	-	1
Brazil	3	2	Azerbaijan	-	1
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	-	2	Republic of Serbia	-	1
Morocco	5	2	Ghana	3	1
Canada	-	2	Colombia	-	1
Syria	-	2	Uganda	-	1
Ecuador	-	2	Nepal	3	1
Argentina	-	2	Western Sahara		1
Guyana	-	2	St Vincent & The Grenadines	-	1
Egypt	18	2	Republic of Moldova	-	1
Jamaica	-	2	Zambia	2	1
Japan	1	2	Palestinian Authority	1	
Maysara, Palestinian Authority	1	-	Hebron, Palestinian Authority	1	-
Macedonia	1	-	Germany	1	-
Saudi Arabia	1	-	Gambia	2	-

Kenya	4	-	Italy	2	-
Trinidad & Tobago	1	-	Poland	1	-
Dominican Republic	1	-	Chile	1	-
Russian Federation	10	-	Peru	1	-
Mauritius	2	-	Ireland	1	-
Kazakhstan	1	-	Oman	1	-
Somalia	1	-	Fiji	1	-
Bangladesh	7	-	Jordan	1	-
Lithuania	1	-	Vietnam	2	-
Israel	1	-	Venezuela	1	-
Kyrgyzstan	2	-	Portugal	1	-
Malaysia	3	-	Iran	4	-

Mini – Canvasses

3.22 Building on lessons learnt in 2008/09 mini-canvasses were conducted by four Area Electoral Offices in nine wards selected because of their low levels of electoral registration. Registration forms were posted out to the 19,348 electors and to the 5,225 properties in those wards at which no one was registered. This year it was made clear that returning the form was voluntary and that those who chose not to do so would not be removed from the register. As a result of the work 1,255 individuals were registered for the first time whilst 790 updated their address details. The property database was updated as a result of information obtained.

Overseas Electors

3.23 The Electoral Commission runs a costly campaign each year to encourage registration by overseas electors. Whatever may have been its impact in Great Britain it has had little or no success in Northern Ireland where the number of overseas electors on 1 April 2009 was only 29.

3.24 Despite the fact that sole responsibility for public awareness of registration lay with the Electoral Commission it was decided to launch a modest initiative to encourage registration by those eligible overseas electors resident in the Isle of Man and in the Republic of Ireland. Persons, resident in these jurisdictions are, in electoral law, overseas and provided they meet the other criteria are

entitled to register and vote as overseas electors. The Electoral Commission's campaigns appeared never to have targeted these individuals.

- 3.25 Three Area Electoral Offices worked to encourage registration by those former Northern Ireland residents now living in the Republic and the Isle of Man. Media coverage was obtained, in many cases free of charge, in these jurisdictions, the political parties were informed, notices were displayed and in parts of Donegal a leaflet drop was undertaken.
- 3.26 Although there was significant initial interest, especially in the Republic of Ireland, the results were disappointing. Whilst the target of increasing the number of overseas electors by 25% was easily achieved the actual number of new electors was only 22.
- 3.27 It appears that the main stumbling block was the legal requirement for applications to be attested by a British passport holder. Fortunately the Northern Ireland Office has committed to removing that obstacle for those resident in the Republic of Ireland. A further initiative there will be considered when that amendment to the law has been made.

National Fraud Initiative

- 3.28 Details of the Electoral Office participation in this initiative were given at paragraphs 3.28 of the 2008/09 Report.
- 3.29 As a result of information obtained on apparent discrepancies between the electoral register and data held by the Housing Executive and the Lands and Property Services Agency and in the payroll records of a wide range of public sector organisations, letters were sent to 12,308 registered electors seeking confirmation of their correct details. As a result of the responses received 1,182 changes were made to the register. It is understood that as a result of Electoral Office participation a number of cases of potential fraud against other public sector organisations are under investigation. The cost of each change to the electoral register was disproportionate to the results obtained

and it is unlikely that the Electoral Office will be able, due to lack of resources, to participate in the next running of the National Fraud Initiative. Discussions in this matter were ongoing with the Northern Ireland Audit Office at the year end.

Other Registration Initiatives

- 3.30 The Electoral Office is not the only public sector organisation that relies on the public to give information if they change their name or address. In an attempt to encourage the public to do so agreement was reached with the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) that they would include a registration leaflet in all road fund licence reminders issued by them in early 2010. Some 350,000 such leaflets were issued. In return a DVA leaflet reminding individuals of the need to report to that Agency any change of name or address was included along with all registration reminders issued by the Electoral Office. The cost of such initiatives was minimal and similar arrangements with other organisations are planned for 2010/11.
- 3.31 In February 2010 letters were sent to all nursing homes and similar establishments seeking their support in ensuring that all their residents had an opportunity to register and that the details of those on the register were correct. At the same time information was given on the availability of postal and proxy votes for their residents.
- 3.32 A number of other registration initiatives were undertaken some of which are described in Section 7 of this Report.

Free Prize Draw

- 3.33 The Free Prize Draw continued on a quarterly basis. To secure maximum media coverage the draws took place in a different part of Northern Ireland on each occasion and were made by the Mayor or other person well known in the locality. The annual cost of the Draw was less than £5k and the anecdotal

evidence available was that it continued to be a very significant factor in encouraging registration particularly by young people.

Electoral Identity Cards

3.34 The production of electoral identity cards was, as planned, brought in-house on 1 April 2009. As a result of the meticulous planning undertaken by the Information Officer and her colleagues there was a seamless transition from external to internal production. During the year 10,281 cards were issued. The average time between receipt of a properly completed application and dispatch of the card was reduced by around two weeks to two days. The total cost of card production, including one-off setting up costs, was £41.8k.

Meeting the Registration Objectives

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

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

“to secure, so far as reasonably practicable –

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

First Registration Objective

3.37 The total electorate on 1 December 2009 was 1,170,336. The Registrar General and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research

Agency advised that the estimated eligible population on that date was 1,374,300. The register published on 1 December 2009 was, on that basis, 85.2% comprehensive. The increase of 1.8% over the year reflects the success of the registration work undertaken.

3.38 The ways in which it is intended to offer those individuals who are not registered the opportunity to so do are outlined in the Electoral Office Business Plan 2010/11 which can be viewed at www.eoni.org.uk.

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

Second Registration Objective

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

3.41 The Electoral Commission, although carrying out work on the accuracy of the register in parts of Great Britain to inform work on the introduction of individual registration there, were unable to carry out any work on the accuracy of the Northern Ireland register.

3.42 There is, however, no reason to believe that there was any significant change in the accuracy of the register over the period of this Report. The work described above and elsewhere in the Report all tended to maintain the high level of accuracy. The small number of poll cards issued at the June 2009 election which were returned as undelivered by Royal Mail was also supportive of the continuing accuracy of the register.

Third Registration Objective

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

Assessment

3.44 Based on the foregoing it is assessed that the statutory registration objectives have, to a large extent, been met.

Recommendation about a Canvass

3.45 Under section 10ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983 a canvass of electors was to be held in 2010 unless the Secretary of State made an order that it was not.

3.46 Following advice from the Chief Electoral Officer that an annual canvass within less than nine months of the General Election would almost certainly result in a significant reduction in the eligible electorate, the Secretary of State accepted the recommendation that no canvass should take place. The Representation of the People (Timing of the Canvass) (Northern Ireland) Order 2010 gave effect to that decision.

SECTION 4 - ELECTIONS

Introduction

4.1 This section outlines the actions taken in connection with the European Parliamentary election in June 2009, the by-election for the Lurgan District Electoral Area and the preparation for the Parliamentary General election. It also gives information on cases of suspected breaches of electoral law most of which were election related.

European Parliamentary Election

4.2 Elections to the European Parliament are held on a fixed date every five years. That facilitates early preparation and planning much of which was undertaken during 2008/09 as outlined in last year's Report.

4.3 Following a review of all polling stations a number were identified at which access was poor for voters with restricted mobility. Where possible arrangements were made to provide ramps at these locations to improve access. Where off street parking was not provided the PSNI provided cones which were used to indicate disabled only parking. There remained a small number of polling stations at which, despite these measures, access was not good. To address that issue a non-statutory Restricted Access Polling Station Scheme was developed and used, for the first time, at the 2009 election.

4.4 Under that Scheme a letter was sent to all electors allocated to a polling station with unsatisfactory access. The letter advised of that fact and set out the alternatives of voting at that polling station using assistance, applying for a postal or proxy vote or the new third option of voting at an alternative polling station with better access. Anyone wishing to avail of the third option was asked to complete and return a simple application form. Although this Scheme, which is unique to Northern Ireland, was warmly welcomed by groups representing those with disabilities, the uptake by electors was low. Following the election the Scheme was modified to reflect feedback received.

- 4.5 Because of the significant changes to electoral law such as the abolition of ballot paper counterfoils and their replacement by corresponding numbers lists, the replacement of the imprint device by a security mark on the ballot paper and the changes to the photographic identification requirements, all polling station staff were provided with training prior to polling day. The training of more than 2,900 casual staff had to be delivered outside normal office hours and was a considerable commitment for the Area Electoral Officers and their staff.
- 4.6 To assist voters the layout of the poll cards was revised to omit much unnecessary detail and to simplify the language. For the first time in Northern Ireland a map showing the location of the elector's allotted polling station was shown.
- 4.7 At previous elections the Electoral Commission provided a call centre facility to deal with enquiries about the election from members of the public. This duplicated the work undertaken by the permanent Helpline at the Electoral Office. The Commission's facility was expensive and the accuracy of the information given was, on occasion, of doubtful quality. Following discussion between the Chief Electoral Officer and the Head of the Commission's Belfast Office it was agreed that for the European Parliamentary election the Commission would simply fund additional staff for the Helpline at Electoral Office HQ. These staff were employed and trained by the Electoral Office. The new arrangement worked well and provided a better service to the public at a reduced cost. It has been agreed as the model for future elections in Northern Ireland.
- 4.8 Election day was 4 June 2009 and ran smoothly despite attempts by dissident republicans to disrupt the election by placing improvised explosive devices at two polling stations in Lurgan. These were dealt with quickly by the police and army without any significant disruption to the voting process.

- 4.9 The activities at polling stations of a number of party activists again caused concern to electors who felt intimidated. Complaints about these activities were received from a number of political parties. Such activities, whether by polling agents within the polling station or by other activists outside the polling place tend to undermine confidence in the electoral process. The Chief Electoral Officer again expressed his concerns about such behaviour to both the Northern Ireland Office and to the Electoral Commission but by the year end neither organisation had brought forward any proposals for reform.
- 4.10 As planned the verification of the ballot papers from across Northern Ireland took place in Belfast on Friday 5 June. The verified ballot papers were then secured until the start of the count on Monday 8 June. This delay was necessary because it was unlawful to declare the result of any election to the European Parliament until the polls closed in all Member States. Many States voted on Sunday 7 June. Whilst planning for the election the Chief Electoral Officer had taken the views of the main parties on the option of conducting the count on a Sunday and in light of the responses received had decided against it.
- 4.11 Approximately 350 staff were recruited to work at the verification and at the count. For the first time all applicants, including those with previous count experience, were required to undertake a simple test of their speed and accuracy of counting. A number of experienced count staff did not reach the required standard and so were not employed. Both at the verification and the count itself the benefits of testing staff were evident. Fewer mistakes were made and a greater degree of urgency was evident than at previous elections.
- 4.12 The count passed without incident with the final result being declared on the Monday afternoon.
- 4.13 Following the election a review meeting was held with all the Area Electoral Officers and HQ managers to identify areas in which changes to improve the process should be considered. Work to implement many of these agreed changes commenced before the year end.

- 4.14 The result and other statistical information on the election can be viewed on www.eoni.org.uk and in the Electoral Commission's official report on the European Parliamentary Elections 2009 which can be viewed at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

Lurgan District Electoral Area By-election

- 4.15 On 13 January 2010 the only district council by-election held in this period took place in the Lurgan District Electoral Area of Craigavon District Council. The Interim Chief Executive of the Council was the Deputy Returning Officer. The staff of the Banbridge A Area Electoral Office dealt with the processing of absent vote applications, the provision of equipment and materials and the staffing of polling stations on his behalf. The Area Electoral Officer provided advice to the Deputy Returning Officer on a wide range of matters connected with the election and undertook the training for the poll staff. The election was conducted efficiently by all concerned.
- 4.16 As had been anticipated the fact that electoral law for council elections had not been updated in line with the law for the European Parliamentary election caused voter confusion and probably resulted in a small number of individuals being unable to vote. The main cause for concern was that photographic identification documents that had been acceptable at the election in June 2009 could not be accepted at this election. Following the election the Chief Electoral Officer again drew this matter to the attention of the Northern Ireland Office but was advised that it was unlikely that any amendments would be made until a general updating of local election law prior to the next local government general election scheduled for 2011.

Preparation for Parliamentary General Election

- 4.17 Preparation for the Parliamentary General Election started almost immediately after the election on 4 June 2009. Whilst the date of the General Election was unknown it had, by law, to take place by 4 June 2010. Plainly there was a

possibility that it could be held much earlier and steps were taken to ensure that the Electoral Office would be ready as soon as the date was announced which might be little more than three weeks before polling day.

- 4.18 Because of the decision that all the counts should take place overnight it was no longer possible for the staff who would be employed at polling stations to be employed also to count the votes. An open recruitment for count staff took place across Northern Ireland. All applicants had to pass a test of their speed and accuracy of counting before being admitted to the pool of count staff that was established before the year end. A total of 1,531 applicants were tested of whom 1,208 were found suitable for employment as counters.
- 4.19 Potential venues for use as count centres were identified and evaluated. Whilst a preferred option was identified for all constituencies no final decision could be made because it could not be guaranteed that the preferred option would be available on the night after the election.
- 4.20 Following discussion with the political parties it was agreed that the revised register published in December 2009 would be based on the new parliamentary constituency boundaries that would apply at the next General Election. Considerable staff time and resources had to be devoted to making these changes and transferring the relevant records. Publishing the register in this way made it much easier for candidates and political parties to prepare for the election.
- 4.21 Whilst accuracy and not speed would be the paramount consideration for the first ever overnight count throughout Northern Ireland it was decided to learn from others with experience of speedy and accurate overnight counting. Sunderland is famous for the short time between the close of poll and the declaration of the results in the three local constituencies. The Chief Electoral Officer arranged for all Area Electoral Officers to be briefed by the official responsible for organising counts in Sunderland.

- 4.22 In addition in March 2010 all Electoral Office staff attended a training event at which various aspects of election work were covered. The training included a mock count exercise in which staff undertook the various roles and at which the new methodology adopted following the briefing on overnight counting was tested. Following that event the draft procedures were further revised.
- 4.23 The Chief Electoral Officer was a member of the Election Co-Ordination Group, comprised of senior electoral administrators from across the United Kingdom, that was created to discuss major issues in connection with national elections. The Group replaced the Regional Returning Officers Group established for the June 2009 election. He attended meetings of these Groups throughout the year.
- 4.24 By the year end planning for the General Election was well advanced.

Electoral Law Offences

- 4.25 A case of failing to provide information contrary to Regulation 23 of the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2001, instituted in 2008, resulted in a caution in September 2009 when the defendant withdrew his defence to the charge.
- 4.26 Following the European Parliamentary election 51 cases of suspected postal and proxy vote fraud were reported to the police for investigation. In one case there was insufficient evidence to justify a report to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). Five individuals admitted postal voting fraud and received a formal caution. Two others, who denied the offences, are awaiting trial on ten and three charges respectively of absent voting fraud. The PPS decision is awaited in one other case. The other cases were still being investigated by the PSNI at the year end.
- 4.27 Two individuals were reported to the police for obtaining electoral registration and electoral identity cards by fraud contrary to section 13D of the

Representation of the People Act 1983. Police investigations were continuing at the year end.

SECTION 5 – CENTRAL SERVICES

Premises

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

Staff

Staff Resignations and Appointments

- 5.2 Six members of the permanent staff, compared with eight in 2008/09, resigned or retired. Five of them full-time positions whilst the others worked on the Helpline one day per week.
- 5.3 Eight permanent members off staff were appointed. Open competitions were run to fill the vacancies for the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Elections), the Area Electoral Officer in Newtownabbey, one of the Assistant Area Electoral Officers in Banbridge, an Assistant Finance Officer, the Senior IT Officer, a Helpline Officer and for two part-time position in Corporate Services.
- 5.4 All the vacancies were filled without difficulty following a public recruitment process. Dr Campbell of the Electoral Commission kindly agreed to provide a senior level independent input as a member of the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer selection panel.
- 5.5 More than 2,600 applications to work at the poll or the count at the European Parliamentary Elections in June 2009 were processed. For the first time in Northern Ireland all those seeking employment at the election count had to take a test of competence and speed of counting. Only those who passed that test were employed to count votes. In addition a competition was run to

replenish the pool of staff available to work on a casual basis in the Newtownabbey Office.

Development and Interchange Opportunities

5.6 Work on development and interchange opportunities was undertaken with a number of public sector bodies whose staff, like those of the Electoral Office, do not enjoy civil service status. Agreement in principal had been reached and at the year end a draft memorandum of understanding was being prepared for consideration by the senior management of the participating organisations.

Structure

5.7 Only minor changes to the Electoral Office staff structure were made during the year. The structure at 1 April 2009 is at Annex B whilst the structure in place at 31 March 2010 is at Annex C.

Training

5.8 By the year end 97% of the corporate Training Plan had been successfully completed. That Plan was again the amalgam of personal development plans agreed between line managers and their staff as part of the performance appraisal process.

5.9 Whenever possible training was delivered in-house to reduce costs and to ensure that it was tailored to the particular needs of the Electoral Office and its staff. Where that was not practicable the provider was identified in accordance with the Procurement Policy.

5.10 A further 20 members of staff undertook the Foundation Course in Electoral Administration designed by the Association of Electoral Administrators. This course is now compulsory for all new Electoral Office staff. The five Certificate in Electoral Administration students, who started their studies in 2008/09, completed them successfully. In the course of their studies they had

to submit four dissertations on subjects set by the Association and to pass two examinations each of two hours duration. All five candidates were successful and were the first individuals in Northern Ireland to be awarded the Certificate. A further four members of staff started their Certificate studies.

5.11 Following on comments received in the last Staff Survey, all staff came together for a day of team building exercises in November 2009. In March 2010 all staff undertook training in connection with the European Parliamentary elections.

Sick Absence

5.12 Sick absence levels continued to be low and to be closely monitored by the Board. The average number of days lost over the year was 4.5 (2.1%) compared with 6.7 days (3%) in 2008/09. If non-work related long-term absences are excluded the figure was 1.9%.

Staff Survey

5.13 The Electoral Office conducts an annual Staff Survey. The returns are analysed independently so that staff can be candid when completing their questionnaire. The report of the analysis is considered by the Board and an Action Plan to address the agreed weaknesses is prepared. During the year the Plan drawn up as a result of the March 2009 survey was implemented. Questionnaires for the next survey were completed in March 2010 and will result in an action plan for 2010/11. The result of the last survey will demonstrate the extent to which implementation of the previous action plan was successful.

Funding

5.14 The total running costs funding provided to the Electoral Office for 2009/10 was £2.85m a reduction of £450k on the previous year when additional funds

were required for the major IT project. Total expenditure was £2.78m or 97.5% of the budget available.

5.15 Funding for the European Parliamentary election was provided from the Consolidated Fund and was accounted for separately from the Electoral Office running costs. Following amendments to the governing legislation the Chief Electoral Officer was given much greater flexibility on how to allocate the resources provided to him to run the election. The agreed budget of just over £2.4m was calculated largely in accordance with a funding formula devised by the Ministry of Justice with changes being made only in areas, such as postal votes and the count, where there were significant differences between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. By the year end nearly all payments had been made for the June 2009 election and it was clear that the election had been delivered successfully well within the budget provided. The election account was closed in June 2010. The total cost of the election was £1.78m more than £600k within the agreed budget.

Stakeholder and Media Relations

Media

5.16 Sole responsibility for all matters relating to public awareness of elections and registration remained with the Electoral Commission. It was agreed between the Chief Electoral Officer, the Commission and the Northern Ireland Office that the function should be transferred to the Chief Electoral Officer, on a date to be determined after the 2010 General Election. Unfortunately, in the course of the detailed discussions on the transfer of the function, the Commission made clear that they would not, contrary to the normal practice, transfer any funds along with the function. In the absence of such funding the Chief Electoral Officer was of the view that the very necessary activity could not be carried out effectively. Accordingly, work on the transfer of the function was suspended.

- 5.17 The Chief Electoral Officer issued nine press releases during the year. Many of these attracted substantial coverage in the printed press, the radio and on occasion on TV. 44 printed and broadcast interviews were given by the Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues.
- 5.18 A significant development during the year was the much more effective relationships developed between Area Electoral Officers and their local newspapers and radio stations. These have been used to good effect to give free publicity for local registration and election matters.
- 5.19 The Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues again received invaluable support in their dealings with the media from staff of the Northern Ireland Information Service within the Northern Ireland Office. These staff also played a vital role in advising on the arrangements for the media at the European Parliamentary election in June 2009. Feedback from the media on the arrangements made for them was very complimentary.
- 5.20 Many of the public appear to have no understanding of the work that goes on behind the scenes to deliver an election. To address that knowledge deficit the Chief Electoral Officer agreed to a proposal from the BBC for the making of a documentary on the subject. The programme makers were given filming rights at all meetings and events in the run up to and during the election. A programme was broadcast a few weeks after the election and is now available as a training aid for new staff.
- 5.21 The discussions on the arrangements for media support after the devolution of policing and criminal justice, started in 2008/09, were concluded. It was agreed that in the short term, at least, the support would be delivered by the same members of staff within the rebranded Northern Ireland Office Information Service.

Political Parties

- 5.22 The Northern Ireland political parties were consulted on all planned initiatives by the Electoral Office and some provided valuable and constructive comments. Whilst some parties engaged with the Chief Electoral Officer and his Area Electoral Officers on an ongoing basis it is to be regretted that others made contact only in the run up to elections by which time it was not infrequently too late to address the issues of concern to them.
- 5.23 The Chief Electoral Officer again attended all meetings of the Assembly Parties Panel, the meeting convened by the Electoral Commission to discuss electoral matters. He gave information on changes made to electoral law and practice and on forthcoming initiatives.

Electoral Commission

- 5.24 A mutually beneficial and sound working relationship continued to exist at all levels between the Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues and the Head of the Commission's Belfast Office and his staff.
- 5.25 The Chief Electoral Officer continued to make representations about the inadequate and incorrect contents of some documents published by the Commission in London. It is unfortunate that such errors tend to enforce the perception of the Commission as a London centred organisation. Both the Head of the Commission's Belfast Office and Dr Campbell, the Commissioner with special responsibility for Northern Ireland, have worked hard and effectively to deal with the perception created by these errors and have been very supportive of the work of the Electoral Office throughout the year.

Disability Groups

- 5.26 As well as including them in all consultation exercises, regular discussion on a wide range of issues took place with national groups such as Disability Action and RNIB. Area Electoral Offices liaised with these and other groups

representing those with a disability at a local level and encouraged participation by their members in the democratic process.

5.27 Although the Electoral Identity Card is intended only as a means of identification of those attending at polling stations it has come to be widely accepted as proof of identity for many purposes including access to financial services, travel and entry to licensed premises. The card is in the same general form as a credit card. Following an approach from RNIB it was agreed to provide a Braille overprint on cards, when requested, to make it possible for those with a visual impairment to identify it. The overprinting is carried out by RNIB with the modest cost being met by the Electoral Office.

Northern Ireland Office

5.28 The Chief Electoral Officer worked closely with the Elections Unit at the Northern Ireland Office on amendments to the law required for the European Parliamentary Elections. There was daily, or more frequent, contact throughout the year on this and other issues.

5.29 The Chief Electoral Officer worked closely with Northern Ireland Office officials on a number of pieces amending legislation including the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2010, the Representation of the People (Timing of the Canvass) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2010, the European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2010, the European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, the European Parliamentary Elections (Returning Officer Charges) (Northern Ireland) Order 2009 and the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 (Amendment) Order 2010.

Presentations

5.30 The Chief Electoral Officer and his colleagues gave presentations to a wide range of bodies principally to encourage electoral registration. Northern

Ireland is recognised as an exemplar on individual electoral registration. Briefings on that subject were given to representatives of the Palestinian Electoral Commission, the UK Electoral Commission and to officials of the Ministry of Justice. The Chief Electoral Officer spoke on the Northern Ireland experience of running elections at the Association of Electoral Administrators Annual Seminar.

Helpline

5.31 The Helpline at Headquarters dealt with 43,119 enquiries during the year which represented an increase of nearly 17% compared with 2008/09 and 115% since 2007/08. Customer service standards were achieved or exceeded throughout the year and several callers took time to record their appreciation of the high level of service provided.

Website

5.32 Almost half a million pages on the Electoral Office website were viewed during the year which vouches the benefits of the policy of publishing on the website as much information as possible.

5.33 A customer survey was undertaken between July and September 2009 which found a 93% overall customer satisfaction rating. A number of suggestions for improvement were made and were implemented where practicable.

5.34 20,293 registration forms were downloaded in the languages shown in following table -

Table 2 – Registration forms downloaded by language

Language	No. Forms downloaded 2009/10
English	18,398
Polish	446

Ulster Scots	278
Portuguese	231
Lithuanian	186
Irish	173
Romanian	163
Slovak	124
Filipino	84
Latvian	64
Tetum	46
Russian	46
Cantonese	31
Mandarin	23
Total	20,293

Records Management

5.35 19 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and 14 under the Data Protection Act were received. All were processed within the statutory time limits.

IT System

5.36 The efficiency and effectiveness of the Electoral Office continued to benefit from the new IT systems installed in 2008/09.

5.37 A number of alterations were made to the EROS electoral management software to meet the developing needs of the business.

5.38 Further work was carried out on a back-up site at a remote location to ensure that the Electoral Office could continue to offer an acceptable level of service in the event of the loss of Headquarters facilities.

SECTION 6 – CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Management Board

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

Charter Mark

- 6.3 Following a further independent assessment the Electoral Office's Charter Mark status was renewed for the period up to 30 June 2011.
- 6.4 The discipline of the Charter Mark accreditation process undoubtedly caused examination of areas of customer service that would otherwise not have received attention. It contributed to an improvement in customer service.
- 6.5 Charter Mark has been replaced by Customer Service Excellence which adopts a more customer focused approach to the delivery of high standards of customer care. The Management Board decided that the Electoral Office should apply for Customer Service Excellence in 2011 and work on achieving that status has already started.

Mystery Shopping

6.6 Quarterly reports by ‘mystery shoppers’ employed by a private sector provider continued to provide a valuable independent insight into how the public perceived the service provided to telephone, email and personal customers. Valuable learning points were identified and corrective action was taken where appropriate.

Complaints

6.7 The revised complaints process introduced in 2008/09 continued to operate well. No complaints were made about the process itself nor about how it was operated.

6.8 During the year 62 formal complaints were received compared with 47 in 2008/09. Given that in 2009/10 the Electoral Office engaged at least once with each one of the nearly 1.2m registered electors this represents a very low level of dissatisfaction. That is consistent with the reports received from the ‘mystery shoppers’. 733 individuals took the time to complete a written compliment card.

6.9 The nature and outcome of the formal complaints is summarised in the following table –

Table 3 – Formal Complaints Received 2009/10

Nature of Complaint	No.	Outcome
Registration evidence requirements/ tone of letter.	10	Evidence requirements and tone of letter revised.
Evidence documentation not returned	3	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable.
Receipt of CSA letter/tone of letter/Removal letters	2	Tone of letter revised.
Canvass form not showing name in Irish	2	Relevant legislation explained

Office closure times	2	Explanation issued
Late registration procedures	3	Relevant legislation explained
Difficult to find candidate information on website	1	Help provided
Postal Voting/ Postal Vote Packs	3	Explanation/apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Poor service provided by poll staff.	8	Apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Poll cards	1	Explanation/apology issued/remedial action taken where applicable
Location of polling station	4	Explanation issued
Not on register when going to vote	3	Explanation and registration form issued
Deployment of special poll clerks	10	Explanation issued
Forms of electoral identification	3	Relevant legislation explained
Advertising of postal votes	1	Referred to Electoral Commission
CEO standing for national anthem at European Election count	10	Letter issued
Electoral Law	1	Relevant legislation explained/referred to NIO
Total	67	

Equality

6.10 Following the European Parliamentary elections in June 2009 a number of recommendations were made to the Northern Ireland Office to amend the law to make it less difficult for those with a disability to engage in the democratic process. The recommendations, which included changes to the requirement for valid applications for postal and proxy votes, were implemented by way of

the Representations of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2010 which were in place prior to the General Election.

- 6.11 The annual Equality Progress Report was submitted to the Equality Commission in August 2009.
- 6.12 Work to reconstitute the pool of casual staff available to work for the Electoral Office, mainly at election time, was started by the public recruitment of count staff for the June 2009 election. The remainder of the work is planned for 2010/11.

Other Plans and Policies

- 6.13 There were no significant developments in relation to the implementation of the Disability Action Plan, the Good Relations Strategy and the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy.

Charitable Donations

- 6.14 Under the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy and the Charter Mark principles Electoral Office staff select, by secret ballot, a different cross community charitable organisation to support each year. For 2008/09 the Alzheimer's Society was chosen. Through a variety of events a total of £4,604 was raised during the year.

Internal Audit

- 6.15 The Chief Electoral Officer and the Management Board continued to benefit from the constructive reports produced by ASM Horwath, our internal auditors.
- 6.16 During the year they undertook planned audits of four areas agreed by the Board as suitable for detailed examination. In three of these an assurance

rating of 'satisfactory' was achieved whilst in the other the assurance rating was 'substantial'.

- 6.17 The 18 recommendations made by the auditors were considered by the Management Board, who because of the small size of the Electoral Office acted as the audit committee. All but one of those recommendations were accepted and 15 of them were implemented almost immediately. The other two recommendations will be implemented by 31 December 2010.

Boundaries

- 6.18 The Chief Electoral Officer is an assessor to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland, the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner for Northern Ireland and to the District Electoral Areas Commissioner. During the year he attended a number of meetings with both the Commission and the Commissioners and provided them with information and advice to assist them in the discharge of their duties.

SECTION 7 – THE AREA OFFICES

Introduction

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

Table 4 – Area Electoral Offices

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

- 7.3 Each office was managed by an Area Electoral Officer who was both the deputy registration officer and deputy returning officer for the constituencies. As such these officers had, under the supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer, responsibility for all matters relating to electoral registration and for the conduct of free and fair elections to the Westminster Parliament, the European Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. By law the Chief

Executive of each district council was the deputy returning officer for any local government election. Each Area Electoral Officer was supported by an Assistant Area Electoral Officer and a number of registration officers appropriate to the workload of that office.

- 7.4 To further improve customer service all Area Offices were open during the lunch period throughout the year.
- 7.5 The following paragraphs, whilst by no means covering all that was done, give an insight into the work of each office during the year.

Londonderry Area Electoral Office

- 7.6 The Londonderry Area Electoral Office at 20 Queen Street, Londonderry serves the Foyle and East Londonderry constituencies.
- 7.7 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent full time staff and by two permanent part-time staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.
- 7.8 During the year the electorate of the Foyle constituency was increased by 1,833 whilst that of East Londonderry was increased by 861. As a result of boundary changes two wards were transferred from Foyle to East Londonderry. There was a monthly average of 281 personal callers to the office.
- 7.9 In addition to participation in general registration initiatives such as the Schools Initiative staff from the office attended the Fresher's Day at the Strand Road and Limavady campuses of the North West Regional College and provided registration and electoral identity cards clinics at the Coleraine and Magee campuses of the University of Ulster. The office participated in the overseas electors initiative and piloted the provision of the full range of services in Coleraine on one day each month for a period of six weeks. For the same period the office opened late on one day each week to facilitate

registration by those unable to attend during normal office hours. Prior to the June 2009 elections registration and electoral identity card clinics were held at a number of locations in both constituencies. In May 2009 the Area Electoral Officer briefed representatives of the Electoral Commission of Palestine on the conduct of elections in areas of conflict.

7.10 £1,077 was raised by staff from events in support of the Alzheimer's Society.

Omagh Area Electoral Office

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

7.12 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent staff and by casual staff during particularly busy periods.

7.13 During the year the West Tyrone constituency increased by 1,218 whilst that of Fermanagh and South Tyrone increased by 1,383. There was a monthly average of 161 personal callers to the office.

7.14 The office participated fully in the Schools Initiative and the piloting of late night opening. For a six week period in early 2009 the full range of services were provided on one day each week in both Enniskillen and Dungannon. Work was undertaken to encourage the registration of eligible persons resident in the Republic of Ireland. Registration and electoral identity card events were held at a number of locations.

Belfast Area Electoral Office

7.15 The Belfast Area Electoral Office, located on the first floor of the Electoral Office Headquarters at 15 Church Street, Belfast serves the Belfast South and Belfast West constituencies.

- 7.16 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by five permanent members of staff. Additional casual staff were employed as required.
- 7.17 During the year the electorate of the Belfast South constituency increased by 9,160 whilst that of Belfast West increased by 7,580. There were significant boundary changes. The Belfast South constituency gained two wards from each of the Strangford and Belfast East constituencies. The Belfast West constituency gained two wards from Lagan Valley.
- 7.18 There was a monthly average of 600 personal callers to the office. This remained by far the highest figure at any of the area offices and reflected the fact that many electors, registered outside the two constituencies for which the Belfast Office had responsibility, found it convenient to call there when in the city centre.
- 7.19 In addition to the general registration initiatives the Area Office conducted a mini canvass of a ward in each of its constituencies which resulted in 501 electors being added to the register. The wards selected were ones with low levels of registration due to the failure of many persons resident there to respond to other registration initiatives. Bearing that in mind, the addition of more than 500 to the register was a good outcome. The office participated in events aimed at encouraging registration amongst ethnic minorities and other hard to reach groups.
- 7.20 Events organised by the staff raised a total of £590 for the Alzheimer's Society.

Banbridge A Area Electoral Office

- 7.21 The Banbridge A Area Electoral Office is co-located with the other Banbridge office at 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge. It has responsibility for the Upper Bann and Newry and Armagh constituencies.

- 7.22 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by two permanent members of staff with additional casual staff being employed as required.
- 7.23 During the year the electorate of the Upper Bann constituency increased by 1,597 whilst that of Newry and Armagh increased by 1,401. There was a monthly average of 178 personal callers at the premises occupied by the two Banbridge Offices
- 7.24 As well as the Schools Initiative and other general registration work staff from the office visited 3 further education campuses to encourage registration and participated in the late opening pilot and overseas elector initiative. In early 2010 the full range of services were provided on one day per week for a period of 6 weeks in Armagh. Although 22 registration application forms were received and 43 electoral identity card photographs were taken the future provision of such out of office activities will require careful consideration.
- 7.25 The Area Electoral Officer and her staff supported the Interim Chief Executive of Craigavon Borough Council at the by-election in the Lurgan District Electoral Area on 13 January 2010. Actions taken included the processing of all postal and proxy vote applications, the printing and issuing of poll cards and the provision of registration and electoral identity cards clinics prior to polling day.
- 7.26 Two members of staff used the opportunity available to all staff under the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy to work in the garden of the Leonard Cheshire Disability building in Banbridge.

Banbridge B Area Electoral Office

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

- 7.28 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent members of staff with additional assistance, as required, from casual staff.
- 7.29 During the year the electorate of the South Down constituency increased by 2,164 whilst that of Lagan Valley increased by 1,975. As a result of boundary changes the Lagan Valley constituency lost one ward to the South Antrim constituency and one ward and part of another to the Belfast West constituency. Three wards were transferred from South Down to the Strangford constituency. There was a monthly average of 178 personal callers to the premises occupied by the two Banbridge Offices.
- 7.30 A mini canvass was conducted in a ward in each constituency assessed as having a low level of registration, in each constituency. In the course of the Schools Initiative staff from the office visited every eligible post primary school in their two constituencies.
- 7.31 Ruby Hunter, the Assistant Area Electoral Officer retired after some 20 years service and was replaced by John Quinn who was appointed following an open competition.

Newtownards Area Electoral Office

- 7.32 The Newtownards office at 2(B) Regent Street, Newtownards serves the North Down, Strangford and Belfast East constituencies.
- 7.33 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by four permanent members of staff with further casual staff being used at times of peak activity.
- 7.34 During the year the electorate of the Belfast East constituency increased by 8,848 whilst that of North Down increased by 901. The electorate of the Strangford constituency decreased by 788. There was a monthly average of 257 personal callers to the Office.

- 7.35 There were significant changes to constituency boundaries. The Belfast East constituency lost 2 wards to Belfast South but gained 5 from Strangford. In addition Strangford lost 2 wards to Belfast South but gained 3 from South Down. There were no changes to the North Down boundaries.
- 7.36 As well as the Schools Initiative and other general registration work a mini canvass was carried out in a ward in each constituency believed to have a low level of registration.
- 7.37 Staff from the office also participated in 3 RNIB events, a MENCAP event and a Disability Action event all designed to encourage registration and participation in the democratic process by those with a disability.
- 7.38 Following requests made to the office, polling station equipment was provided to Priory College and Strangford College for use at their school elections.
- 7.39 The premises occupied by the Newtownards Office can be accessed only by a steep staircase which is not suitable for those with restricted mobility. A fire inspection undertaken during the year prohibited access to the office by anyone with restricted mobility until extensive building works were undertaken. These were discussed with the landlord but could not be carried out without an unacceptable reduction to the usable floor area of the office. Efforts to locate suitable new premises were ongoing at the year end.

Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office

- 7.40 The Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office at 1-3 Portland Avenue, Glengormley serves the East Antrim, South Antrim and Belfast North constituencies.
- 7.41 In addition to the Area Electoral Officer there were four full-time posts with additional casual staff being employed as required.

- 7.42 During the year the electorate of the East Antrim constituency increased by 1,810, whilst that of Belfast North increased by 14,614. The electorate of the Antrim South constituency decreased by 4,655. There were significant boundary changes. Belfast North gained six wards, five of which were from South Antrim and one from East Antrim. East Antrim lost one ward to South Antrim whilst gaining three from North Antrim. South Antrim gained one ward from Lagan Valley but lost five to Belfast North. There was a monthly average of 312 personal callers to the Office.
- 7.43 All 19 eligible post primary schools in the constituencies were visited during the Schools Initiative as a result of which 1,274 pupils were registered for the first time and 1,241 photographs for electoral identity cards were taken.
- 7.44 The office undertook a pilot to assess the effectiveness of a household leaflet drop to encourage registration. Leaflets were delivered to every residential property in nine wards, three in each constituency, that appeared to have low levels of registration. 53 requests for registration application forms were received as a result of the leaflets although other individuals may either have downloaded a registration form or obtained one from a source other than the Electoral Office. The results of the pilot will inform future decisions on the effectiveness of leaflet drops.
- 7.45 Further work to the premises was undertaken to ensure that all current fire safety requirements were met. Minor works were carried out to facilitate the use of the Newtownabbey Office as the backup IT site in the event of loss of the facilities at Headquarters.
- 7.46 Sharon Allen, the Area Electoral Officer, retired from that post in August 2009 and until her retirement in January 2010 undertook valuable work on the standardisation of registration processes at all offices. She was replaced by Janet Goodall who was recruited, following open competition, from the retail sector.

7.47 A number of events organised by the staff raised a total of £534 for the Alzheimer's Society.

Ballymena Area Electoral Office

7.48 The Ballymena Area Electoral Office located at 122 Broughshane Street, Ballymena serves the North Antrim and Mid Ulster constituencies.

7.49 The Area Electoral Officer was supported by three permanent members of staff with additional casual staff being employed as required.

7.50 During the year the electorate in the Mid Ulster constituency increased by 2,075 whilst that of North Antrim decreased by 1,045. As a result of boundary changes three wards were transferred from North Antrim to South Antrim. There was a monthly average of 165 personal callers to the office.

7.51 In addition to visiting all 21 eligible post primary schools in the constituency during the Schools Initiative staff from the office visited the Magherafelt, Ballymoney and Ballymena campuses of the Northern Regional College to encourage registration.

7.52 Mini canvasses of wards with a low level of registration in each constituency was undertaken resulting not only in a number of new registrations and changes to the register but also the identification of a number of properties recorded on the property database that no longer existed.

7.53 Other work undertaken to encourage registration included the provision of registration and electoral identity card clinics at the Coleraine campus of the University of Ulster, to An Munia Tober (the group representing Irish Travellers) and at various locations throughout both constituencies. The most successful of these was in Magherafelt where 344 fully completed registration applications were taken.

- 7.54 The Area Electoral Officer gave presentations on the work of the Electoral Office to Magerafelt, Cookstown, Ballymoney, Ballymena and Moyle councils. In addition she invited representatives of financial institutions to a presentation at her office where she explained the registration process and the steps that were taken to safeguard institutions and the Electoral Office against fraudulent applications.
- 7.55 Staff from the office ran a series of events that raised £955 for the Alzheimer's Society. In addition used stamps and other items of no value to the Electoral Office were donated to a range of charitable organisations.

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Targets and Development Objectives 2009-10

OT	On Target
A	Achieved
NA	Not Achieved
NP	Not Proceeding

Targets		Status	Comments
1.	<p>To publish on 1 December 2009, a revised register of electors that is at least as accurate and comprehensive as the December 2008 register.</p> <p>There is a statutory requirement to publish a revised register of electors on 1 December each year. The comprehensiveness of the register will be maintained through the continuous registration process. Its accuracy will be maintained by removal from the register of those who have died or have ceased to meet the registration criteria and by amending the registration particulars for those who notify a change of name or address.</p>	A	The December 2009 register showed an increase of over 2.4% in the electorate. Accuracy remained at a high level.
2.	<p>To submit the CEO's annual report for the year ended 31 March 2009 to the Secretary of State by 1 September 2009.</p> <p>Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 requires the CEO to submit an annual report on how he has carried out his duties. The Secretary of State lays that report before both Houses of Parliament. Work in connection with the European Parliamentary elections is likely to delay submission of the report until late summer.</p>	A	Submitted 28 August 2009

3.	<p>To conduct the European Parliamentary elections, and the General Election if held during the year, so that they are free, fair, efficient and within budget. Preparation for the European Parliamentary elections was well advanced at the start of the year. Between 1 April and the poll on 4 June further action will be taken to ensure that this target is met. A Westminster General Election may be called during the year. Much of the work undertaken for the June elections will be relevant to any General Election.</p>	A	The European Parliamentary elections ran smoothly and within budget. Much preparatory work was undertaken for any possible General Election.
Customer Service Development Objectives		Status	Comments
1.	<p>By 31 May 2009 to reduce to 7 days or less the average delivery time for Electoral Identity Cards. New arrangements for the production of Electoral Identity Cards will be introduced on 1 April. By 31 May we will have halved the average time from receipt of a completed application to provision of the card.</p>	A	The average delivery time was 2 working days.
2.	<p>From 1 April 2009 to increase the opening hours of all Area Electoral Offices by remaining open over lunchtime. To make it easier for the public to access our services all eight Area Electoral Offices will be open from 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and from 9am to 4pm on Fridays.</p>	A	All offices commenced lunch hour opening on 1 April 2009.
3.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to pilot “late opening” at a minimum of 3 Area Electoral Offices. Some customers in full time employment have told us that they find it difficult to visit one of our offices during normal working hours. We will pilot ‘late opening’ at a minimum of 3 of our offices and depending on the usage take decisions on future opening hours.</p>	A	Pilots completed but result disappointing.

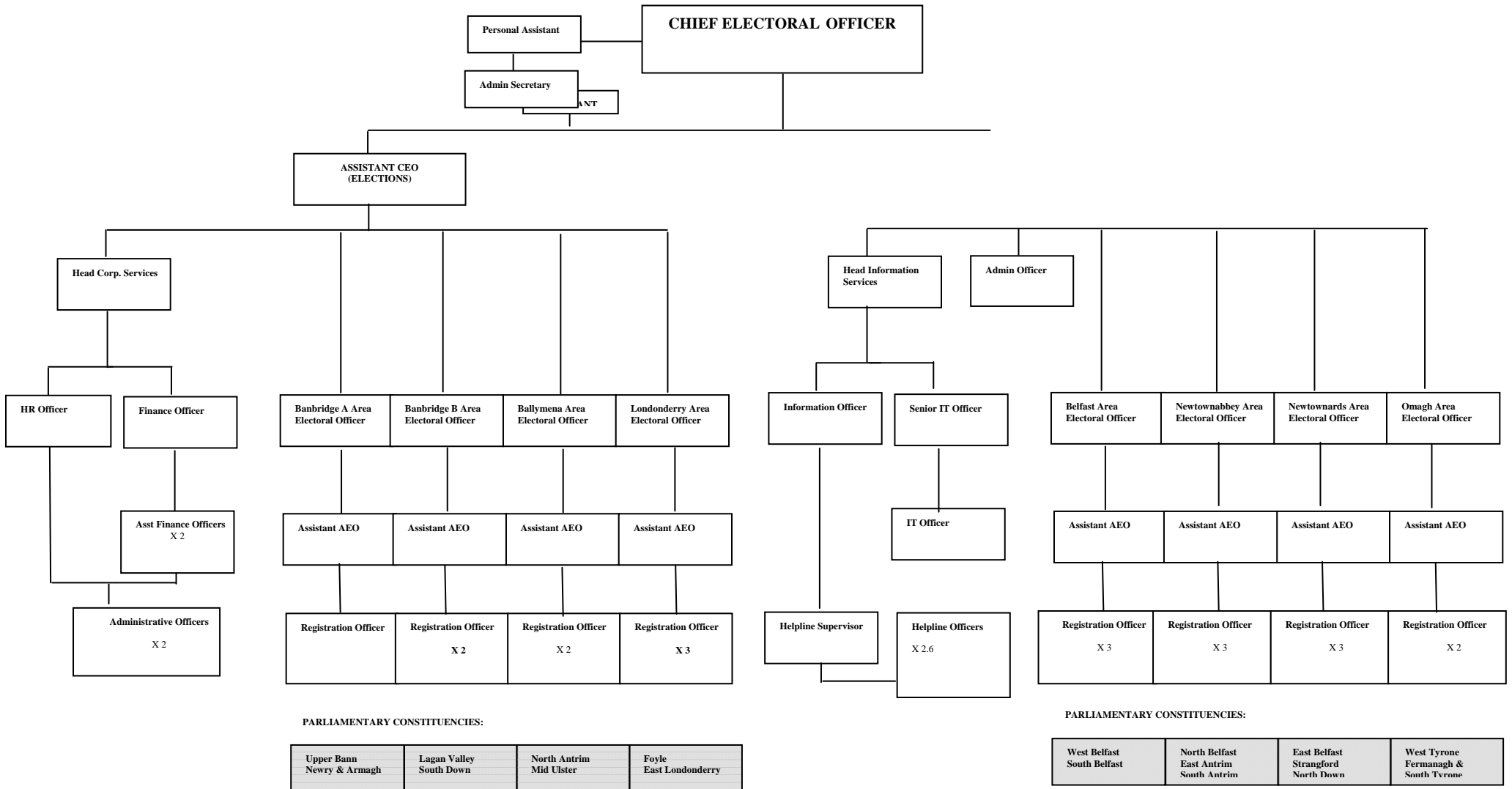
4.	<p>By 4 June 2009 to pilot Saturday morning opening at all Area Electoral Offices.</p> <p>Experience shows that in the run up to elections there is an increase in the number of personal callers at our offices. This year we expect an even greater increase ahead of the European Parliamentary elections as a result of the new late registration arrangements. Before these elections we will pilot Saturday morning opening at all of our offices. The results will be evaluated and will inform our future decisions.</p>	A	<p>In the run up to the European Parliamentary election all offices opened on Saturday mornings. Few members of the public availed of this opportunity.</p>
5.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to pilot, in at least 2 constituencies, the provision of a limited opening office, providing the full range of services, in towns away from the Area Electoral Office.</p> <p>Although we have offices at 7 locations across Northern Ireland we are conscious that in some areas people have to travel considerable distances to use our services. During the year we will pilot the use of limited opening offices at locations away from the Area Offices in at least 2 constituencies.</p>	A	<p>Limited opening offices were provided in Enniskillen, Dungannon, Coleraine and Armagh but little use was made of them.</p>
Registration Development Objectives			Comments
6.	<p>By 31st March 2010 to consider the feasibility of “cleansing” data received from the Central Services Agency to reduce the number of ‘duplicate’ letters sent to the same elector.</p> <p>Information provided by the Central Services Agency is critical to the success of the continuous registration process that replaced the annual canvass in 2006. Every 3 months the Agency provides details of those who, according to their records, have moved house. This information is used as the basis of letters sent to these individuals reminding them of the need to change their registration details. It has become apparent that the data provided by the Agency contains a small number of duplicate entries with the result that some people receive two or more letters from us. During the year we will explore options for electronically identifying these duplicates so as to avoid individuals receiving more than one letter.</p>	A	<p>New procedures were introduced which significantly reduced the number of calls received about duplicate letters.</p>

7.	<p>By 30 September 2009 to review the registration process in light of best practice and experience of the late registration process and operate it, as amended as necessary, in a standard way throughout Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Since 2006 continuous registration has been an evolving process. Late registration will be available for the first time at the June 2009 elections. The practices in relation to the processing of applications have varied, to some extent, between our eight offices. We will review the continuous registration process, building on best practice, and implement it in a standard way at all our offices.</p>	A	Procedures were standardised in accordance with revised instructions.
8.	<p>By the date on which the legislation comes into force to be ready in all respects to process applications for anonymous registration.</p> <p>The Government have announced that the proposed legislation to introduce anonymous registration should be enacted later this year. We will build on the work already undertaken to ensure that we are ready to offer this new service to the public as soon as the legislation comes into force.</p>	NP	Work was suspended when the NIO advised that the legislation had again been delayed
Comprehensiveness and Accuracy of Registers Development Objectives		Status	Comments
9.	<p>Particularly from September 2009 onwards, to engage proactively with 16-18 year olds who are not attending school so as to encourage their registration.</p> <p>Building on the success of our “Schools Initiative” in 2008/09 we will this year engage proactively with young people who have left school so as to encourage their electoral registration.</p>	A	Using information provided by DWP a letter encouraging registration was sent to the nearly 12k 17 year olds who were not on the register. As a result more than 3.5k additions and alterations were made to the register. Other work included attendance at events at FE colleges and universities.
10.	<p>By 31st March 2010, to have increased by at least 25% compared with 1st December 2008, the number of registered overseas electors.</p> <p>Those who were previously registered in Northern Ireland are entitled to register as overseas electors and to vote in certain elections. We will engage with such individuals and encourage them to exercise their legal right to register.</p>	A	A 75.9% increase was achieved.

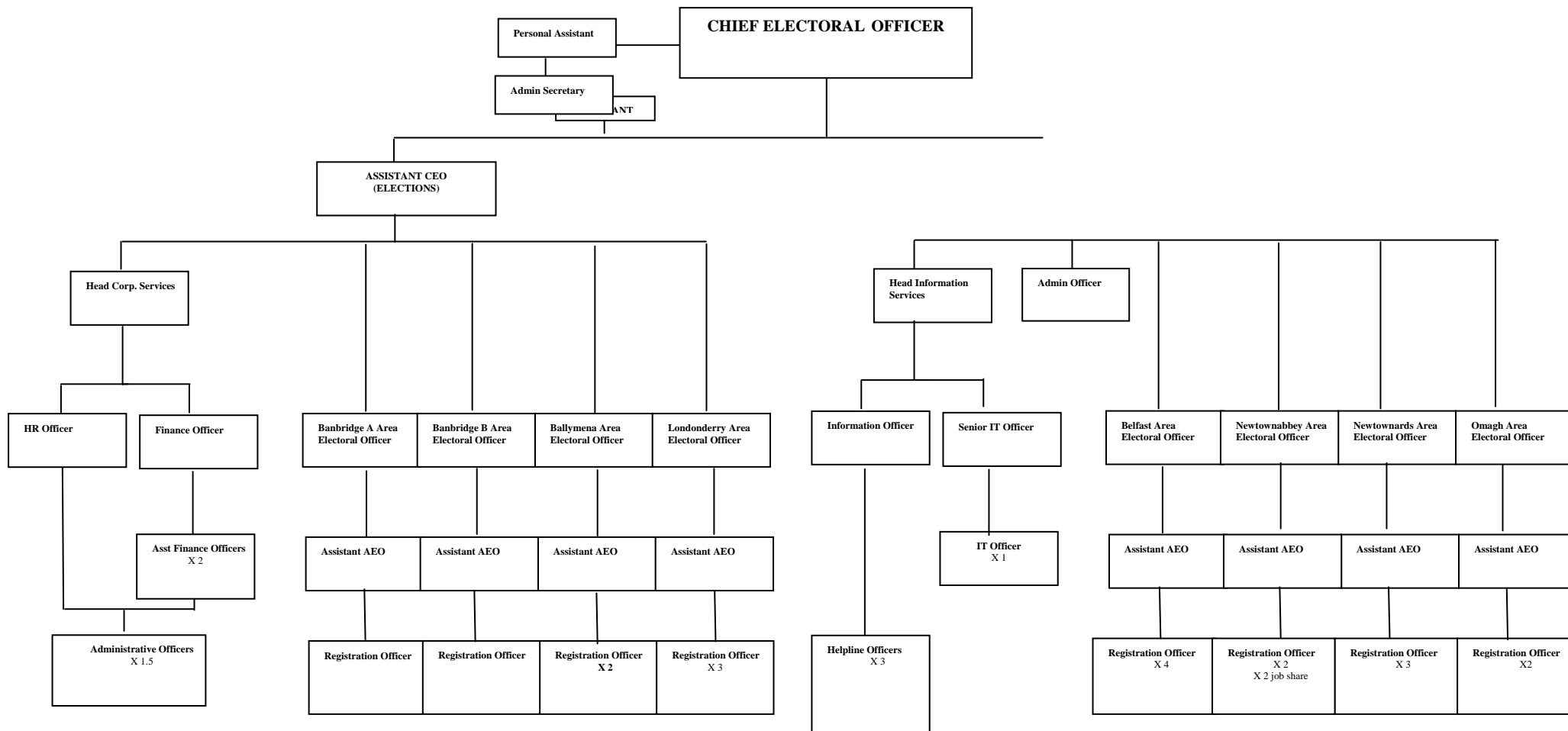
11.	<p>By 31st March 2010 to have explored and implemented, where practicable, the benefits available from use of the Pointer system.</p> <p>Pointer is an address database providing a common standard address for every property in Northern Ireland. We will explore how it could assist us in delivering an improved and more efficient service and implement any changes to current practices where practicable.</p>	A	The work undertaken identified that in most cases our database was more accurate than the POINTER database.
12.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to pilot in at least 6 wards or part-wards the effectiveness of a household leaflet drop to encourage registration.</p> <p>Household leaflet drops are a relatively inexpensive way of contacting the public in a particular area. We will pilot and evaluate the effectiveness of such drops in at least 6 wards or part wards as a method of maintaining both the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the electoral register.</p>	A	Leaflet drops took place in nine wards with low levels of registration.
13.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to have carried out a further 8 pilot mini-canvasses as a means of maintaining the accuracy of the register.</p> <p>Taking account of lessons learned from the mini canvass pilots in 2008/09 we will carry out further pilots this year.</p>	A	Mini-canvasses were undertaken in 9 wards selected because of their low level of registration.
14.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to have exploited in full the information gained from participation in the National Fraud Initiative.</p> <p>Last autumn we announced our participation in NFI. The results will become available early in 2009/10. All inconsistencies between our records and those of the other public sector authorities will be considered and appropriate action will be taken.</p>	A	As a result of the mismatches identified more than 12k letters were issued encouraging registration. The uptake was not proportionate to the cost. It is understood that the data provided by the Electoral Office led to the detection of frauds on a number of Government departments and agencies.
Elections Development Objectives			
15.	<p>By 31st December 2009 to have amended the processes and procedures as necessary in light of lessons learned at the June 2009 elections.</p> <p>Significant changes to both law and practice will be implemented at the European Parliamentary elections. We will consider how these, and all our other processes,</p>	A	The outline plan for the General Election was amended.

	worked at the June elections and make any necessary adjustments to our processes by 31 December.		
16.	<p>Within 5 working days of the calling of the next General Election we will implement the new parliamentary boundaries.</p> <p>The changes to the parliamentary boundaries made by the Parliamentary Constituencies (Northern Ireland) 2008 do not take effect until the next General Election is called. Within 5 working days of that event we will amend our electronic records to reflect the new boundaries and, where necessary, transfer any paper records to the appropriate Area Electoral Office.</p>	A	The revised register published on 1 December 2009 reflected the new boundaries.
Corporate Services Development Objectives			
17.	<p>Prior to any re-structuring of the Northern Ireland Office as a consequence of the devolution of policing and criminal justice, to have established procedures for the continued support of the Electoral Office finance and information services functions.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Office will be restructured following any devolution of the policing and criminal justice functions. As part of the restructuring the arrangements for supporting our finance and information services functions are likely to change and to be moved to London. Prior to that we will discuss the new arrangements with the NIO to ensure that we continue to be well supported.</p>	A	New arrangements were agreed for both functions.
18.	<p>By 30 August 2009 to have reviewed, and revised as necessary, the policy on the recruitment and use of casual staff.</p> <p>Our policy for the recruitment and use of casual staff has been developed incrementally over a number of years. By 30 August 2009 we will have reviewed the policy and amended it as necessary.</p>	A	The revised policy was agreed with NIPSA and signed in May 2009.
19.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to have reviewed, and revised as necessary, the policy on the recruitment and selection of permanent staff.</p> <p>The review will take account of changes to employment law and will include subjects such as the advertising of vacancies and the qualifications required for particular posts.</p>	A	The revised policy was agreed with NIPSA and signed in February 2010.

ELECTORAL OFFICE STRUCTURE AS AT 1 April 2009



ELECTORAL OFFICE STRUCTURE AS AT 31 MARCH 2010



PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES:

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

West Belfast South Belfast	North Belfast East Antrim South Antrim	East Belfast Strangford North Down	West Tyrone Fermanagh & South Tyrone
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OPERATING COSTS

	£k
<u>Basic Pay -</u>	
Permanent Staff	1082.0
Temporary Staff	77.1
Basic Pay Total	1159.1
<u>Overtime -</u>	
Permanent Staff	45.3
Overtime Total	45.3
<u>Employers National Insurance -</u>	
Permanent Staff	72.9
Temporary Staff	2.8
Employers National Insurance Total	75.7
Accrued Superannuation Liability Charge	191.6
Total Staff	1471.7
Power	45.3
Premises (Keyholding)	1.3
Maintenance & Minor Works	44.3
Training	42.2
Travel	16.5
Subsistence	1.9
Personnel Costs	3.1
Other Employee Costs	3.9
Hospitality	0.1
Office Services (Printing, Equipment, Hire, Window Cleaning)	77.8
Computers (Software, Hardware, Maintenance, Line Rental etc)	238.3
Professional Services	10.8
Materials (Mainly Stationery Orders)	23.6
Property charges	97.8
Postage	142.7
Telecommunications	27.5
Office Equipment	3.4
Central & Common Services (Cleaning Offices)	14.9
Estate Management	2.9
Insurance (Premises)	5.3
Advertising	6.6
Fees	5.2
Transport Costs	3.4
Advisory Services	6.4
Operating Leases (Rent of Offices & Photocopiers)	236.2

Total Goods & Services	1061.6
Electoral Identity Card	41.8
Encouraging Registration (Prize Draw)	4.0
Non Cash Costs	199.1
Receipts	(185.6)
TOTAL PROGRAMME	2592.5
Capital	57.5
GRAND TOTAL	2650.1