



# Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

## Information booklet



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# 1 What we do

The Chief Electoral Officer manages elections and compiles the Register of Electors in Northern Ireland. He is independent of Government and is assisted by the staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. The current Chief Electoral Officer is Graham Shields.

Our headquarters are based in Belfast at:

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

Helpline: 0800 4320 712 (If calling from outside the UK, phone 028 9044 6688.)  
Textphone: 0800 3284 502  
Website: [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)  
Email: [info@eoni.org.uk](mailto:info@eoni.org.uk)  
Fax: 028 9033 0661

The helpline is open from 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

There are area offices in seven locations throughout Northern Ireland.

Area Office	Constituencies
<b>Ballymena Area Office</b> 122 Broughshane Street, Ballymena BT43 6EE	Mid Ulster North Antrim
<b>Banbridge Area Office</b> 52 Bridge Street, Banbridge BT32 3JU	Lagan Valley Newry & Armagh South Down Upper Bann
<b>Belfast Area Office</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> Floor, St Anne's House 15 Church Street, Belfast BT1 1ER	Belfast South Belfast West
<b>Derry/Londonderry Area Office</b> 20(a) Queen Street, Derry/Londonderry BT48 7EQ	East Londonderry Foyle
<b>Newtownabbey Area Office</b> 1-3 Portland Avenue Glengormley, Newtownabbey BT36 5EY	Belfast North East Antrim South Antrim
<b>Newtownards Area Office</b> 2(b) Regent Street, Newtownards BT23 4LH	Belfast East North Down Strangford
<b>Omagh Area Office</b> 21 Kevlin Avenue, Omagh BT78 1ER	Fermanagh & South Tyrone West Tyrone

Area offices are open from 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday, and from 9am to 4pm on Fridays. On the Contact Us page of our website there are maps showing the locations of area offices.

## 2 Electoral registration

The Electoral Register is a list of the names and addresses of people who can vote in elections in Northern Ireland. The register is updated continuously throughout the year and a new version incorporating all the changes is published on 1 December each year. Two versions of the register are published.

**The full register** – this contains the names and addresses of everyone registered to vote. By law, only certain people and organisations can get a copy of the full register, and they can only use it for specific purposes such as checking credit applications or detecting crime.

**The edited register** – this contains the names and addresses of people who have agreed to their names appearing on this version. It is available to anyone and can be used for any purpose including marketing. You can choose to have your details left off the edited register by ticking the Edited Register box on the registration form.

You can get more information on the electoral registers and who is entitled to access them from our website.

### Why you should register

- You will only be able to vote if your name is on the electoral register.
- If we have asked you to fill in a registration form it is an offence to refuse to or to provide false information.
- If you are not registered it may prevent you from getting credit.

### Who can register

To be added to the register you must:

- be a British, Irish, Commonwealth or EU citizen;
- be 17 or over; and
- have lived in Northern Ireland for the past three months.

### How to register or update your details on the register

1. Fill in a registration form – you can download this from the Forms and Leaflets page of our website or ask for one from the Helpline (see page 3 for contact details). You can use the registration form to register to vote and to update your details, for example if you change address or get married.

You may need to provide proof of your identity and address. You can get more information from the Registration page of our website or from the Helpline.

2. Return the filled-in form to the relevant area office.
3. If your application is accepted, we will add your name to the register within six weeks. We will tell you when we have done this.

### 3 Elections

There are four types of election in Northern Ireland.

- Westminster parliamentary elections – to elect MPs
- Northern Ireland Assembly elections – to elect MLAs
- European parliamentary elections – to elect MEPs
- Local council elections – to elect councillors

Referendums are also held from time to time to allow voters to accept or reject a particular proposal.

To vote in elections in Northern Ireland you must be listed on the electoral register and be 18 or over on the day of the election.

#### Voting systems

Westminster parliamentary elections are conducted using the 'first past the post system', where you choose one candidate on the ballot paper and mark your preference with a cross (X). In each constituency, the candidate with the most votes wins the seat.

All other elections in Northern Ireland are conducted using the 'single transferable vote' method of proportional representation. On the ballot paper, you put a '1' in the box next to your first choice of candidate, a '2' next to your second favourite, and a '3' next to your third choice and so on. You can vote for as many or as few candidates as you like. This method of voting is used to elect several candidates in one area.

#### How to vote

Most people go to a polling station to vote in person. They receive a poll card beforehand to let them know where their polling station is. If you are going to be away on the day of an election or there is some other reason why you cannot vote in person (for example, you are physically disabled) you can apply to vote by post or 'proxy' (where you appoint someone to vote on your behalf). You can get more information on this type of voting on page 7 of this booklet.

#### Identification needed when voting

When you vote at a polling station you need to bring any one of the following documents with you.

- A UK, Irish or EEA driving licence (photographic part)
- A UK, Irish or EU passport
- An Electoral Identity Card
- A Translink Senior SmartPass
- A Translink 60+ SmartPass
- A Translink War Disabled SmartPass
- A Translink Blind Person's SmartPass

The document does not need to be current.

## 4 Electoral Identity Card

The Electoral Identity Card, which we produce, is one of the forms of identification accepted at polling stations. The card is free.

### How to apply

You can apply for a card by post or in person at an area electoral office. To get a card you must be listed on the electoral register or have applied to be registered.

### Postal applications

If you want to apply by post, you need to fill in the electoral registration form and tick the Electoral Identity Card box. With the form you must provide a passport-sized colour photo with your name and date of birth written on the back, along with photographic proof of your identity, or a declaration form filled in by an MP, MEP, MLA or councillor to confirm your identity. You can download an electoral registration form and a declaration form from our website or ask for one from the Helpline (see page 3 for contact details).

The proof of identify you supply with your application must be original (we will not accept a copy) and must have your photograph on it. Examples of acceptable documents are:

- Citizencard
- Driving licence (photographic part)
- National Identity Card
- Passport
- Sports club pass
- Student Card
- Translink SmartPass
- Works pass

### Applications in person

You can apply in person at any area electoral office, where a member of staff will take your photo for the card. You will not need to provide ID if you apply in person as we will ask you to fill in a form containing the same personal information you supplied when you registered to vote.

We will check the information you provide against the information you provided when you registered to vote. If all the information matches, you can expect to receive your card within 10 working days.

### Replacement cards

If you lose your card you can apply for a new one. We will only provide one replacement card in any 12-month period, unless an election is due, in which case you can get another replacement card during the month before the election.

### Cards with Braille

If you are blind or partially sighted you can request a card with a Braille overlay. Please make a note on your postal application or inform the Area Office staff if applying in person.

## **5 Voting by post or proxy**

If you cannot go to the polling station in person you can apply to vote by post or proxy (where you appoint someone to vote on your behalf). You must provide a reason why you cannot vote in person.

### **Voting by post**

Your ballot paper will be sent to you before polling day so you can cast your vote and post the ballot paper back before the deadline (10pm on polling day). Or you can hand your ballot paper in at your area electoral office (not at a polling station). If you are allowed to vote by post you cannot vote at a polling station. Postal votes can only be sent to addresses within the UK.

### **Voting by proxy**

You can appoint someone (your 'proxy') to vote on your behalf at your polling station. The person you appoint will be sent a proxy poll card approximately one week before polling day. If you arrive to vote before your proxy, you can cast your own vote in person.

A postal or proxy vote may be allowed for one election only or on a permanent basis, depending on your circumstances.

### **Permanent postal or proxy vote**

To be eligible for a permanent postal or proxy vote we must be satisfied that you cannot reasonably be expected to go to your polling station because of:

- a disability;
- your (or your husband's, wife's or civil partner's) work;
- your (or your husband's, wife's or civil partner's) studies.

You must make your application at least 14 working days before an election.

### **Temporary postal or proxy vote**

A temporary postal or proxy vote only applies to one election. To be eligible, we must be satisfied that you cannot reasonably be expected to go to your polling station on polling day for a particular reason (for example, because you will be on holiday, are attending an important event or are suffering from a short-term illness). You must make your application at least 14 working days before the election.

### **How to apply**

1. You can download the application form for the postal or proxy vote from our website or ask for one from the Helpline (see page 3 for contact details).
2. Fill in the application and, if necessary, have the form attested (where another person confirms that the information provided is correct).
3. Return the application form to your area electoral office.

## 6 Customer service standards

We are committed to providing the best possible service to our customers in an efficient and professional way. We aim to meet the following customer service standards.

Service	Standard
Registration applications	To process all registration forms within the deadlines set out on the Registration page of our website.
Electoral Identity Card	<p>To issue at least 95% of Electoral Identity Cards within 10 working days, as long as the applicant is listed on the electoral register and all the information on their application matches that they gave on their registration form.</p> <p>Note: this service standard does not apply to applications taken at schools.</p>
Phone calls and emails	<p>To answer at least 85% of calls within 30 seconds (except during peak periods such as elections).</p> <p>For all staff to give their name and the name of the section they work in.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate the politeness and helpfulness of staff as Good or Very Good.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate the clarity and accuracy of information we provide as Good or Very Good.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate the fairness and sensitivity of staff as Good or Very Good.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate us as Good or Very Good for overall satisfaction.</p> <p>To reply to at least 85% of voicemail messages within one working day, unless our recorded message stated otherwise.</p> <p>To reply to at least 85% of emails within one working day unless we have stated otherwise.</p>

<p>Counter services</p>	<p>For our premises to be easily accessible to at least 95% of customers.</p> <p>For 95% of customers visiting any of our offices to be seen within five minutes (except during peak periods such as elections).</p> <p>For all staff to wear name badges.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate the politeness and helpfulness of staff as Good or Very Good.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate the clarity and accuracy of information we provide as Good or Very Good.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate the fairness and sensitivity of staff as Good or Very Good.</p> <p>For at least 85% of customers to rate us as Good or Very Good for overall satisfaction.</p>
<p>Complaints, compliments and suggestions</p>	<p>To acknowledge all written complaints within three working days of receiving them, and issue a response within 15 working days.</p> <p>To record and publish the number and type of all complaints, compliments and suggestions we receive.</p> <p>For us to take any action needed as a result of complaints and suggestions.</p> <p>To publish details of what action we have taken as a result of complaints and suggestions, what we have not been able to change, and why.</p> <p>To ask all people whose complaints were upheld whether they were content with the way we handled their complaint, and to publish that feedback.</p>

We will measure our performance in meeting these standards and publish the results on our website.

## **7 Customers with particular needs**

We are committed to making our services fully accessible to everyone.

### **Information in different formats and languages**

You can get our forms in alternative formats (in Braille, on audio CD, in large print) and other languages. If you need a form in a different format or language, phone the Helpline or send us an email (see page 3 for contact details).

### **Electoral Office website and helpline**

Our website has been designed to be easy for people with disabilities to use and it includes a Browsealoud facility which reads web pages aloud for people who find it difficult to read online. We have a textphone (0800 3284 502) for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and we welcome calls via Typetalk. We also have a Language Line service if you would prefer to communicate with us in a language other than English. If you want to use this service, tell us when you ring our Helpline.

### **Voting by post or proxy**

If you have a disability which makes it unreasonable to expect you to go to the polling station in person, or to vote without help, you are entitled to a permanent postal or proxy vote (see page 7 for more details).

### **Voting at an alternative polling station**

Although we have done everything possible to find polling stations that are accessible for voters with disabilities, there are some parts of Northern Ireland where no suitable buildings are available. If you are due to vote at a polling station that is not accessible, you can apply to vote at an alternative polling station in the same electoral area. You can get an application form by phoning the Helpline. We must receive your application at least 14 working days before polling day.

### **Polling station facilities**

At each polling station there is at least one polling booth with a shelf at a height suitable for people in wheelchairs. Also, at least one polling booth has extra lighting to help those who are partially sighted.

A large print version of the ballot paper is displayed at each polling station to help you if you are partially sighted. There is also a device available to help you mark your ballot paper, along with a version of the ballot paper in Braille. If you want to use these items, please tell the staff at the polling station when they give you your ballot paper.

If you cannot mark the ballot paper yourself due to a disability, you can have it marked for you by a companion or by the person in charge of the polling station (the Presiding Officer). You will need to tell the polling station staff that this is how you want to vote and why. If your companion is voting for you they will be asked to fill in a form. Your ballot paper will be marked and placed in the ballot box on your behalf.

## **8 Using your personal information**

We collect your personal details so the Chief Electoral Officer can maintain an accurate and up-to-date electoral register. Your personal details will also be checked if you apply to vote by post or proxy, or for an Electoral Identity Card, in order to prevent electoral fraud.

The Chief Electoral Officer is a data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. This means that he is responsible for making sure that electors' personal details are held in line with the Data Protection Act. Your personal details are held securely on our electoral registration system and will only be held for as long as is necessary to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to perform his duties. You can get more information about the Data Protection Act on the Information Commissioner's website at [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

### **Who can see your personal information**

Your name and address are published on the full register. Access to the full register is restricted by law (the Representation of the People Regulations 2008). Commercial organisations, apart from registered credit reference agencies, cannot get copies of it.

Certain other people and organisations can get copies of the full register. They can only use it for purposes specified by law and cannot pass any details on to commercial organisations.

Anyone can call at an area electoral office and inspect the current full register, but you cannot take a copy of it. However, you can make handwritten notes.

Any person or organisation can buy a copy of the edited register and use it for commercial purposes. You can choose not to be on that register by ticking the Edited Register box on the registration form.

Our website provides more information on the electoral registers and who has access to them.

Personal details such as dates of birth, National Insurance numbers and signatures are not included on the electoral register and are not passed on to anyone else except as allowed under the Data Protection Act for purposes such as preventing crime, or as part of the National Fraud Initiative. More information about the National Fraud Initiative is given on our website.

### **Publishing information from the register online**

Sometimes members of the public are concerned to find that commercial organisations are publishing their details on the internet.

Those companies do not get that information from us, no matter what their websites say or imply.

If you are concerned about your personal details being published on the internet you can complain to the Information Commissioner through their website [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk).

## 9 How to make a complaint

We welcome complaints about any part of our service that you do not think is acceptable. You can do this by speaking to us in person, phoning us, or sending us a written complaint by post, fax or email.

When you make a complaint:

- give your name, address and contact details; and
- explain clearly what you are complaining about, giving as much detail as possible including dates, the events which caused the problem and, if you know them, the names of the members of staff involved.

We will keep the information you give us during the complaints process confidential and will only make it available to members of staff who need it.

### Complaints procedure

We have a simple two-stage complaints procedure.

#### Stage 1 (verbal complaint)

Tell the relevant member of staff, or his or her manager, why you are unhappy with our service. If you are not happy with the response you receive you can make a formal written complaint.

#### Stage 2 (formal written complaint)

At this stage a senior member of staff who has not been involved with your complaint will deal with it for you. To help us deal with all the issues it would be helpful if you could fill in the attached complaint form. Within three working days of receiving your complaint we will acknowledge that we have received it and you will receive a full response within 15 working days.

If we can't meet any of these deadlines, we will write to you to explain why, and tell you when we will give you a detailed response.

### Appealing against the outcome of a complaint

If you are unhappy with the response you receive at stage 2, you can ask the Chief Electoral Officer to review your complaint and how it has been handled. You can contact him as follows.

Post: Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, St Anne's House  
15 Church Street  
Belfast BT1 1ER

Phone: 0800 4320 712

Email: [info@eoni.org.uk](mailto:info@eoni.org.uk) (please mark for the attention of the CEO)

The Chief Electoral Officer will write to you to let you know that he has received your complaint and will send you a response within 15 working days.

The Chief Electoral Officer is independent and there is nobody else in the public service in Northern Ireland to complain to if you are unhappy with the Chief Electoral Officer's decision about your complaint. If you ask, the Chief Electoral Officer will arrange to have the way your complaint was dealt with, but not the decision made, reviewed by an independent person who is experienced in reviewing complaints in the public sector.

### **When our complaint procedure does not apply**

We are not responsible for all aspects of electoral registration or elections. Some of the things we are not responsible for are listed below. If you want to complain about any of these matters, it will be quicker for you to apply direct to the organisation that is responsible. If you make your complaint to us and we think it is the responsibility of another organisation, we will tell you and give you information on how to contact them. If you have made your complaint in writing, we will pass it to the responsible organisation and tell you that we have done this.

<b>Areas we are not responsible for</b>	<b>Responsible body</b>
Promoting public awareness of joining the electoral register or voting.  Regulating political parties and their funding.	The Electoral Commission <a href="http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk">www.electoralcommission.org.uk</a>
Removing posters after an election.	Roads Service NI <a href="http://www.roadsni.gov.uk">www.roadsni.gov.uk</a>
The law relating to elections and electoral registration.	Human Rights & Elections Unit, NIO <a href="mailto:electionsunit@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk">electionsunit@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk</a>
Information from the electoral register being published online.	The Information Commissioner <a href="http://www.ico.gov.uk">www.ico.gov.uk</a>

**Electoral Office for Northern Ireland – Complaint form**

**Your details**

Surname \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

First names \_\_\_\_\_

Address and  
postcode \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone  
number \_\_\_\_\_

**Your complaint**

To help us handle your complaint as quickly and as helpfully as possible, please give us as much information as you can, including, for example, the date and time of events and the names of the members of staff involved, if you know them. Please include any relevant documents. If you need more space to explain your complaint, please continue on a separate page and attach it to the back of this form.

Large empty rectangular area for writing the complaint details.

Please tell us how you would like us to respond to your complaint.

I believe that the information I have given is true and complete.

Your  
signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to:

Complaints Co-ordinator  
Electoral Office for NI  
FREEPOST BE617  
3rd Floor  
St Anne's House  
Belfast  
BT1 1BR

Email: [info@eoni.org.uk](mailto:info@eoni.org.uk)

**This booklet is available in Braille, in large print and on audio CD. To get any of these, phone the Helpline on 0800 4320 712 or send an email to [info@eoni.org.uk](mailto:info@eoni.org.uk).**