

## **PRESS RELEASE**

05 September 2007

### **IMPROVED SERVICE FOR ELECTORS**

As a way of improving services for electors the Electoral Office is re-organising the constituencies covered by its offices in Belfast, Newtownards and Newtownabbey.

With effect from Monday 17 September the Newtownabbey Area Electoral Office will become responsible for the Belfast North constituency in addition to East Antrim and South Antrim whilst the Newtownards Area Electoral Office will become responsible for the Belfast East constituency in addition to North Down and Strangford. The Belfast Area Electoral Office will have responsibility for the Belfast West and Belfast South constituencies.

Speaking of this decision Douglas Bain the Chief Electoral Officer said:

**“I am confident that these new arrangements will allow my staff to provide an even better service to the public. With the abolition of the annual canvass and the move to continuous registration my staff will be spending much more time out of the office actively engaging with the public and encouraging them to register. This will be made easier by the new structure under which there will be an increased number of staff at the Newtownabbey and Newtownards offices. Electors from Belfast North or Belfast East will still be able to use the office in William Street, Belfast, to obtain the full range of services.”**

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Electoral Office currently has 9 Area Electoral Offices each responsible for two Parliamentary constituencies.
2. Under the new structure the number of offices will be reduced to 8 – six of these will continue to serve 2 constituencies while the Newtownabbey and Newtownards offices will in future each be responsible for 3 constituencies.
3. Under the proposed changes to Parliamentary Boundaries the Newtownabbey Office (which is located in Glengormley) will be in the Belfast North constituency.
4. The proposal to reduce the number of Area Electoral Offices and increase the staffing levels at each to meet the needs of continuous registration was a recommendation of the Electoral Office Estate Review published in August 2006. Although all political parties were invited to comment on the review none did so.
5. All parties represented in the Assembly and all MP's and MLA's for the Belfast North and East constituencies were consulted about this particular re-structuring in July 2007. Only 3 responses were received.
6. This re-structuring was equality screened. No adverse differential impact on any of the relevant categories was identified. It was noted that the Belfast Office, like all electoral offices will continue to offer the full range of services to personal callers from anywhere in Northern Ireland and that accordingly no member of the public would be disadvantaged.

