

THE ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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COUNTDOWN TO DEADLINE FOR POSTAL VOTE APPLICATIONS

Anyone wanting to apply for a postal or proxy vote for the General Election needs to act quickly to meet the deadline of 5pm on Thursday 15 April the Chief Electoral Officer said today.

The time frame for submitting postal and proxy vote applications is laid down in legislation and the only exception is in a case where the applicant applies on grounds of illness that has arisen after the normal closing date.

Douglas Bain, the Chief Electoral Office said: **“Anyone who needs a postal or proxy vote and meets the criteria really only has a few days to apply. I would urge anyone, who for legitimate reasons will be unable to vote in person, to take action right away.**

“While this is an essential facility for some, I would warn anyone trying to cheat the system that we have stringent checks in place to detect fraudulent applications.”

Mr Bain also reminded voters of the changes to the law on postal and proxy voting that will make it easier for those entitled to vote in this way but more difficult for those who are intent on breaking the law. Many of these changes were the result of recommendations made following last year's election to the European Parliament.

Anyone who needs advice or assistance should phone 0800 4320 712 (text phone 0800 3284 502) Applications forms are also available online at www.eoni.org.uk.



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Notes to Editors

1. The deadline for submitting postal and proxy vote applications is laid down in legislation and cannot be altered. The only exception is for those applying on the grounds of illness arising after the normal closing date.

2. The changes to the law include –
 - allowing certain types of applications can now be countersigned by a social worker
 - exempting those in receipt of certain benefits from the need to have their application countersigned
 - allowing the same person to countersign up to two applications at the same election
 - requiring those who countersign certain types of applications to be registered as electors so that their signatures can be checked against the specimens held by the Electoral Office.

Full details of the relevant changes are set out the application forms.

3. Following the June 2009 elections some 50 cases of suspected false applications were passed to the police for investigation. Two persons will appear at Newry Magistrates Court on 21 April charged with 13 counts of electoral fraud. A number of other investigations are ongoing. Building on the lessons learned enhanced counter fraud measures, including the use of a handwriting expert, will be in place at this election.

