

THE ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



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PRESS RELEASE

ELECTORAL OFFICE SUPPORTS NATIONAL FIGHT AGAINST IDENTITY FRAUD

The Electoral Office has announced how it will play its role in the national fight against identity fraud. Douglas Bain, Chief Electoral Officer, has announced that the Office in Northern Ireland will participate in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), a programme aimed at preventing and detecting public sector fraud.

NFI was originally set up in Great Britain in 1996 and in its last exercise detected frauds amounting to £140m. Government figures show that identity fraud costs the UK economy more than £1 billion annually and over 4.3 million adults have already fallen victim.

In Northern Ireland, beginning this month, a number of public sector bodies will provide information to the Northern Ireland Audit Office who will compare it electronically to identify suspect matches, for example where the name of a deceased person is used to claim a pension.

Douglas Bain said:

“I very much welcome the extension of the National Fraud Initiative to Northern Ireland. With the every increasing strain on public funds everyone needs to fully support the prevention and detection of fraud.

“I am confident that the work will help protect electors against the serious risk of identity theft and fraud. I also expect that frauds detected will result in savings for other public sector bodies”

The announcement comes during National Identity Fraud Prevention Week, a UK wide awareness drive supported by a number of agencies, including the Home Office's Identity and Passport Service, the Serious and Organised Crime Agency and the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Notes for Editors:

1. Other actions taken or planned by the Electoral Office to prevent and detect fraud include –



CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE

- ◆ requiring documentary evidence of entitlement to register
 - ◆ much closer scrutiny of postal and proxy vote applications
 - ◆ training of staff in signature comparison
 - ◆ checking of information with the Department of Work and Pensions.
2. Because it is very difficult to open a bank account or obtain credit unless you are on the electoral register fraudsters often attempt to register, sometimes in false names, as a first step in their crime.
 3. It is the policy of the Chief Electoral Officer to refer all cases of suspected fraud to the police for investigation.
 4. NFI received a warm welcome from the Assembly Audit Committee at a hearing chaired by John O'Dowd (SF) in April and in the Committee's subsequent report published on 12 June.
 5. In addition to the Electoral Office, other public sector organisations taking part in NFI include all the Northern Ireland departments and their agencies, all district councils, all Education and Library Boards, all Health and Social Service Boards and all Health and Social Care Trusts.
 6. The Electoral Office will not be providing any information on individual electors until 1 December 2008. Any elector who believes that the provision of his data would be likely to cause substantial unwarranted damage or substantial unwarranted distress or that it would be unjustified or unlawful should write to the Chief Electoral Officer asking that his data be excluded from the exercise. If the Chief Electoral Officer agrees, that data will not be provided.
 7. Further information on NFI is available at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/nfi.

