

THE ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER ANNOUNCES PLAN TO FURTHER IMPROVE ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

Douglas Bain, Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, has announced plans to increase voter registration and make access to polling stations easier, particularly for people with disabilities. The announcement came today as the Electoral Office published its Business Plan for the coming year.

The target to increase the number of electors on the Electoral Register by at least 11,500 by the beginning of December was also announced. The current register is already considered to be the most accurate anywhere on these islands.

Preparation for the expected European Parliamentary Election in 2009 will also be given high priority and key to this will involve identifying qualified individuals to staff polling stations and count centres for this and any other election held next year.

Douglas Bain said:

“During the year ahead I will be announcing new initiatives to encourage registration amongst young people, people with disabilities and EU citizens, all of whom are under-represented on the register.

“I will also be checking on the availability and suitability of current polling stations, ensuring that everyone will have the opportunity to exercise their democratic right to vote.

“We have been working very hard to establish Northern Ireland as a benchmark for electoral registration and practice. I thank everyone who has taken just the few moments needed to complete a registration form.”

Also announced are 31 development objectives; these include a programme of registration events in at least 95% of secondary schools, trial programmes of a “mini canvass” in eight areas of low registration or significant new housing, and the publication of a booklet setting out the adjustments to electoral law and practice to enable those with disabilities to play their full part in the democratic process.

While the Electoral Office will continue to do all that is reasonably practicable to assist those entitled to register to do so, there is a clear warning to those who flout the law. The Chief Electoral Officer expects to refer around 50 cases of alleged failure to provide information required for registration purposes to the PSNI for investigation with a view to prosecution. Failure to provide such information is an offence punishable by a fine of £1000.

Full details of the Electoral Office Business Plan can be found at www.eoni.org.uk.

Anyone who needs to register or has any questions about registration can contact the Electoral Office Helpline on 0800 4320 712.