

THE ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

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PUBLICATION OF THE NEW ELECTORAL REGISTER

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, Denis Stanley, today announced publication of the new Electoral Register. The new Register contains the names and addresses of 1,157,052 electors, an increase of 1.00% on the number contained in the 1 September Register, the last published before this year's annual autumn canvass. Details of the breakdown of returns by Parliamentary Constituency are attached.

The Chief Electoral Officer said on making the announcement about publication of the Register:

“As ever, a great deal of hard work has been put into compiling this autumn's Register by both full-time and part-time staff throughout the Electoral Office. It is now widely accepted that the requirements of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, which require a completely new Register to be compiled each year and each individual elector to provide afresh their three personal identifiers of date of birth, national insurance number and signature, are having an adverse effect on the willingness of electors to re-register annually. Although this autumn's Register is up by a small amount, due mainly to 95,120 electors exceptionally this year being carried forward from the September 2005 Register, the overall trend in recent years has been downward. Consequently, the Electoral Office is pleased that the recommendations made to Ministers last year in respect of changes in legislation aimed at easing the burdensome task on both electors and staff of producing a fresh Register each year have been accepted and that a Bill to introduce continuous registration to Northern Ireland is to be presented to Parliament in early 2006.

Under this new system, electors will remain on the Register without the need to re-register annually and need take no action unless their circumstances change. To help ensure that

registration details are kept up-to-date, the Electoral Office will automatically be notified of changes that come to the attention of other government agencies and public bodies, including when young people reach voting age. Electoral Office staff will then follow-up with the individual electors concerned and alter their registration details as appropriate. This system will, not only be more efficient for existing electors, it will also allow the Electoral Office to devote its resources to encouraging under represented groups to register. This new legislation is likely to come into force late next year and therefore the autumn canvass in 2006 is expected to be the last in the present form.

Anyone who missed the annual canvass may, of course, have their name added to the Register, or their details changed, at any time under the system of Rolling Registration. Registration forms continue to be available from a range of sources, including the Electoral Office website, and these should be returned, duly completed, to any Area Electoral Office, as soon as possible.”

Note to Editors

In Northern Ireland electors at present are required under the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 to register annually on an individual basis and to supply their national insurance number (or sign a declaration that they do not have one), date of birth and sign the registration form personally. This year’s registration began on 30 August with the posting out of registration forms, pre-printed with the name and address of each of the 1.146 million previous electors, co-ordinated simultaneously with a major advertising campaign on television, billboards and in the newspapers, sponsored by the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Office employed upwards of 900 canvassers to visit every house in Northern Ireland to help electors complete their forms and collect completed forms. Where collection was not possible, canvassers left further blank forms and Freepost return envelopes.

Reminders and fresh registration forms, again pre-printed with the name and address of each of the 242,000 electors who had not at that stage returned their forms, were sent out by 3 November. Blank forms were also sent to the 90,000 households from which no response had been received.

Electors may check that their details have been correctly entered on the Register by calling the Electoral Office on 028 9044 6688, by visiting any one of the nine Area Electoral Offices or by calling into their local District Council Headquarters. Anyone who is eligible to be registered, but has yet to return a form, may apply to be added to the Register by submitting a completed form at any time under the Rolling Registration scheme.

The primary objective of the new legislation is to stabilise the size of the Register. Despite the considerable improvements to its integrity brought about by the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 the Register has been falling year-on-year. Among other things this is due to the repetitive demand on electors for detailed personal information. There are other positive reasons to change. The annual canvass presently costs nearly £2 million. Freed from the burden of organising a canvass every year the Electoral Office can both save taxpayers money and more effectively target the large number of eligible electors who persistently fail to register. Instead of a concentrated effort during the relatively short canvass period the task can be addressed in a continuous way.

The key to the success of this revised approach lies in the Electoral Office having access to data on electors' names and addresses maintained by other governmental agencies. It is envisaged that the new legislation will permit the transfer of data to the Electoral Office from these bodies. Essentially they will provide information when people change their name or address and using these "alerts", the Electoral Office will then seek to establish whether a revision to the Register is required or if an elector should be removed. It is envisaged that this will be done by contacting the elector, (other, of course, than when notified by the Registrar General that the elector has died). Initially this will be done by post, but ultimately by doorstep visits as necessary.

Published Electorate – 1 September 2003 to 1 December 2005

CONSTITUENCY	01/09/2003	02/02/2004*	01/09/2004	01/12/2004	01/09/2005	01/12/2005
Belfast East	51852	50005	49820	48503	52994	53076
Belfast North	51355	49114	49530	46008	52627	52742
Belfast South	50707	49403	49447	46718	52560	52523
Belfast West	50873	47183	48837	46054	53660	54268
East Antrim	55477	54727	54658	53307	58120	58921
East Londonderry	56202	55260	55142	54759	58686	59239
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	64355	62993	63903	61774	66927	67882
Foyle	65312	62404	63511	61386	69143	68937
Lagan Valley	67921	65642	65636	65837	70572	72135
Mid Ulster	60113	58950	59456	58346	62599	63242
Newry & Armagh	68740	67433	68026	66593	72354	73226
North Antrim	70493	69942	70046	70087	74353	75487
North Down	57426	56137	55980	54734	59471	60266
South Antrim	63644	62983	63172	60315	66805	67662
South Down	70155	68515	68892	68022	73477	74367
Strangford	66314	64796	64649	63882	68838	69712
Upper Bann	68816	67713	67753	67033	72257	73058
West Tyrone	57796	55960	57060	54243	60097	60309
TOTAL	1097551	1069160	1075518	1047601	1145540	1157052

* Publication of the Register due on 1 December 2003 postponed by Parliament to 2 February 2004 due to the Assembly election being rescheduled for 26 November 2003.