

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Targets and Development Objectives 2009-10

Progress Report – March 2010

OT	On Target
A	Achieved
NA	Not Achieved
NP	Not Proceeding

Targets		Status	Comments
1.	<p>To publish on 1 December 2009, a revised register of electors that is at least as accurate and comprehensive as the December 2008 register.</p> <p>There is a statutory requirement to publish a revised register of electors on 1 December each year. The comprehensiveness of the register will be maintained through the continuous registration process. Its accuracy will be maintained by removal from the register of those who have died or have ceased to meet the registration criteria and by amending the registration particulars for those who notify a change of name or address.</p>	A	Register to be published on 1 December 2009 shows increase in numbers registered. 13179 attainers on 1 Dec register as a result of schools initiative/contacting 17-18 year olds on DWP reports. Initiatives undertaken, including NFI has maintained accuracy at high level.
2.	<p>To submit the CEO's annual report for the year ended 31 March 2009 to the Secretary of State by 1 September 2009.</p> <p>Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006</p>	A	Submitted 28 August

	requires the CEO to submit an annual report on how he has carried out his duties. The Secretary of State lays that report before both Houses of Parliament. Work in connection with the European Parliamentary elections is likely to delay submission of the report until late summer.		
3.	<p>To conduct the European Parliamentary elections, and the General Election if held during the year, so that they are free, fair, efficient and within budget.</p> <p>Preparation for the European Parliamentary elections was well advanced at the start of the year. Between 1 April and the poll on 4 June further action will be taken to ensure that this target is met. A Westminster General Election may be called during the year. Much of the work undertaken for the June elections will be relevant to any General Election.</p>	A	No petitions presented or complaints made by a political party or other stakeholder. Preparation work for the General Election well advanced.
Customer Service Development Objectives		Status	Comments
1.	<p>By 31 May 2009 to reduce to 7 days or less the average delivery time for Electoral Identity Cards.</p> <p>New arrangements for the production of Electoral Identity Cards will be introduced on 1 April. By 31 May we will have halved the average time from receipt of a completed application to provision of the card.</p>	A	From 1 June to 30 September 2009 the average delivery time to produce electoral identity cards was 2 working days.
2.	<p>From 1 April 2009 to increase the opening hours of all Area Electoral Offices by remaining open over lunchtime.</p> <p>To make it easier for the public to access our services all eight Area Electoral Offices will be open from 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Thursday and from 9am to 4pm on Fridays.</p>	A	All offices commenced lunch hour opening on 1 April.

3.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to pilot “late opening” at a minimum of 3 Area Electoral Offices.</p> <p>Some customers in full time employment have told us that they find it difficult to visit one of our offices during normal working hours. We will pilot ‘late opening’ at a minimum of 3 of our offices and depending on the usage take decisions on future opening hours.</p>	A	Commenced January 2010 in Omagh/Londonderry/Banbridge area offices.
4.	<p>By 4 June 2009 to pilot Saturday morning opening at all Area Electoral Offices.</p> <p>Experience shows that in the run up to elections there is an increase in the number of personal callers at our offices. This year we expect an even greater increase ahead of the European Parliamentary elections as a result of the new late registration arrangements. Before these elections we will pilot Saturday morning opening at all of our offices. The results will be evaluated and will inform our future decisions.</p>	A	Piloted in all offices – results disappointing
5.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to pilot, in at least 2 constituencies, the provision of a limited opening office, providing the full range of services, in towns away from the Area Electoral Office.</p> <p>Although we have offices at 7 locations across Northern Ireland we are conscious that in some areas people have to travel considerable distances to use our services. During the year we will pilot the use of limited opening offices at locations away from the Area Offices in at least 2 constituencies.</p>	A	Commenced January 2010. Limited opening offices provided in Enniskillen, Dungannon, Coleraine and Armagh .

Registration Development Objectives			Comments
6.	<p>By 31st March 2010 to consider the feasibility of “cleansing” data received from the Central Services Agency to reduce the number of ‘duplicate’ letters sent to the same elector.</p> <p>Information provided by the Central Services Agency is critical to the success of the continuous registration process that replaced the annual canvass in 2006. Every 3 months the Agency provides details of those who, according to their records, have moved house. This information is used as the basis of letters sent to these individuals reminding them of the need to change their registration details. It has become apparent that the data provided by the Agency contains a small number of duplicate entries with the result that some people receive two or more letters from us. During the year we will explore options for electronically identifying these duplicates so as to avoid individuals receiving more than one letter.</p>	A	Procedures to identify and remove duplicate entries within the quarterly output and using the unique identifier supplied by CSA to identify and remove duplicates across outputs have successfully reduced the incidence of duplicate letters.
7.	<p>By 30 September 2009 to review the registration process in light of best practice and experience of the late registration process and operate it, as amended as necessary, in a standard way throughout Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Since 2006 continuous registration has been an evolving process. Late registration will be available for the first time at the June 2009 elections. The practices in relation to the processing of applications have varied, to some extent, between our eight offices. We will review the continuous registration process, building on best practice, and implement it in a standard way at all our offices.</p>	A	Desktop manuals outlining registration processes issued to Area Offices and stored in TRIM by 30 September 2009.

8.	<p>By the date on which the legislation comes into force to be ready in all respects to process applications for anonymous registration.</p> <p>The Government have announced that the proposed legislation to introduce anonymous registration should be enacted later this year. We will build on the work already undertaken to ensure that we are ready to offer this new service to the public as soon as the legislation comes into force.</p>	NP	Work suspended – NIO have advised that legislation is unlikely to be in force before 31 March 2010.
<p>Comprehensiveness and Accuracy of Registers Development Objectives</p>		<p>Status</p>	<p>Comments</p>
9.	<p>Particularly from September 2009 onwards, to engage proactively with 16-18 year olds who are not attending school so as to encourage their registration.</p> <p>Building on the success of our “Schools Initiative” in 2008/09 we will this year engage proactively with young people who have left school so as to encourage their electoral registration.</p>	A	<p>DWP provide a quarterly output of all those who have reached the age of 17. All those not already registered receive a letter outlining the benefits of registration and a registration form. 11744 letters were issued from July to December 2009 resulting in 3443 additions to the register and 18 modifications/transfers. AEOs have also attended College Freshers Fayres to engage with students and encourage registration. Contact made with Universities to encourage registration amongst students.</p>

10.	<p>By 31st March 2010, to have increased by at least 25% compared with 1st December 2008, the number of registered overseas electors.</p> <p>Those who were previously registered in Northern Ireland are entitled to register as overseas electors and to vote in certain elections. We will engage with such individuals and encourage them to exercise their legal right to register.</p>	A	<p>Initiative launched 17 February 2010 with press release. Posters/leaflets/information packs distributed. 29 Overseas electors on 1 December 2008 – 51 on 1 April 2010.</p>
11.	<p>By 31st March 2010 to have explored and implemented, where practicable, the benefits available from use of the Pointer system.</p> <p>Pointer is an address database providing a common standard address for every property in Northern Ireland. We will explore how it could assist us in delivering an improved and more efficient service and implement any changes to current practices where practicable.</p>	A	<p>Address mismatch checks complete. Address field incompatibilities passed to the POINTER team. Discussed with Halarose at User Group Meeting 14/15 Jan 2010. Removal of properties not identified in POINTER ongoing.</p>
12.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to pilot in at least 6 wards or part-wards the effectiveness of a household leaflet drop to encourage registration.</p> <p>Household leaflet drops are a relatively inexpensive way of contacting the public in a particular area. We will pilot and evaluate the effectiveness of such drops in at least 6 wards or part wards as a method of maintaining both the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the electoral register.</p>	A	<p>Leaflets delivered to households in 9 wards w/e 22 January 2010. Disappointingly low response</p>
13.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to have carried out a further 8 pilot mini-canvasses as a means of maintaining the accuracy of the register.</p> <p>Taking account of lessons learned from the mini canvass pilots in 2008/09 we will carry out further pilots this year.</p>	A	<p>'Canvass' letter issued to electors/households in 9 wards w/e 15 January 2010. Reminder letters issued 9 February.</p>

14.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to have exploited in full the information gained from participation in the National Fraud Initiative.</p> <p>Last autumn we announced our participation in NFI. The results will become available early in 2009/10. All inconsistencies between our records and those of the other public sector authorities will be considered and appropriate action will be taken.</p>	A	Letters issued to mismatches on NIHE/Payroll and Rates databases (12,000+ letters) from late August to mid October.
Elections Development Objectives			
15.	<p>By 31st December 2009 to have amended the processes and procedures as necessary in light of lessons learned at the June 2009 elections.</p> <p>Significant changes to both law and practice will be implemented at the European Parliamentary elections. We will consider how these, and all our other processes, worked at the June elections and make any necessary adjustments to our processes by 31 December.</p>	A	Plans for Parliamentary election amended.
16.	<p>Within 5 working days of the calling of the next General Election we will implement the new parliamentary boundaries.</p> <p>The changes to the parliamentary boundaries made by the Parliamentary Constituencies (Northern Ireland) 2008 do not take effect until the next General Election is called. Within 5 working days of that event we will amend our electronic records to reflect the new boundaries and, where necessary, transfer any paper records to the appropriate Area Electoral Office.</p>	A	Parliamentary boundary changes have been made on EROS and are incorporated in the 1 st December 2009 register.

Corporate Services Development Objectives			
17.	<p>Prior to any re-structuring of the Northern Ireland Office as a consequence of the devolution of policing and criminal justice, to have established procedures for the continued support of the Electoral Office finance and information services functions.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Office will be restructured following any devolution of the policing and criminal justice functions. As part of the restructuring the arrangements for supporting our finance and information services functions are likely to change and to be moved to London. Prior to that we will discuss the new arrangements with the NIO to ensure that we continue to be well supported.</p>	A	<p>Met with NIO official 11 Sep. Follow up work ongoing.</p> <p>Special meeting of the Board was convened on 9 Feb for the sole purpose of considering a paper on the future arrangements for the processing and payment of invoices for goods and services and deciding on the way forward.</p> <p>After discussion it was agreed the time was not right to seek NIO agreement to bring the payment process in-house and the matter should be revisited later in the year.</p>
18.	<p>By 30 August 2009 to have reviewed, and revised as necessary, the policy on the recruitment and use of casual staff.</p> <p>Our policy for the recruitment and use of casual staff has been developed incrementally over a number of years. By 30 August 2009 we will have reviewed the policy and amended it as necessary.</p>	A	<p>Casual Staff Policy equality screened and signed off by CEO and NIPSA May 2009.</p>
19.	<p>By 31 March 2010 to have reviewed, and revised as necessary, the policy on the recruitment and selection of permanent staff.</p> <p>The review will take account of changes to employment law and will include subjects such as the advertising of vacancies and the qualifications required for particular posts.</p>	A	<p>Recruitment Policy was agreed at the JCC meeting 11 Feb and signed off.</p>