



## **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2007- 08**

**Report to the Equality Commission on progress in the implementation of our equality and good relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) 2006**

This report can be found on the EONI website [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk) and can also be made available in alternative formats on request

**Name of Public Authority:** Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

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## **S75 Executive Summary**

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations and what outcomes were achieved?

A key development for 2007 centered on encouraging registration amongst people with disabilities. This theme was selected in part because the Northern Ireland Office had indicated that the Electoral Administration Act provision abolishing the unsatisfactory common law on mental capacity to vote was likely to be brought into operation by 1 October. Unfortunately that timescale was not achieved and it now appears likely that the provision will not be in force until July 2008. Nonetheless, significant progress was made by alerting those with disabilities to the new provisions that would enable them to engage in the democratic process.

There were no major elections during the year but the information gained from the March 07 Assembly election enabled EONI staff to review some of the locations used as polling places and, where appropriate, to source alternative venues with better disability access for future elections. However, a formal polling station review under legislation cannot take place until late 2009.

Work continued throughout 2007-08 to ensure the best possible service from public counters at all Area Electoral Offices. Actions taken included improving access, better signage and new facilities for wheelchair users.

- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

The Chief Electoral Officer, through his staff in the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI), will continue to make all services available equally to all those in our community and to ensure equality of opportunity for all staff. The following initiatives are planned for the coming year:

- ◆ Modify as necessary the continuous registration process and continue the review of electoral registration forms making them available in plain English and in a range of other languages;
- ◆ Keep under review the election procedures and practices revising them as necessary, and monitor and review electoral law and practice making proposals for change when appropriate.
- ◆ Publish a short booklet to inform those with disabilities of the changes in the law which will make it easier for them to participate more fully in the democratic process.
- ◆ Continue to provide a high quality electoral service to the people of Northern Ireland in a way that is increasingly efficient and which provides value for money, equality and good relations.

- Please give examples of changes to policies or practices which have resulted in outcomes. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3:

	Change in policy or practice which has resulted in outcomes	Tick if result of EQIA
Persons of different racial groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• REGISTRATION FORM - now available in 13 other languages including Irish and Ulster Scots.</li> </ul>	

Persons of different age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RECRUITMENT OF ELECTION STAFF (Reducing age limit from 18 to 16)</li> </ul>	
Men and women generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MONITORING (gender statistics re customer visits to Area offices and callers to EONI Helpline).</li> </ul>	
Persons with and without a disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ANNUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION WEEK - targeting persons with disabilities</li> </ul>	

**Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties**

- Please outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2007-08.

Equality of treatment for all was one of the stated values underpinning EONI Corporate and Business plans for 2007-08. During the year work began on developing a good relations strategy and the preparation of a Disability Action Plan was one of the business targets. The Plan was completed and submitted to the Equality Commission by June 2007.

In recognition of the increasing number of individuals eligible to register in Northern Ireland who do not have English as their first language, the simplified version of the registration form introduced in 2007 was made available in 13 other languages including Irish and Ulster Scots. It is also available on request in a number of other formats.

The annual canvass, abolished by legislation after 2006, provided a focus on registration activities. To replace this it was decided that there should be an annual Electoral Registration Week with a theme each year of promoting registration for a particular section of the community. The

theme for 2007 was encouraging registration amongst people with disabilities. A launch event was held at Parliament Buildings and was attended by invited guests from a wide range of disability groups from across Northern Ireland. EONI staff present were assisted in their work of hosting the guests by pupils with disabilities from Longstone School, Dundonald who attended by kind permission of the principal, Mr Trevor Howard.

The launch received widespread coverage on television, radio and in the newspapers. During the week Area Officer staff ran or participated in more than 40 separate events across Northern Ireland aimed at encouraging registration by those with disabilities or more generally. These also achieved good media coverage.

## Section 2: Screening

- Please provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u> ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u> esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter <u>F</u> or <u>R</u></i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Y</u> es/ <u>N</u> o? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Car Parking Policy	R	N	N
Guidance for Dealing with Unacceptable Customer Behaviour	R	N	N
Proposed Restructuring of EONI Estate	R	N	N

**Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)**

- Please provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2007/08, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2008-09.

No policies were subject to EQIA during 07/08.

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2007- March 2008

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
Function of Preparing and maintaining an accurate electoral register	Reduced (Electoral Commission Report on the Accuracy and Comprehensiveness of the Electoral Register indicated register was 95%).	Reduced
Polling Station Scheme	Reduced (Fewer locations with poor disability access are used as polling stations).	Reduced

2008-09 EQIA Time-table

The are no EQIAs due to be commenced during 2008/09.

**Section 4: Training**

- Please outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision and conclusions from any training evaluations.

Section 75 awareness training for EONI staff was carried out as an integral part of the induction process for new appointees during 07/08. Training

provided during the year which is associated with Section 75 categories included the following:

- Attendance at the Foyle Multi-Cultural Forum – Area Electoral Officer was guest speaker to highlight events taking place during Registration Week for people with disabilities.
- Briefing of South Down and Lagan Valley MLAs , MPs , Cllrs and party workers. The aim was to raise awareness and encourage participation of all political parties in Registration Week highlighting the theme of Disability.
- Attendance at Coleraine Disability Forum – AEO was guest speaker to highlight the launch of Registration Week and in particular the Registration Awareness Day at the Lodge hotel on 4 October 2007.
- Attendance at Downpatrick Disability Resource Centre with mobile ID unit and Electoral Registration Forms
- Meeting with An Munia Tober(Travellers' Group) at their premises to organise registration and ID card event
- Attendance at RNID event at Stormont with mobile ID unit and Electoral Registration forms
- Special Open Day at EONI Office in L'Derry for Ethnic Minority groups in the Foyle Constituency
- Registration Awareness events throughout NI involving a presentation, photographic identity card provision and form completion exercise. All local disability groups invited.
- Local Democracy Event for Migrant Workers and Ethnic Minorities. Presentation, Registration and Electoral ID facilitation session in Dungannon Leisure Centre
- Youth Democracy Awareness Session. Presentation, Registration and ID facilitation at Dungannon Borough Council Offices.
- Senior Citizens Electoral Awareness Session. Presentation, Registration and ID Facilitation at Dungannon Borough Council Office.

- Local Democracy Event for various Disability groups in the Dungannon Borough Council area. Presentation, Registration and ID facilitation
- Local Democracy Event for Ethnic Minorities and Migrant Workers in East Tyrone College. Preparation and participation through Information Stall. Registration and Photographic facilities on site
- Presentation on electoral matters to Afro Community Support Group, AEO was guest Speaker at monthly meeting in Renshaws Hotel.

### **Section 5: Communication**

- Please outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the Section 75 Duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

EONI Management Board meets monthly, to monitor progress against targets and objectives including the progress on delivery of statutory duties. The equality implications of proposals must be addressed in all Board papers. Minutes of meetings are made available to all staff and published on the website.

### **Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis**

- Please outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research or any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

Qualitative research included planning for the Electoral Registration Week which started in early summer 2007 and was undertaken by a group made up of the CEO, the Assistant Chief Electoral Officer (Registration), staff from the Northern Ireland Information Service and representatives of Disability Action, RNIB, RNID, MENCAP and the Leonard Cheshire Foundation.

Quantitative – Electoral Commission reports comprising 97% of voters interviewed post-election Assembly 2007, said they were either very or fairly satisfied with the location of their polling place. EONI Helpline also gathers statistics on the age and gender of callers.

### **Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services**

- Please provide details of any initiatives/steps taken during the year, including take up, to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

To facilitate access to the information on EONI website by those with a visual disability, the Browsealoud facility was made available. Browsealoud will read the website to the user highlighting words as they are read out.

The registration form and evidence letter have been translated into a variety of languages and formats including Braille and audio. EONI began preliminary work to produce a booklet which gives advice to people with disabilities on registering and voting – which will be translated into Braille, audio and Easy Read formats.

The textphone number is now Freephone along with the main Helpline number. We state on our website that we welcome calls via Tynetalk. The Language Line service allows customers to deal with us using their preferred language.

Refurbishments were undertaken in relation to the relocation of the Belfast Area Electoral Office to Headquarters which included improvements to disability access ie, installing an automated front entrance, an elevator

voice service and an emergency audio communication system located on the stairwell on each floor.

### **Section 8: Complaints**

- Please identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
  - received and resolved by the authority (including how this was achieved);
  - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
  - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

The were no complaints received which were Section 75 related.

### **Section 9: Consultation and Engagement**

- Please provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

During 07/08 regular meetings took place with Disability Action, RNIB and RNID to discuss a range of issues impacting on people with disabilities. These organisations, together with MENCAP and the Leonard Cheshire Foundation, were represented on the steering group that oversaw Electoral Registration Week 2007 which focused on encouraging registration and participation by those with disabilities.

As a result of these useful contacts a number of development objectives intended to make it easier for those with a disability to play their full part in the democratic process were included in the 2008/09 Business Plan which was published just before the end of the reporting year.

At a local level, many of the Area Electoral Officers developed and improved contacts with disability and ethnic minority groups in the areas which they administer for registration and elections. Some of these wide ranging groups are detailed in Appendix A.

## **Section 10: The Good Relations Duty**

- Please provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

EONI staff were present at the polling station in Belfast for the Polish elections and in Ballymena for the Romanian elections. Electoral registration forms and a letter explaining the benefits of registration, in English and the other language, were handed to all those who came to vote. The CEO had discussions with the Honorary Lithuanian Consul about providing a similar service at the Lithuanian elections scheduled for October 2008.

Annual Report July 2007/ March 2008  
'Disability Duties' Questions

**1. How many action measures for this reporting period have been?**

6

Fully  
Achieved

4

Partially  
Achieved

0

Not  
Achieved

2. Please outline the following detail on **all actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs <sup>1</sup>	Outcomes / Impact <sup>2</sup>
National <sup>3</sup>	N/A		
Regional <sup>4</sup>	1. Polling station scheme – changes required as a result of closure of schools. 2. Electoral Registration	No major elections during 2007-08.  Disability Themed Week to encourage registration.	Review of polling stations to improve disabled access. Media coverage/feedback.
Local <sup>5</sup>	Access to Area Offices/HQ	Accessibility Improvements	DDA Compliant

<sup>1</sup> **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

<sup>2</sup> **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

<sup>3</sup> **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

<sup>4</sup> **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

<sup>5</sup> **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local forums.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Training and awareness activities by Area Office	Undertook a number of training sessions throughout NI – see annex A	Increase in Electoral Register
2	Customer Comment Cards	Statistics gathered on access to Area Offices and HQ.	Of a total of 128 comments received, 94% indicated 'Good'.

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Promotion of awareness on changes to electoral administration – rules on mental incapacity	Postponed.	Postponed.
2	Electoral Registration Week 2007 themed on those with disabilities - encourages electoral registration	Extensive coverage in the broadcast and written media including RNIB talking newspaper. More than 40 events took place across NI.	Positive feedback from First Minister and other politicians as well as members of the publi

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Staff Notice on legislative changes and development of Disability Action Plan	Consultation and meetings to ensure EONI met all the requirements.	Engagement encouraged staff views which were used in the formulation of measures, performance indicators and targets to comply with the new disability duties. For example a member of staff did voluntary work for people with both physical and mental disabilities and was very keen to discuss particular issues.

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures	Milestones <sup>6</sup> / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1	Carry out a fundamental review of the polling station scheme taking particular account of the needs of persons with disabilities and the changes that will be required as a result of the closure of schools.	Consultation took place with the political parties, disability groups and the public.	Work started on a review of those stations with restricted access.	The law did not permit a fundamental review.

<sup>6</sup> **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.

2	Regularly meet with Disability Action, RNID, RNIB and other groups representing people with disabilities	Consultation on disability related issues.	Improvements made where issues were identified.	Because of the regular dialogue on a range of issues some meetings did not take place as there was nothing to discuss.
3	(a) Press NIO to remove common law rules on mental incapacity in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (b) Promote awareness of the changes amongst relevant stakeholders including those enfranchised by them.	All interest groups informed.	Booklet giving details of all the adjustments made to the registration and election processes to benefit those with disabilities will be published 1 July 2008	Common law rules will cease to apply wef 1 July 2008
4	(a) Press NIO to extend types of photographic ID acceptable to include Translink War Disabled and Blind Persons Smartpasses; (b) Raise awareness of the changes amongst those effected by them.	There was widespread media coverage of its publication	The changes were outlined on the new booklet (see above) a copy of which will be sent to the relevant interest groups and which will be available on EONI website.	The changes will take effect on 1 July 2008.

4. Please outline what **action measures have not been achieved** and the reasons why?

All action measures were either fully or partially achieved.

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Performance indicators, timescales and targets which are detailed on the Disability Action Plan are monitored by the Management Board. EONI also receives regular feedback from interest groups and customers.

(b) Quantitative

Increases in the electoral register - On the basis of an estimate of the eligible population provided NISRA, the revised electoral register published on 3 December 2007 was 83.5% comprehensive. This represented an increase of 2.6% on the comprehensiveness of the 2006 register which was compiled following the last annual canvass.

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions, has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes.

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisations annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

No revisions or additional steps taken during the year. The Disability Action Plan will be considered by the Management Board in October 2008 and revisions to the plan considered in light of this review.

## ANNEX A

<b>Details of Activity*</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>EONI Personnel involved</b>
Attendance at the Foyle Multi-Cultural Forum – guest speaker to highlight events taking place during Registration Week	24 August 2007	Patricia Murphy
Briefing of South Down and Lagan Valley MLAs , MPs , Cllrs and party workers the aim was to raise awareness and encourage participation of all political parties in Registration Week highlighting the theme of Disability.	7 <sup>th</sup> August 2007	Majella Morgan
Attendance at Coleraine Disability Forum – guest speaker to highlight the launch of Registration Week and in particular the Registration Awareness Day at the Lodge hotel on 4 October 2007.	12 September 2007	Patricia Murphy
Attending Downpatrick Disability Resource Centre with mobile ID unit and Electoral Registration Forms	2 October 2007	Majella Morgan
Meeting with An Munia Tober(Travellers’ Group) at their premises to organise registration and ID event	19 Sept 07	M Carroll
Registration Event at An Munia Tober, Blackstaff Mill, assisting visitors with the completion of forms and taking ID photos. Contact Marie Louise McAllister	12 Oct 07	M Carroll & E Hughes
Attending Edgecumbe Training & Resource Centre with mobile ID unit and Electoral Registration Forms	26 November 2007	J Murray
Attendance at RNID event at Stormont with mobile ID unit and Electoral Registration forms	1 October 2007	J Murray
Organised a Registration Awareness Day for all disability groups in the East Londonderry Constituency at the Lodge Hotel Coleraine	1 October 2007	J Murray
Attendance at Ethnic Minority Forum event on Media held at The City Hotel in order to promote registration awareness	2 October 2007	P Murphy

Organised a Special Open Day at EONI Office for Ethnic Minority groups in the Foyle Constituency	3 October 2007	P Murphy
Registration Awareness Event at Lurgan Library with invitations sent to disabled groups.	5 October 2007	P Murphy
Registration Awareness Event at Portadown Library with invitations sent to disabled groups.	2 October 2007	A Mason
Attended Millview Day Centre, Bessbrook and spoke to the disabled residents there.		
Registration Awareness Event at Armagh Library with invitations sent to disabled groups.	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2007	A Mason
Registration Awareness raising event at Enniskillen Castle involving a presentation, photographic identity card provision and form completion exercise. Event arranged in conjunction with Fermanagh District Council. All local Special Needs groups invited.	4 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	A Mason
Registration and Electoral ID session arranged in conjunction with Omagh D.C. at the Grange, Omagh. All local Special Needs groups invited along with those from the Strabanne D.C. area.	4 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	A Mason
Local Democracy Event for Migrant Workers and Ethnic Minorities. Presentation, Registration and Electoral ID facilitation session in Dungannon Leisure Centre	2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2007	M. Fox
Youth Democracy Awareness Session. Presentation, Registration and ID facilitation at Dungannon Borough Council Offices.	10 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	M. Fox
Senior Citizens Electoral Awareness Session. Presentation, Registration and ID Facilitation at Dungannon Borough Council Office.	14 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	M. Fox
Local Democracy Event for various Disability groups in the Dungannon Borough Council area. Presentation, Registration and ID facilitation	15 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	M. Fox
Local Democracy Event No.2 for Ethnic Minorities and Migrant Workers in East Tyrone College. Preparation and participation through Information Stall. Registration and Photographic facilities on site	19 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	M. Fox
Presentation at An Munia Tober Launch of Electoral Leaflet, Contacts Marie Louise McAllister/Louise Brennan	30 <sup>th</sup> October 2007	M. Fox
Presentation on all matters electoral to Afro Community Support Group, Guest Speaker, Monthly Meeting 8pm Renshaws Hotel, Contact Julius Anaka	6 <sup>th</sup> November 2007	M. Fox

Information Morning. Registration and ID facilitation at Ballymoney Community Resource Centre. Disability, Ethnic Minority and Community Groups invited.	19 December 07	M Carroll
Information Afternoon. Registration and ID facilitation at <b>ecos</b> Centre, Ballymena. Disability, Ethnic Minority and Community Groups invited.	11 January 08	M Carroll
Information Morning. Registration and ID facilitation at Magherafelt District Council Offices. Disability, Ethnic Minority and Community Groups invited.	2 October 07	Rae Kirk
Registration and ID Mobile Unit at Glens Hotel, Cushendall. Church, Community and Disability Groups invited.	3 October 07	Rae Kirk
Registration and ID Mobile Unit at Moyle District Council Offices. Church, Community and Disability Groups invited,	4 October 07	Rae Kirk
Romanian Election. Registration facilitation at Kenbane House, Ballymena.	19 November 07	Rae Kirk
Attended Respecting Diversity Conference. Registration and ID facilitation at Ballymoney Town Hall.	20 November 07	Rae Kirk
Disability Information Day. Registration and ID facilitation at High Kirk Hall, Ballymena.	25 November 07	Rae Kirk
Registration and Mobile ID Unit organised for Ethnic Minority groups at Glenshane Community Centre, Dungiven	30 November 07	Rae Kirk
Meeting with Polish Community Rep at NICEM	3 December 07	Rae Kirk
Visit hosted by Belfast Office for group of school leavers led by An Munia Tober ID Clinic at Orchardville Day Resource Centre for group of adults with learning disabilities	24 January 2008	Patricia Murphy
ID Clinic at Morton Community Centre for group of adults with learning disabilities	20 February 2008	Maureen Carroll
ID Clinic at Orchardville Day Resource Centre for group of adults with learning disabilities	10 March 08	Maureen Carroll
Evening ID Clinic at Simon Community Belfast Foyer for group of homeless adults		