



**Public Authority Annual Progress Report  
on Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and  
Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) 2006**

**1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011**

Name of Public Authority :

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

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# ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

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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?

The key issues during the reporting year for the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) included the Polling Station Review and the Parliamentary General Election in May 2010. There were also preparations for the combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Government elections, and referendum in May 2011. A draft polling station scheme was published in September 2010 which was subject to a 12 week consultation period. This exercise, which proposed changes to polling stations, also promoted equality of opportunity as Area Officers were required to find polling venues which avoided the need to deploy ramps for wheelchair access or to have an alternative polling station scheme. The final scheme was completed and published in January 2011 which improved access for voters.

In terms of registration EONI undertook a number of initiatives to contact various public sector organisations to target under-represented groups. An insertion was placed in NIHE's Housing News to cover 80,000 households and publicity leaflets issued with DVA license renewals in November 2010.

EONI achieved Customer Services Excellence accreditation in March 2011 which replaced Charter Mark and adopts a more customer focused approach to the delivery of high standards of customer care and good equality practice.

- 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?

EONI intends to develop action measures to address inequalities experienced by people across the Section 75 categories alongside the development of a revised Equality Scheme due to be submitted to the Equality Commission by 1 May 2012.

- Please give examples of changes to policies or practices which have resulted in outcomes.

There were no changes to policies or practices which resulted in an EQIA .

Elections – During 2010/11 a number of polling station venues were changed to improve accessibility to vote at elections. All premises were required to be DDA compliant and other Section 75 considerations were taken on each decision to alter either the location of the polling station or the elector allotted to it. The notice of publication of the draft polling station scheme asked specifically for representations on equality issues.

Registration – initiatives were revised to include further education colleges as well as schools, and as at December 2010 the register showed an increase from December 2009.

## **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.

Strategic implementation of the section 75 duties is supported by the mainstreaming of equality in all EONI activities, targets and development objectives. The Management Board monitored targets during the reporting year on a monthly basis incorporating progress made on equality of opportunity and good relations including engagement with under-represented groups to increase the register, and the revision of the statutory Polling Station Scheme to be published by 31 January 2011.

There is considerable evidence to support EONI's aim to improve access as part of the Polling Station Scheme review. For example, there was a 23% reduction in the number of ramps needing to be ordered for the 2011 elections compared to the 2010 elections and there was an increase in the electoral register of 2.7% .

As part of our strategy to promote training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities a number of placements from the Orchardville Society were appointed on a temporary basis in the HR Section at Headquarters and in a number of Area Offices, namely Belfast and Newtownards, under Project ABLE (Autism Building Links to Employment). To assist in ensuring we continue to develop policies and practices that promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities the Electoral Office also joined the network of Employers for Disability NI.

## Section 2: Screening

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

The NIO is responsible for policies and legislation regarding electoral registration and elections and through public consultation provides an opportunity for stakeholders and the wider public to contribute to proposed or revised law. The Polling Station review was the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer and the full report was issued for a 12 week consultation period. The publication of the draft scheme did not find any unavoidable adverse differential impact on any elector. However, a number of responses received from consultees on the proposals resulted in revisions. No other policies screened.

## Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Please provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2010-11 stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2011-12

No policies were subject to EQIA during 10/11.

### Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2010- March 2011

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	Increase in register; accuracy remains at a high level.
Polling Station Scheme	Reduced	Improved access resulting from Polling Station Scheme

## 2011-12 EQIA Time-table

There are currently no EQIAs due to be commenced during 11/12. The Northern Ireland Office is responsible for maintaining the legal framework for elections, including electoral registration, in Northern Ireland.

### **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.

A number of new entrants attended Diversity Training through the Centre for Applied Learning in November 2010 and January 2011.

Equality Officer attended 'Section 75 - New Equality Agenda' seminar through Legal Island in June 2010.

### **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.

Area Electoral Officers continue to communicate progress on delivery of Section 75 duties through a central list of activities which is accessible by all staff, and which is monitored by EONI's Equality Officer. There was an increase in the electoral register as a result of EONI's engagement with young people through various outreach registration initiatives.

Consultation also took place with all Section 75 stakeholders on proposed changes to polling station locations during the review of the scheme from September to December 2010.

## **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, including the needs and experiences of people with multiple identities:.

In September 2010 EONI appointed Community Evaluation Northern Ireland to meet with customer service focus groups to target participants which were inclusive and representative of all communities in Northern Ireland. This is the first time the EONI has conducted a public customer service consultation exercise through focus groups in Northern Ireland. The focus groups were primarily in relation to the Customer Service Excellence accreditation. Meetings took place throughout NI with a number of young people, political parties, disability organisations and various stakeholder groups eg Chinese community, schools and councils. The findings provided a critical insight into considering improvements to services and customer care generally.

Information continues to be provided to EONI by a number of public authorities eg DWP, BSO and for the first time the Registrar General provided information on marriages and civil partnerships in NI. Building on the success of targeting young people, during the course of the year further education colleges were for the first time obliged to provide EONI with information on student registration. First year students were written to in October 2010 inviting them to register. By December 2010 approximately 11,000 attainers had been added to the electoral register, largely due to the Schools Initiative and the engagement with further education colleges.

Qualitative data is collected from comments cards which were made available in polling stations throughout Northern Ireland at the Westminster Parliamentary Election on 6 May 2010. Approximately 1,700 completed responses were received. A full breakdown of the results is available on EONI website, however, there were a number of positive responses in relation to facilities for disabled/elderly voters and ease of voting procedure.

Statistical information and qualitative research is also provided by the Electoral Commission ie, 2010 Report on the Parliamentary General Election. The Commission's research showed that disabled entrances were well signposted with usable ramps in place, low polling booths were available for wheelchair users, and large-print ballot papers and tactile voting devices were available for voters with visual impairments. EONI Area Officers were more proactive in including access issues as part of their polling station staff training.

### **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.

EONI was proactive in improving the design and presentation of voter materials, including the voter guidance eg Polish and Portuguese information and user-friendly/easy read posters/notices displayed in polling stations and polling booths. Access was considerably improved to polling stations particularly for those with limited physical mobility and ballot papers were made available in Braille.

## **Section 8: Complaints**

- Please identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:

There were a number of Section 75 related complaints during the reporting year particularly in relation to the revised Polling Station Scheme and consultation. No matters were referred to the Equality Commission.

## **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.
- Please outline any use of the Commission's guidance consulting with and involving children and young people.

The Schools Initiative was undertaken between September 2010 and January 2011. During that period all but 2 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland with more than 10 pupils received a visit from Electoral Office staff. During the course of the year further education colleges were for the first time obliged to provide the Electoral Office with information on student registration. First year students were written to in October 2010 inviting them to register. A considerable number of visits were also made by Electoral Office staff to fresher events at campuses and FE colleges throughout Northern Ireland to enhance the level of engagement with young people.

In January 2011 all Area offices participated in a review of all those registered at nursing homes across Northern Ireland in preparation for the polls in May 2011.

Area Electoral Offices also ran a number of outreach activities to enhance the level of engagement with Section 75 related groups. For example an Area Officer organised two information days for the Chinese community in the Foyle constituency. Registration and ID clinics were provided for those in attendance and presentations on the registration process were made in both English and Chinese. There was also an open day at the local office for people with learning difficulties. This included adults from the DESTINED group who promote inclusion in the community for those with learning difficulties. Another Area Officer also organised registration initiatives with a number of bodies including the 'Young at Heart' Community Group, the Simon Community in Ballymena and the Lighthouse Hostel also in Ballymena. Those attending were afforded the opportunity to complete registration forms and receive electoral identity cards

Other events included:

- Tullycarnet Community Resource Centre: Registration and ID clinic to target young people to register to vote.
- Southern Area Action with Travellers (Safe and Well project): Presentation and ID Event, and launch event at St George's Market.
- Facilitating VOYPIC - YTP with Minor Learning Difficulties - hosted event in HQ conference room.
- In March 2011 the Area Officer in L/Derry took part in a promotion film to support the Tactile Voting Device to help promote the use of the device among the blind Community (free access on Youtube).
- Autism and Building Links to Employment – Presentation to EONI staff in preparation for placement scheme.

Regular discussion on a wide range of issues took place with groups such as Disability Action and RNIB. Area Electoral Officers also liaised with these organizations and other groups representing those with a disability at a local level, and encouraged participation by their members in the democratic process.

As part of EONI's commitment to improving the quality of customer services and customer care, EONI decided to engage in a public consultation to learn directly from its customers about the aspects of its service and delivery which were working well and areas in which these could be improved. This was the first time that EONI had undertaken a public consultation conducted through customer focus groups and therefore regarded as an important way of assessing levels of customer satisfaction with services delivered. Focus group participants were selected to provide a representative sample of EONI customers and communities in Northern Ireland. Eight customer focus groups were facilitated with a variety of participant groups selected to be representative of customers in terms of age, ethnic identity, gender and religious affiliation in urban and rural communities. These focus groups provided an opportunity for voters and potential voters to come together and discuss their experiences as service users in areas such as voter registration, information requests, advice and guidance on electoral issues and to identify ways in which EONI services could be improved. Four focus groups were carried out with post primary schools across Northern Ireland: Glengormley High School, Oakgrove College in L/Derry, Cross and Passion College in Ballycastle and Dean Maguirc College in Carrickmore. A further four focus groups were carried out to consult with members of local communities and ethnic minority communities and stakeholder groups. These focus groups

invited customers representing members of the Chinese Community; other community groups eg residents from Kilcooley Community Group and Women's Centre in Bangor, and representatives of political parties, stakeholder groups, groups representing people with disabilities and EONI staff.

### **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.

Belfast Area Electoral Officer attended a Racial Awareness Seminar at Lisburn Civic Centre and provided promotional information to attendees.

Area Officers also ran events at the Chinese Welcome Centre and Chinese Welfare Community and for Travellers Safe and Well Events in Armagh and Newry in addition to Registration Clinics in Belfast and Dungannon.

In March 2011 the Equality Officer attended a Conference supported by OFMDFM through Business in the Community (BITC) on employing Migrant Workers in Northern Ireland. EONI are currently working with BITC to organise membership which may enable EONI staff to engage more with organisations to proactively progress the good relations duty.

Annual Report April 2010/ March 2011  
'Disability Duties' Questions

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

9

Fully  
Achieved



1

Partially  
Achieved

1

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>	Polling station scheme	Fundamental review of all polling stations taking particular account of the needs of persons with disabilities	Reduction in the use of ramps
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
	Accessibility of the voting process	Training sessions and information events	Improved access and promotion of election materials ie voting device for the blind

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

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
	Voter information	User friendly design and easy read format of polling day guidance.	Positive feedback - Electoral Commission Research.

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

Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
Awareness and election training sessions run by AEOs	Information and events	Engagement with EONI staff and stakeholders.

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

Action Measures	Milestones/Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
As far as reasonably practical ensure that all Electoral Office premises are DDA compliant.	Disabled access	All Area Offices compliant except Newtownards – H&S Risk.	An ongoing problem with disabled access to the Newtownards office resulted in a search for a new ground floor location in the Newtownards area. A property was located but unfortunately due to the current difficult economic climate it was decided not to proceed with this option for the time being

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

CEO made recommendations to the NIO to amend primary legislation to permit use of candidate's photographs and coloured party emblems on ballot papers. The legislation has not yet been amended.

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

- Evaluation of all outreach initiatives undertaken by Area Officers are reviewed by the Management Board on a monthly basis.
- Increase in the electoral register monitored.
- Research from the Electoral Commission.

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?

It is intended to revise the Disability Action Plan in conjunction with revising the Equality Scheme.