

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

Business Plan

April 2026 – March 2027

Foreword

I am pleased to present the Business Plan for the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027. This plan builds on the 2025/2026 Business Plan and reflects the organisation's statutory responsibilities to maintain an accurate and comprehensive electoral register and deliver well-run electoral events.

The Electoral Office plays a critical role in supporting the democratic process in Northern Ireland. This includes maintaining the electoral register, supporting electoral events, advising on electoral policy and ensuring voters, candidates and stakeholders can engage confidently with electoral processes. The Electoral Office must ensure that all services are responsive to the needs of voters, as well as being as fair and as secure as possible.

The 2026/2027 year represents a challenging period for two main reasons. Firstly, work will progress on the planning and early delivery of the combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections – the largest election in over a decade. Since the last combined polls held in 2011, the electorate has increased by 20%, legislative requirements have increased whilst Electoral Office staffing complement has decreased. This indicates the scale of the challenge.

Secondly work is required to prepare for the Representation of the People Bill 2026 - the biggest change in electoral franchise in fifty years. Work is underway to support the implementation of canvass reform and the extension of voting rights to those aged 16 and 17. Over the next year the Electoral Office will develop systems and processes to support these large legislative changes. These two major projects show the scale, complexity and capability required for successful delivery.

Alongside this there is an ongoing priority for the Electoral Office to continue the modernisation and digitisation of electoral services. Building on work already undertaken to develop digital infrastructure, the Electoral Office will deliver a programme of changes designed to enhance the experience for voters and stakeholders, improve efficiency and reduce the time taken to process applications.

This modernisation will harness technology to improve accessibility and deepen public engagement. The move towards digital also gives Electoral Office an ability to enhance the robustness of electoral processes.

At the same time maintaining the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register is a core activity of the Electoral Office. During 2026/2027, the Electoral Office will continue to undertake targeted registration activity, including 2021 canvass follow up work and proactive elector engagement.

This plan sets out the key strategic objectives:

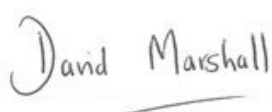
1. Maintain & enhance the accuracy & completeness of the Electoral Register
2. Deliver well-run electoral events
3. Modernise electoral services
4. Build a resilient organisation

Progress will be monitored through performance reporting to ensure planned activities are delivered and that the organisation remains prepared to respond to emerging challenges.

Through the delivery of these priorities, the Electoral Office will continue to support the integrity, accessibility and effective administration of the electoral system in Northern Ireland.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Electoral Office for their ongoing dedication and professionalism. Their efforts will help to ensure the successful delivery of upcoming elections and the associated delivery of new legislation. Every member of staff plays a role in ensuring success.

I also look forward to working with all stakeholders as the Electoral Office takes forward the work outlined in this plan.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

April 2026

David Marshall Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland acts to support the Chief Electoral Officer in carrying out their duties. The main duties of the Chief Electoral Officer include:

- maintaining the Electoral Register and working to ensure the Electoral Register is as accurate and complete as possible
- running all official elections and referendums in Northern Ireland
- making recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the development of policy in relation to electoral law in Northern Ireland
- implementing any changes coming from Parliamentary and Local Government Boundary Commissions
- maintaining public confidence in electoral services and working to ensure delivery is free from political interference.

Strategic Objective 1: Maintain & enhance the accuracy & completeness of the Electoral Register

Business Objectives: During 2026/27 the Electoral Office will:

Enhance the accuracy and completeness of the Electoral Register by processing at least 65,000 applications to register to vote through ongoing registration and targeted registration interventions

Run at least 3 targeted registration interventions to encourage people to register or re-register to vote (Young People and Change of Address)

Ensure 99% of applications to register to vote are processed in 5 working days

Enhance the accuracy of the Electoral Register by using high-quality data to remove inaccurate entries

In preparation for the 2027 elections, by June 2026 release an enhanced version of the 'Am I registered' service (www.eoni.org.uk/Am-I-Registered). This version will include user-focused improvements

Review the remaining electors carried forward from the 2021 Canvass via individual/household audits and letters/emails/texts encouraging these electors to re-register to vote

By June 2026 undertake preparatory work and publish a paper on canvass reform in line with the position set out by the UK Government in the Representation of the People Bill 2026

Undertake work to develop plans to implement voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds and other electoral reforms arising from the UK Government Representation of the People Bill 2026

Strategic Objective 2: Deliver well-run electoral events

Business Objectives: During 2026/27 the Electoral Office will:

By December 2026 publish a detailed 2027 Combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections Operational Plan

By Autumn 2026 prepare and publish a Polling Station Scheme for use in the 2027 Combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections – the combined Polling Station scheme will be subject to a consultation period over Summer 2026

By Autumn 2026 review the election staff model to ensure operational capacity is available for the 2027 Combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections

By Autumn 2026 run a series of training events with key staff and Councils officials for Polling Station and Count activities for the 2027 Combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections

Maintain readiness for unscheduled electoral events through reviews of plans and processes

By April 2026 send the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland a recommendation on whether there should be an Electoral Canvass in Northern Ireland in 2026

Continue to deliver and reform the Electoral Identification Card online service – following reform in 2025 the service will continue to operate via online and paper applications

Strategic Objective 3: Modernise electoral services

Business Objectives: During 2026/27 the Electoral Office will:

By Winter 2026, review Electoral Office communications to allow for the development of a forward-looking, digital first approach that will be rolled out through the 2027 Combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections and beyond

Deliver a programme of digital transformation changes as part of the modernisation of the Electoral Office services (this will include enhancements to Am I Registered online, ID card online and, subject to a final assessment, a Postal Vote Applications online service)

By Winter 2026, develop, test and communicate improvements in the Candidate Nomination process to assist with the delivery of the 2027 Combined Northern Ireland Assembly and Local Council Elections in May 2027

Identify and work with Data Controllers to refine and acquire the data needed to support the introduction of voter registration at age 14 given changes arising from the UK Government Representation of the People Bill 2026

Review postal voting processes to identify opportunities for streamlining the service and improving the voter experience

Introduce further improvements to the automation of electoral registration processes

Objective 4: Build a resilient organisation

Business Objectives: During 2026/27 the Electoral Office will:

Align resources to strategic priorities by delivering training and developing workforce capabilities to support the delivery of electoral services

Strengthen corporate governance by ensuring robust risk management, project planning, and management practices are consistently applied

Maintain controls across finance, procurement and human resources by conducting regular checks and reporting

Maintain security of Electoral Office data assets by regular monitoring and reporting on safety measures

Ensure 95% of public enquiries are responded to within target timeframes

By September 2026 submit the 2025/26 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to allow the report to be presented before the UK Parliament

Expenditure

The resource budget allocation from the United Kingdom Government for 2026/27 for the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland is £2.345m. The expected expenditure is broken down in the table below

| Broad Area | Amount |
|--|---------------|
| Permanent Staff | £1.500m |
| Buildings – Rent, Rates, Utilities | £0.091m |
| IT, Legal, Finance, Audit & Central Services | £0.654m |
| Other Services e.g. Postage, Printing, Equipment Maintenance | £0.250m |
| Income (including statutory sales of Electoral Register) | -£0.152m |

There is a separate annual capital budget from the United Kingdom Government for 2026/27 of £100k in 2026/27

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