

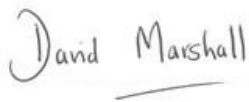
Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

Business Plan

September 2023 – March 2024

Foreword

This Business Plan sets out the work of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland for the period 1 September 2023 to 31 March 2024. The plan has been reviewed and updated following my appointment as Chief Electoral Officer on 7 August 2023.



Dr David Marshall
Chief Electoral Officer
29 September 2023

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Background

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

- maintaining the Electoral Register & working to ensure the Electoral Register is as accurate and complete as possible;
- running all official elections and referendums within 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; and
- maintaining public confidence in the electoral service and working to ensure service delivery is free from political interference.

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland operates from a single office in Belfast and employs around 25 people. At election time the Office uses a temporary workforce of several thousand people. Over the last fifteen years, the Office has undergone significant reorganisation in moving to a single location and greater digitisation of processes. This has resulted in staffing and real-term expenditure falling by 50%. Going forward to support our growing, more digitally aware and ageing population will require further transformation of electoral services. This requires significant change.

To deliver this change a Strategic Plan was published in 2022. As the incoming Chief Electoral Officer I look forward to leading this work. This Business Plan looks to activities that will be started or completed over the next few months to help deliver our strategic aims. This Business Plan is available on our website at www.eoni.org.uk, where further more detailed information on the work of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland can be found.

To help us improve for the future, I welcome all comments or suggestions on this Business Plan – to do so please email me on info@eoni.org.uk. To support transparency, a summary of any written comments received will be published.

Registration (Maintain & Enhance the Register) (Strategic Aims)

- Continue to maintain the Electoral Register and work to ensure the Electoral Register is as accurate and complete as possible;
- Promote & enhance our digital services through www.gov.uk/register-to-vote & www.eoni.org.uk and undertake a series of work packages to enhance the accuracy and quality of the Electoral Register

Business Objectives (2023-24):

Ongoing throughout the year to continue to process & verify in line with deadlines all digital/paper applications for registration

Ongoing throughout the year to promote the continued uptake of digital registration
www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Ongoing throughout the year to process, where possible digitally, persons to be removed from the register via information received from statutory death certificates or other sources

Ongoing throughout the year to use high quality data from official sources to drive forward improvements in the accuracy and completeness of the Electoral Register

By Winter 2023 to have reviewed and started consulting on polling station scheme. The review will take account of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission & feedback from 2023 Local Elections

Elections (Readiness & Delivery)

(Strategic Aims)

- Remain prepared to undertake any elections required by law
- Plan for improvements in delivery of all elections (Local, Assembly & UK)
- Further develop Contingency Plans and resilience in delivering Elections
- Start development of enhanced Single Transferable Vote training plan & calculation software
- Develop & deliver changes in processes required under the Elections Act 2022

Business Objectives (2023-24):

Ongoing throughout the year to maintain readiness for any upcoming elections

By Winter 2023 to have started election readiness preparations for the UK Parliament election

By Winter 2023 to have reviewed the local council elections and documented main areas for improvement

By Winter 2023 to have developed methods to mitigate Digital Registration Number issues on future elections

By Spring 2024 to have worked with Electoral Commission and disability organisations to develop enhanced election support for those with a disability

By Spring 2024 to have started development of an improved programme for single transferrable vote training and calculation software – this is planned to include improved training & enhanced digital calculation methods

Ongoing throughout the year to develop and deliver changes required under the Elections Act 2022

Corporate Services

(Strategic Aims)

- To upgrade and enhance the Electoral Management System
- To continue to deliver Electoral Identification Card service
- To support key staff in undertaking Association of Electoral Administrators training
- To develop a more resilient Office structure for delivering key services

Business Objectives (2023-24):

Ongoing throughout the year to work with commercial supplier to develop plans for the implementation of new Election Management Software in late 2024/25

Ongoing throughout the year to continue to deliver an Electoral Identification Card service

By Winter 2023 to have developed plans to reform the delivery of Electoral Identification Card service

By Winter 2023 to have developed and submitted to the Secretary of State the 2022/23 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer

By Spring 2024 to have started work with Association of Electoral Administrators to bring professional training for key Electoral Office staff

Ongoing throughout the year to ensure that internal financial, procurement and personnel controls are adhered to

Digital & Data Services

(Strategic Aims)

- To continue to manage cyber security for key Electoral Office data assets
- Where possible, to drive forward a “Digital First” approach to key services
- To enhance Electoral Office IT infrastructure

Business Objectives (2023-24):

By Winter 2023 to have moved Electoral Office to MS Office365 and, where possible, to rationalise software from other vendors into an overall MS Office365 approach

Ongoing throughout the year to maintain security of all Electoral Office data assets – while at the same delivering training / measures to enhance our data security

By Winter 2023 to have developed an enhanced means to supply data to external users of the electoral register

By Winter 2023 to have piloted a digital self-service registration verification system

By Spring 2024 to have agreed requirements and, if possible, started procurement of new Electoral Office website - www.eoni.org.uk

Expenditure

The budget allocation for 2023/24 for the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland is £2.075m.

The expected expenditure is broken down in the table below

Broad Area	Amount
Staffing	£1.00m
Buildings	£0.30m
IT, Legal, Finance, Audit & other Corporate Services	£0.65m
Other Services e.g. Postage, Printing, Equipment Maintenance	£0.25m
Income from sales of Electoral Register	-£0.13m

A separate capital budget of £0.1m is utilised to maintain all Electoral Office equipment (e.g. computer equipment, phones, ballot boxes, polling booths etc...).