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Draft Disability Action Plan: A Consultation You are in the Our consultations
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published: 13 January 2021 Last updated: 15 April 2021 Responding to this
consultation Thank you for your interest in our draft Disability Action Plan, on
which consultation has recently closed. We are currently considering the responses
and will be publishing the final version in due course. If you need any further
information on any aspect, please email us at
infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk or call on 028 9089 4020 to speak to
one of our team

Introduction Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Electoral Commission is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to: promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and encourage participation by disabled people in public life ('the disability duties'). Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, the Electoral Commission is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a disability action plan showing how it proposes to fulfil these duties in relation to its functions. As Head of the Electoral Commission, Northern Ireland, I can confirm that we are committed to implementing effectively the disability duties and this disability action plan. We will allocate the necessary resources (in terms of people, time and money) in order to implement effectively this plan and, where appropriate, build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into corporate and annual operating plans. We will also put appropriate internal arrangements in place to ensure that the disability duties are complied with and this disability action plan effectively implemented. We will ensure the effective communication of the plan to staff and to providing all necessary training and guidance for staff on the disability duties and the implementation of the plan. Responsibility for implementing, reviewing and evaluating this disability action plan and the point of contact within the Electoral Commission will be: Name: Mairaid McMahon Title: Manager, Electoral Commission Northern Ireland Address: Ground floor, 4 Cromac Place, The Gasworks, Belfast, BT7 2JB Telephone number: 028 9089 4029 Email: mmcmahon@electoralcommission.org.uk If you require this plan in an alternative format (such as in large print, in Braille, on audio cassette, easy read or on computer disc) and/or language, please contact the above person to discuss your requirements. We confirm our commitment to submitting an annual progress report on the implementation of this plan to the Equality Commission and carrying out a five year review of this plan, or plans submitted to the Equality Commission over the five year review period. A copy of this plan, our annual progress to the Equality Commission and our five year review of this plan will be published in the near future.

Functions Outlined below are the range of functions of the Electoral Commission. . Our vision is to be a world-class public sector organisation – innovative, delivering great value and getting right what matters most to voters and legislators. We plan to achieve this vision through a five year work programme with four goals: To enable the continued delivery of free and fair elections and referendums, focusing on the needs of electors and addressing the changing environment to ensure every vote remains secure and accessible To ensure an increasingly trusted and transparent system of regulation in political finance, overseeing compliance, promoting understanding amongst those regulated and proactively pursuing breaches To be an independent and respected centre of expertise, using knowledge and insight to further the transparency, fairness and efficiency of

our democratic system, and help adapt it to the modern, digital age To provide value for money, making best use of our resources and expertise to deliver services that are attuned to what matters most to voters. This goal underpins and supports all of our work. Public life positions The range of public life positions which the Electoral Commission has responsibility for is as follows. Together our ten Electoral Commissioners constitute the Board of the Commission and ensure that the Commission discharges its functions. One of these Commissioners is the Chair of the Commission, and one is appointed specifically as a lead Commissioner for Northern Ireland. The Commissioners are appointed by Royal Warrant to exercise the functions of the Commission. The Commissioners are independent, non-partisan and accountable directly to Parliament. Action measures Outlined below are the measures which we propose to take over the three year period of this disability action plan, together with performance indicators or targets. The actions outlined below are designed both to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and to encourage their participation in public life. During the lifetime of this plan, there are several key activities and events that we will use to structure our activities: Modernising Voting research: this UK-wide study will explore views around what people think about the current way they can cast their vote, what is important to people when they vote and what would improve their voting experience. This study will include identifying any findings on the experiences of disabled people. We will use the findings to help us to identify any improvements to processes within the current framework as well as to inform any recommendations for changes to the system. Northern Ireland Canvass 2021: this exercise, carried out by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, will form the basis of a new electoral register, by canvassing households across Northern Ireland to ensure as many people as are eligible are registered accurately. We will run a Northern Ireland-wide public awareness campaign to encourage people to sign up to the electoral register. Accuracy and Completeness research: after the electoral canvass is complete, we will undertake research to assess both the accuracy and completeness of the new register. In this context, accuracy is a measure of the number of major and minor errors in the register, while completeness considers the percentage of people who are eligible to be on the register who are actually registered. Northern Ireland Assembly election 2022: we will run a Northern Ireland wide public awareness campaign to encourage people to register to vote and to provide them with the information they need to be able to cast their vote. We will publish a set of digital learning resources to promote the political literacy amongst young people in Northern Ireland. These resources will increase understanding of the provisions in place to ensure disabled people are able to cast their vote. The resources will also include guidance for educators to support the delivery of sessions in formal and informal educational settings. We will also conduct research and analysis to assess levels of participation amongst varying demographics, including disabled people. Northern Ireland Local Government elections 2023: we will run a Northern Ireland wide public awareness campaign to encourage people to register to vote and to provide them with the information they need to be able to cast their vote. Our digital learning resources will provide information on the provisions in place to ensure disabled people are able to cast their vote. We will also conduct research and analysis to assess levels of participation amongst varying demographics, including disabled people. We will also use the findings of previous and forthcoming post-election research, as well as reports such as Elections for everyone , to inform our work on engaging with representative groups in Northern Ireland, to identify any specific barriers or issues that exist in achieving higher levels of participation in

elections. This will form the basis of our engagement with the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Assembly Parties' Panel as outlined below. Underpinning this will be our ongoing work to ensure Commissioners and staff across the organisation are aware of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and that our communications and engagement work is designed to both enable access and promote positive attitudes towards disabled people. We have brought in an interim consultant ahead of appointing to a permanent role in spring 2021; their specific responsibilities will include the provision of advice and expertise to management to ensure organisational compliance with all equality legislation, as well as the incorporation of this Plan within the priorities for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Action plan Measures to promote positive attitudes towards disabled people and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life

Part 1: commencing 2021 Measure Timescale Performance indicator/target Build objectives and targets relating to the disability duties into workplans and annual operating plans, whilst ensuring the corporate planning process is informed by adherence to all relevant equality duties. 2021 and ongoing Relevant plans include objectives and targets that will enable the disability action plan priorities to be addressed Identify opportunities to portray positive images of disabled people, in both internal and external communications, as well as ensuring all communications are accessible 2021 Positive images of disabled people used in both internal and external communications Identify a disability champion and develop a description for the role, at a senior level, to communicate on its importance and drive organisational engagement. The Champion will play a key role in ensuring that the EDI Officer provides reports on progress against the implementation of the DAP at 6-monthly intervals to the Senior Leadership Group (SLG). 2021 and ongoing Disability Champion appointed, to sit on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group Skynet posts to inform and engage with staff across the organisation Bi-annual reports to ET Ensure all staff and office holders aware of the Disability Duties and the public authority's DAP. Undertake this by: Including information in induction of new staff/office holders, at staff/office holders training sessions Alerting staff/office holders to information on the internet and/or intranet, articles in staff and sectoral magazines and newsletters. Where possible, we will include people who have lived experience of a range of disabilities in training and awareness raising activities. 2021 and ongoing Induction and training programmes include reference to Disability Duties in Northern Ireland and an overview of the DAP Recruitment and selection training - Ensure all those involved in recruitment and selection panels have been trained in disability awareness and disability equality legislation to ensure no negative attitudes in recruitment and selection processes. 2021-2 All staff involved in recruitment and selection activities to have been trained by December 2022 Submit annual review of DAP 2021 Review submitted to Equality Commission and published online Engage with representative bodies for disabled people to build relationships, identify any barriers to registration for people with disabilities and encourage participation in the 2021 Canvass in Northern Ireland 2021 Relationships established with key representative bodies Information shared in advance of the Canvass to encourage greater participation Use the findings of the Modernising Voting research to identify barriers for disabled people in casting their votes, and work with EONI and to ensure they are addressed. 2021 Issues identified and raised with EONI by end of 2021 in preparation for Northern Ireland Assembly election in May 2022. Engage with representative bodies for disabled people to encourage participation in 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election 2021-2 Tailored information, where required and

available, shared with representative bodies to encourage participation in the election Building on existing organisational approach to promoting mental health and wellbeing, consider signing up to the Equality Commission's Mental Health Charter. 2021-2 Internal review of mental health and wellbeing policies complete by end 2021 Evidence gathered through staff surveys Part 2: commencing 2022-3 Measure Timescale Performance indicator/target Include questions in post-election research to enable an assessment to be made of the experience of disabled people in participating in the election, or reasons why they did not. Identify any immediate actions/areas that can be addressed to enhance the experience of disabled people when voting. 2022 Establish baseline data to inform decision making and use as a comparator for 2023 analysis. Immediate actions, if applicable, identified and addressed in advance of 2023 polls Consider how the views of disabled staff are incorporated in the promotion of disability equality in the workplace and in policies, practices and procedures. 2022 Incorporate into EDI agenda and EDI officer role description Submit annual review of DAP 2022 Review submitted to Equality Commission and published online Engage with representative bodies for disabled people to encourage participation in 2023 Northern Ireland Local Government elections 2022-3 Tailored information, where required and available, shared with representative bodies to encourage participation in the election Include questions in post-election research to enable as assessment to be made of the experience of disabled people in participating in the election, or reasons why they did not 2023 Evidence gathered on participation the election Analyse responses to post-election research and compare to 2022 data. Identify short, medium and long term actions that can be taken to enhance the experience of disabled people when voting. 2023-4 Trends/themes identified from 2022 Assembly election and 2023 Local Government election Submit annual review of DAP 2023 Review submitted to Equality Commission and published online Arrangements for consultation and publication Following engagement with the Equality Commission, we will publish this Plan for consultation in early 2021, using our website and social media channels to raise awareness and encourage responses. We will also engage directly with a range of organisations (outlined below) which represent disabled people, and endeavour to gather responses from those with lived experience of disability including mental health conditions through that process. The consultation will last for 3 months, and we will review responses and update the Plan accordingly. We will submit the final version of the Plan to the Equality Commission and make it available on our website. Consultee list Voluntary and Community Sector Action on Hearing Loss ADAPT Northern Ireland Advice NI Age NI Age Sector Platform Association of Talking Newspapers Autism NI Aware British Deaf Association (NI) Bryson Charitable Group Carers Northern Ireland Cedar Foundation Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) Children's Law Centre Commissioner for Older People NI Community Development and Health Network (NI) Council for the Homeless (NI) Diabetes UK NI Disability Action Disability Sport NI Down's Syndrome Association Employers for Disability Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Inspire Marie Curie Mencap Mindwise Motor Neurone Disease Association National Autistic Society Northern Ireland NI Commissioner for Children & Young People Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke Association Northern Ireland Dyslexia Centre Northern Ireland ME Association Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment NOW Group Praxis Care RNIB Sense NI Start 360 The National Deaf Children's Society Northern Ireland Stakeholders Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Northern Ireland Office Northern Ireland Parties Alliance Party

of NI Democratic Unionist Party Labour Party People Before Profit Alliance SDLP Sinn Féin The Green Party in Northern Ireland Traditional Unionist Voice Ulster Unionist Party Workers' Party Local Government Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council Ards and North Down Borough Council Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council Belfast City Council Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Derry City and Strabane District Council Fermanagh and Omagh District Council Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council Mid and East Antrim Borough Council Mid Ulster District Council Newry, Mourne and Down District Council Northern Ireland Departments The Executive Office Department for Economy Department for Infrastructure Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs Department for Communities Department of Education Department of Finance Department of Health Department of Justice Feedback form