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Welcome, apologies and introductions CH welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted attendance. Minutes from NIAPP meeting Tuesday 12 October and any matters arising The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. Introduction to Dr Katy Radford the Northern Ireland Commissioner and Alex Attwood the Commissioner nominated by smaller parties. CH introduced KR and AA to the attendees. KR said she was pleased to attend and looked forward to meeting with the panel in the time ahead. AA advised he is the Electoral Commissioner for smaller parties and that he is here to listen and also to talk with people in relation to issues affecting smaller parties. 2021 Electoral registration canvass Update from Chief Electoral Officer VM briefed the panel on the electoral register figures. The January figure is 1,367,621. The last round of canvass data was sent to local councillors and MLAs. VM suggested this may be the most complete electoral register pre-election however there will still be a registration drive, focussing particularly on areas where registration was lower than average. The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) had hoped to set up registration pop ups in shopping centres but were unable to due to rise in Covid-19 cases. EONI have liaised with the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) as they found that those aged 80 and above who are receiving care in residential facilities are less likely to be registered. EONI are working with RQIA on this in a supportive way to correct any misunderstanding on this subject and to share ways in which registration in this area can be improved. EONI now have a chart that allows them to see registration rates in schools. They are contacting schools to discuss ways of improving registration rates though capacity at schools is limited. CM raised that electors do not realise to use their full name when they are filling in the online registration form. VM advised that differences between names on electors' IDs and on the electoral register such as Jim and James should not cause a problem at polling stations. EC raised that when electors change their name there is a gap between the ID and the electoral register. VM responded that the legislation is tight on this and that electors must report any change of name to EONI. However, some clerical errors can be dealt with by EONI on polling day up until 7pm. Registration applications were checked against health and other admin data sources which should keep these errors down to a minimum. VM raised that she does not believe the 10 year cycle for a canvass in Northern Ireland is an ideal method of maintaining voter registration and that using data sets for rolling registration would be preferable. Electoral Commission reporting CH raised that with the canvass now complete the Electoral Commission has begun a detailed process of information gathering and evaluation so that lessons can be captured and learned. JM advised that the Electoral Commission will be formally reporting on how the canvass went, with plans to publish

a report in March. To help inform the report CH invited the Panel to get in touch with any feedback they have on the canvass. Northern Ireland Assembly Election 2022 Update from Chief Electoral Officer Impact of Covid-19 on poll VM advised that EONI closely followed colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales last May to see how elections were run in the climate of Covid-19. This will be input into their own planning. In broad terms, this will likely include Perspex at desks in polling stations and counts. VM advised she is conscious that the pandemic has the potential to impact the method that electors choose to vote. Legislation allowing an emergency absent vote, for electors who have to isolate due to Covid-19 has not been extended to Northern Ireland. VM raised that the only tool she has to operate with is the temporary absent vote application. VM advised parties should speak to their constituents who may be vulnerable and/or isolating. Polling stations will remain largely the same following public consultation. The counts will likely be over three centres: Meadowbank Sports Centre in Magherafelt, the Titanic Exhibition Centre, Belfast and the sports centre at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown. VM advised she is attempting to get large spaces with plenty of ventilation to allow as much space as possible. EONI have prepared the Candidates guidance for the election as far in advance as possible. Nominations will likely begin on Tuesday 29 March. There will be staffed pop ups for candidates in local council offices to help with the nomination process. CH advised that the Electoral Commission wrote to the Minister of State to ask what provisions were being considered for Northern Ireland for those who had to self-isolate because they had tested positive for Covid-19 close to polling day and are waiting to hear back on this. Any response will be shared with the panel. The Electoral Commission will be running pre-election seminars, with a face to face seminar due to take place in Belfast in March and a virtual event also planned. CM raised that it would be useful for candidate information to be available quickly. VM advised EONI will be uploading the candidate guidance as soon as possible. VM highlighted it would be important for candidates to check the March register for subscribers and encouraged parties to use their addresses as it would appear on the register to ensure an efficient nomination process. It was raised that information from the Royal Mail on the freepost entitlement was not yet available on the website. It was raised that the Royal Mail will be in attendance at the next meeting. Update from the Electoral Commission Guidance RM advised that the Electoral Commission published the campaign spending guidance for parties, candidates and non-party campaigners in November last year. Links to the guidance were sent to parties. The party and candidate guides contain more detail on the costs included in each category of spending. The notional spending sections have been updated and there are now more examples to explain when spending is party or candidate or needs to be split. RM requested that parties ensure that potential candidates and agents are aware of the guidance and in particular the rules on who can incur expenditure. RM stated that the Electoral Commission are planning a seminar aimed at party staff such as treasurers or campaigns officers or party staff who oversee the campaigning. This was in addition to the candidate seminars. Deadline to submit changes to names, descriptions and emblems RM stated that in order to ensure parties received a decision in time for nominations, any applications to change, party names, descriptions or emblems must be submitted to the Commission by Friday 21 January 2022. Public Awareness plans JM updated the panel on the public awareness campaign that the Electoral Commission will be running ahead of the Northern Ireland Assembly Election. The campaign will likely run from March until the registration deadline on 14 April and will include TV, radio, digital and outdoor billboard advertising. The campaign will target the whole

electorate with a focus on groups the Electoral Commission know are less likely to be registered; renters, recent home movers and those under 35. The advertising campaign will be supported by public relations activity that will highlight key information, such as the absent vote deadline, the Digital Registration Number (DRN) and how to complete the ballot paper. The Electoral Commission will also work with a range of partners to ensure we reach those groups we know are less likely to be registered and those who face additional barriers to registering. JM also raised that a new area of work this year will see the Electoral Commission producing political literacy resources for 14 to 18 year olds. These resources will explain what you can vote for, what to expect in elections, and how to cast your vote. The resources will be made available and promoted during our 'Welcome to your vote week' running from 24 – 28 January. JM also updated the panel on a new digital campaign that aims to raise awareness of online political advertising by helping people understand who is targeting them and how they can take action if something concerns them. The campaign is small scale and will run on digital channels only from March until polling day.

2022 financial reporting dates for political parties RM stated that donation and loan reports covering the period from 1 October 2021 – 31 December 2021 must be submitted by 30 January 2022. Proposed meeting dates for 2022 CH proposed the following meeting dates for 2022: Tuesday 8 March Tuesday 7 June Tuesday 18 October Panel members were asked to contact HG if any of these dates were problematic. Any other business No other business was raised