

You are in the Northern Ireland Assembly elections section Home Northern Ireland Assembly elections Currently reading: of 4 - Show page contents On this page Voting at the election Campaigning at the election Delivering the election Supporting evidence Summary This report looks at how the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election was run, how voters and campaigners found taking part, and what lessons can be learned for the future. We have reported separately on elections held this year in England, Scotland and Wales. On 5 May 2022, the Northern Ireland Assembly election was held. A total of 1,373,731 people were registered to vote, up from 1,254,709 at the last Assembly election on 2 March 2017. Overall our research shows that most people were confident that the election was well-run, and satisfaction with the process of registering to vote and voting remains high. However, the low levels of awareness of the Digital Registration Number (DRN) indicate that it may have been a barrier to some voters. As such we recommend that the UK Government reviews the operation of the DRN within the postal and proxy voting process to ensure it does not prevent people from accessing their vote. s were able to engage with voters using a variety of methods, with most people finding it easy to get information about the elections. However, a majority of candidates reported experiencing threats, abuse or intimidation. This behaviour has no place in our political system and it's important that all candidates and campaigners are able to freely participate in the democratic process. We will work with the wider electoral community to make sure we understand what is driving candidate abuse and intimidation, and to ensure this issue is addressed as a matter of urgency. The administration of polling day and the count generally went well, despite challenging circumstances relating to capacity, resilience and the late confirmation of the approach by the UK Government regarding provisions for Covid. There were, however, some concerns raised relating to the efficiency of the count. We recommend that the Chief Electoral Officer builds on previous improvements to the first stages of the count process by examining where efficiencies can be made in relation to the latter stages of the count. Voting at the election The experience of voters at the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election Most people were confident that the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election was well-run, and satisfaction with the process of registering to vote and voting remains high. Nine in 10 (93%) of polling station voters felt confident that they could vote safely in person in light of Covid, and most voters were able to vote using their preferred method (91%). Nearly all voters found it easy to fill in their ballot paper. The low levels of awareness surrounding the Digital Registration Number may have been a barrier to some people accessing their vote. Summary On 5 May 2022, the Northern Ireland Assembly election was held. A total of 1,373,731 people were registered to vote, up from 1,254,709 at the last Assembly election on 2 March 2017. Voters continue to have positive views about how elections are run Voters continue to have positive views about how elections are run After each election we ask members of the public who were eligible to vote for their views on voting and elections, which helps us understand if views have changed since the last comparable election. Satisfaction with the registration and voting process remains high People had high levels of satisfaction with the process of registering to vote and voting. Our research shows that: 84% of people across Northern Ireland were satisfied with the process of registering to vote - this is consistent with the levels of satisfaction reported by people after the 2017 Assembly election 95% of people across Northern Ireland were satisfied with the process of voting - this is broadly consistent with the 2019 UK

Parliamentary general election (97%) and is an increase from the 2017 Assembly election (87%). A majority of voters found polling stations safe in relation to Covid. Unlike in the rest of the UK, there was no emergency proxy vote provision for people with Covid in Northern Ireland. This meant that, if someone became unwell as a result of Covid shortly before polling day, their only option to vote was to do so in person at a polling station. Despite the absence of such a provision, a majority of voters reported finding polling stations safe. 93% of voters found polling stations very or fairly safe in relation to Covid, although 4% of voters found them fairly or very unsafe. Most people were confident that the election was well-run. When asked, 82% of people said they were confident that the election was well-run, while 8% were not confident. This is broadly consistent with the 2019 UK Parliamentary general election (83%) and is a slight decrease from the 2017 Assembly election (86%). Confidence that the election was well run was lower amongst those limited a lot by a disability/health condition, with 75% of such people saying they were confident the election was well-run and 12% not confident. Views about the safety of voting and whether electoral fraud is a problem were also consistent with the most recent comparable elections, with 84% of people saying they thought voting was safe from fraud and abuse. However, perceptions of electoral fraud remain high, with 20% of people surveyed saying they thought it was a problem. The main reason given by people who thought fraud had taken place was that they thought there was voter fraud happening by post, but they hadn't seen anything specific. Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) provide data to the Commission on alleged cases of electoral fraud. They have confirmed they received one report of suspected personation on polling day. Following an investigation no further action was taken as there was no evidence of an offence. Turnout at these elections was consistent with previous comparable elections. Overall turnout at the election was 63.6%, a decrease of around one percentage point from the last Assembly election in 2017 (64.8%). However, given the increase in the number of people registered to vote for this election, the total number of ballot papers was higher (873,787 up from 812,783 in 2017). People who told us that they didn't vote were mostly likely to say this was because they did not have time. The most common reasons given were: Lack of time / too busy / I was busy at work (13%) You just can't trust politicians to keep their promises / voter's wishes ignored / politicians do not care / only in politics for their own benefit (9%) There was no point in voting because it was obvious who would win / my vote wouldn't have made a difference to the outcome / my vote doesn't count (8%) I didn't like the candidates / parties / they didn't represent my views (8%) I'm just not interested in politics / fed up with politics (7%) Medical/health reasons not related to Covid (7%) I was away on 5 May / voting day (7%)

Methods of voting In Northern Ireland, people can apply to vote in one of three ways; in person, by post or by proxy (asking someone they trust to vote on their behalf). When applying for an absent vote, people must provide a valid reason why they cannot attend their polling station on polling day. This is different to the rest of the UK, where postal and proxy voting is available on demand. Voters who register to vote online (which has been available in Northern Ireland since 2018) are required to provide a Digital Registration Number (DRN) when applying to vote by post or proxy. The DRN is intended to be a digital replacement for the wet ink signature that is required on paper registration forms. It is supplied to voters when they register online, or can be requested from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. The DRN is not a requirement elsewhere in the UK.

Methods of voting Most people could vote using their preferred method. While most people report being able to vote using their preferred method of voting (91%), 6% of

people say they were not able to vote using their preferred method. Voting by their preferred method was lower for people limited a lot by a disability or health issue, with 83% of those who voted in person saying it was their preferred method. There are low levels of awareness surrounding the Digital Registration Number. Alongside our large-scale voter registration campaign 'Got 5?' we ran a targeted online campaign to raise awareness of the Digital Registration Number (DRN). This campaign targeted those groups we knew were more likely to need a postal or proxy vote. The campaign directed voters to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland's website where they could request their DRN. This campaign was supported by both partnership and public relations activity. The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland received 8,161 requests for a DRN in the run up to the election. Despite efforts to raise awareness of the DRN, awareness levels remain low: 64% of people said they didn't know you are given a DRN when you apply to register to vote online 5% of people said they lacked confidence in the election because they could not find or were confused by the DRN. In total there were 21,039 postal and proxy vote applications approved for the 2022 Assembly election, with 6,031 applications rejected. The main reason for rejection was that no DRN was provided (3,636). At the last Assembly election in 2017 there was no online registration and therefore no DRN. The total number of postal and proxy vote applications approved was significantly higher (29,590) and the rejection rate lower (2,345).

Recommendation 1 The low levels of awareness and the large number of rejected postal and proxy applications due to a missing DRN indicate that it may have been a barrier to some voters, despite public awareness activity. We therefore recommend that the UK Government reviews the operation of the DRN within the postal and proxy voting process to ensure it does not prevent people from accessing their vote. Most people were confident they knew how to vote without making a mistake. Nearly all voters (98%) said that they found it easy to fill in their ballot paper, but some votes continue to be rejected and not included in the count. 11,074 ballot papers were rejected at the count, as the voter had not followed the instructions for marking it. This represents 1.3% of all votes cast. This was a slight increase compared to the 2017 Assembly election when 9,450 ballot papers were rejected, representing 1.2% of all votes cast.

Campaigning at the election The experience of campaigning at the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election s were able to engage with voters using a variety of methods, although concerns about Covid impacted campaigners. A majority of candidates responding to our survey said they experienced threats, abuse and/or intimidation. In most cases this related to the theft or damage of campaign materials, online and verbal abuse. It is important that candidates and campaigners are able to freely participate in our democratic processes, and we plan to meet with the wider electoral community to understand what is driving candidate abuse and intimidation, and to ensure this issue is addressed as a matter of urgency. Most people found it easy to get information, but younger age groups feel less well informed about candidates. Transparency about who is responsible for political campaign activity online remains important for voters. Parties and candidates reported higher campaign spending than at any Assembly election since 2003, but overall spending by campaigners did not reach the limits that were set in law.

Summary A total of 239 candidates stood for election to the Northern Ireland Assembly (compared with 228 in 2017), 87 of which were female candidates, representing 36.4% of all candidates. 17 political parties and 24 independent candidates contested the election. s were able to engage with voters using a variety of methods, although concerns about Covid impacted campaigners. At the 2022 Assembly election, campaigners provided information in a variety of different

ways. The most common way people reported seeing information on parties and candidates included: Leaflet from a candidate / political party (64%) Posters / billboards (51%) Party leader debate on television (32%) Leaflet from another source (e.g. individual / organisation supporting a party) (31%) Word of mouth (30%) On a news website (27%) Candidates responding to our survey also told us that leaflets and canvassing were their most used campaigning methods, specifically: almost half (47%) told us that their most used campaigning method was door-to-door canvassing, with 88% saying it was one of their top three campaigning methods leaflets, newsletters or flyers was the second most popular, with three-quarters (76%) listing it in their top three campaigning methods Social media was the most popular digital campaigning tool, with around a third (31%) of the candidates that responded to our survey saying this was their third most used campaigning method, although it was primarily used to support more traditional campaigning methods. Free methods of digital campaigning were far more popular than paid-for tools with candidates who responded to our survey. We found that: the majority (92%) said they posted on social media about their campaign over half (53%) uploaded video to their social media nearly half (47%) said they asked their supporters to share their posts only one in 10 (10%) of respondents said that they paid for adverts on social media Concerns about Covid impacted campaigners despite the improved public health situation. Concerns about Covid impacted campaigners despite the improved public health situation. Many of the candidates who responded to our survey reported that Covid affected their campaigns in some way. For most, this was due to concerns about the health and safety of others involved in their campaign and the impacts of Covid on recruiting volunteers. Our research found that: just over half of candidates who responded to our survey (57%) felt that they were able to effectively get their views across to voters during the campaign over three quarters (77%) said that concerns about the health of others involved impacted their campaigns three quarters (74%) said that Covid affected their ability to recruit volunteers to some degree A majority of candidates reported experiencing threats, abuse and/or intimidation A majority of candidates who responded to our survey (71%) said they had some sort of problem with threats, abuse, or intimidation, with a quarter (24%) of respondents experiencing a serious problem. Our research shows that: of those who experienced threats, or intimidation, the most common sources were the theft or damage of campaign materials such as posters (77%), online abuse (69%) and verbal abuse (60%) Two thirds (66%) of those who experienced abuse said that it came from members of the public or from anonymous/unknown sources. A quarter (23%) received threats from campaigners/volunteers and 6% received it from other candidates women were more likely than men to report having had a serious problem of those who either experienced threats, abuse or intimidation themselves or witnessed it, 44% reported it to the police. A tenth (11%) said that their experience would discourage them standing as a candidate in the future PSNI has confirmed that it received 128 reports relating to the election, the majority relating to the theft or damage of campaign material (93) with a smaller number of reported incidents relating to online misogyny (2) or assault (5). While robust political debate is part of a healthy democracy, sometimes things can go too far and cross the line into abuse and intimidation. When this happens it is vital that incidents are investigated and action is taken against those found guilty of criminal offences. Intimidating and abusive behaviour has no place in our political system and it's important that all candidates and campaigners are able to freely participate in the democratic process. Due to the cross-cutting nature of candidate and campaigner abuse, tackling it will require the efforts of people from across the electoral community. While we do not

investigate or prosecute incidents of abuse, we are well placed with our expertise across elections to bring together those who have a role to play in addressing this issue. Recommendation 2 Urgent action is needed to tackle and prevent abuse and intimidation of candidates and campaigners at elections. Candidates and campaigners should be able to participate freely in the democratic process, ensuring that voters can hear from a range of voices during elections. We will work with the wider electoral community to tackle this cross-cutting issue and will invite PSNI, representatives from a range of political parties and the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland to a roundtable event on candidate abuse. The event will provide the opportunity to understand the recent experiences of candidates at the 2022 Assembly election and to explore what action can be taken to ensure candidates and campaigners can freely participate in our democratic processes. Most people found it easy to get information but younger age groups feel less well informed about candidates. Most voters found it easy to find information, but there is still a sizable proportion, particularly among younger age groups, who did not feel they had enough information about candidates. Our research after the election found that: 84% of people said they found it easy to find information on what the election was about a similar proportion (86%) felt that they found it easy to find information on the candidates and parties running for election 71% of people agreed that they had enough information on candidates to make an informed choice, although 12% disagreed 88% of people aged 65 and over said they had enough information on candidates to make an informed decision, compared to only 53% of 18-34 year olds. Transparency about who is responsible for election campaign material is important to build trust Ahead of the 2022 Assembly election, imprint requirements on printed election material were brought into line with the law elsewhere in the UK. The change required all printed party and non-party campaign material to include an imprint. We welcome this change as it helps voters understand which parties and campaigners target them with printed election materials. However digital campaigning accounts for an increasingly large proportion of election spending and our research after the election confirmed that people continue to value transparency about who is responsible for political campaign activity online at elections, with: 62% of people agreeing that it is important for them to know who has produced the political information they see online almost half (49%) saying they would trust digital campaigning material more if they knew who produced it 30% saying that they cannot find out who has produced the political information that they see online The UK Government has introduced legislation that will require most campaigners to include information to identify who has promoted and/or published their online campaign material in future. This new digital imprint requirement will help voters understand who is targeting them online with information at elections and referendums in future. These changes are expected to come into force from the end of 2023. We will monitor any impact of the new digital imprint requirement on people's level of confidence in political information online. Candidates were able to access support to understand and comply with election law The Commission focussed on providing candidates and parties with proactive support to understand and comply with political finance law, both before and after the election. Alongside our written guidance we delivered a range of pre-election seminars for candidates and parties on the spending and donation rules. Post-election, we delivered seminars for candidates and agents on completing their spending and donation returns and ran advice surgeries for parties where they could book an appointment to speak to us about specific issues. Our approach has been informed and led by the evidence and feedback we received in our most recent survey of the

regulated community. We will continue to focus on delivering more bespoke advice and guidance resources so that parties and campaigners can easily understand political finance law, regardless of their size or experience. s spent more at this Assembly election than at recent elections, but did not reach permitted spending limits There are limits on how much campaigners can spend in the period during an election campaign. For parties and non-party campaigners, this 'regulated period' started on 5 January 2022 and ended on polling day. For candidates, the period started the day after they became a candidate. The earliest date a person could become a candidate was the date the Assembly was dissolved (28 March 2022). s have to declare what they spent, and we publish this information. s reported more campaign spending than at recent Assembly elections There are limits on how much can be spent on campaigning during an election. These differ depending on if the spending is done at a party, non-party campaigner, or candidate level. At a party level, reported campaign spending totalled £515,434.29 during the regulated period for the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election. This total amount was more than at any Assembly election since 2003. Six parties reported no regulated campaign spending. The amount of spending reported by individual parties varied significantly, ranging from £125 to £178,199. For candidates, the total amount of campaign spending reported was £1,069,656.07. The average amount spent per candidate was £4,475.54. This was much higher than the average amounts spent per candidate at the Assembly elections in 2016 (£3,689) or 2017 (£2,852). Total campaign spending

By parties	By candidates
Alliance - Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	£83,165.98
Aontú	£61,385.00
£60,308.12	Cross Community Labour Alternative (CCLA)
£0	£9,621.70
Democratic Unionist Party - D.U.P.	£51,915.82
£174,986.81	Green Party
£6,242.00	£39,298.23
Heritage Party	£125.00
£0	Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP)
£0	£9,910
Northern Ireland Conservatives	£0
£6,435.67	People Before Profit Alliance
£29,858.00	£42,385.97
Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	£0
£3,379.96	SDLP (Social Democratic & Labour Party)
£41,056.16	£149,844.62
Sinn Féin	£178,199.22
£166,667.26	Socialist Party (Northern Ireland)
£1,951.74	£14,629.73
The Workers Party	£0
£13,851.47	Traditional Unionist Voice - TUV
£29,723.63	£67,364.28
Ulster Unionist Party	£31,811.74
£133,767.07	Independent candidates
N/A	£64,494
Total	£515,434.29
£1,069,656.07	No third-party

campaigners reported regulated campaign spending at the May 2022 election. There was a considerable turnover of candidates between 2022 and 2017, however a sizable portion stood in both elections. About 36% (86) of candidates that stood in 2022 had contested the same seat in 2017. Spending reported by campaigners did not reach the permitted limits Spending limits for parties varied depending on the number of constituencies where they stood candidates. For the May 2022 election, party spending limits ranged from £306,000 for the seven parties that contested all 18 constituencies, to £17,000 for a party that contested one constituency. Spending reported by parties did not reach these limits. On average, parties spent around 17% of their allowed limits. The highest level of reported spend as a percentage of the party's limit was 58% (£178,000 against a limit of £306,000), and no other party spent more than 30% of their limit. The lowest level of reported spend was less than 1% (£125 against a limit of £17,000). Spending limits for candidates varied depending on how many voters there were in the constituency where they stood for election, if they ran a campaign alone or as a joint candidate, and whether the constituency was classified as a county or borough. s calculate how much they are permitted to spend based on the data provided by the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland on how many eligible voters there are in each constituency. 1 For the May 2022 election, candidate spending limits ranged from £8,539.56 to £16,875. Candidates spent an

average of around 35% of what they were permitted to spend, but there was considerable variation between candidates: one candidate spent 98% of their permitted limit, while several (13) reported no regulated campaign spending at all. Three quarters of candidates (178 out of 239) spent less than half of the permitted amount, and only five candidates spent more than 80% of the amount they were allowed to spend. Parties reported they spent most money on advertising, while candidates spent the most on unsolicited material to voters. Parties reported that they spent a total of £251,312.02 on advertising during the campaign for the May 2022 Assembly election. This represented nearly half of all campaign spending reported by parties in 2022. This was similar to most previous Assembly elections when advertising was also the largest single category of spending. In 2011, parties reported spending slightly more on campaign broadcasts than on advertising.

Category	Amount of spending reported (by parties)
Advertising	£251,312.02
Unsolicited material to electors	£67,090.41
Market research/canvassing	£62,028.00
Campaign broadcasts	£51,239.19
Media	£26,866.54
Rallies and other events	£16,706.44
Transport	£16,470.46
Manifesto or Referendum material	£12,495.60
Overheads and general administration	£11,225.63

Category 2 Amount of spending reported (by candidates)

Category	Amount of spending reported (by candidates)
Advertising	£449,433.08
Unsolicited material to electors	£575,847.95
Transport	£13,824.99
Public meetings	£9,132.77
Agent and other staff costs	£6,727.36
Accommodation and administration	£12,501.10
Other authorised spending	£23,848.15
Personal expenses	£12,326.33

To compare, candidates spent the most on unsolicited material to voters. Candidates spent around 42% (£449,433.08) of their total spend on advertising and around 54% (£575,847.95) of their total spend on unsolicited materials sent to voters. This compares to 2017, where 59% of candidate spending was unsolicited materials to voters, and 39% on advertising.

Delivering the election

The experience of delivering the 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election was well run. The late confirmation of the approach relating to provisions for Covid impacted on the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to plan for the poll. Attracting and retaining experienced staff and the booking of venues continue to pose significant challenges for the Chief Electoral Officer. The administration of polling day and the count generally went well, although candidates raised some concerns relating to the efficiency of the count.

Delivering the election summary

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is the registration officer and returning officer for all elections in Northern Ireland. The Chief Electoral Officer's duties include managing electoral registration, nominations, absent voting, polling stations and the counting of votes. Our evidence shows that these elections were well-run, and voters and campaigners reported high levels of confidence. However, underlying issues relating to capacity and resilience remain, with Covid further impacting the ability to attract and retain experienced staff. Early clarity on legislation is essential to support effective planning.

Late confirmation of the approach relating to provisions for Covid

Late confirmation of the approach relating to provisions for Covid impacted on the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to plan for the poll. Unlike in the rest of the UK there was no emergency proxy vote provision for people with Covid in Northern Ireland. This meant that if someone became unwell as a result of Covid shortly before polling day, their only option was to vote in person at a polling station. The Electoral Commission and the Chief Electoral Officer sought clarity from the UK Government on what provisions would be in place to support voters to participate safely in the context of the Covid pandemic. The UK Government did not provide clarity until March 2022 that no legislative provisions would be introduced. This late decision impacted on the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to plan for the poll, and our ability to deliver clear information to voters on what to expect when voting on polling day.

Despite these challenges, and informed by the learnings and guidance we provided from the elections delivered in Great Britain in 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer put in place a range of public health measures for the safety of voters at polling stations. This included hand sanitisers, protective screens, ventilation and advice to wear a face covering. The Chief Electoral Officer needs early clarity to be able to deliver the changes introduced by the Elections Act. Changes introduced by the Elections Act will present new challenges for the Chief Electoral Officer and the wider electoral community. It is important that the UK Government works with the electoral community in Northern Ireland and across the UK as a whole to ensure there is sufficient clarity on how the Elections Act is going to be implemented. Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3 The UK Government should provide early clarity on decisions that would impact on the Chief Electoral Officer's ability to plan for elections. All legislation relating to electoral events should be in place at least six months before it is required to be implemented or complied with to ensure appropriate time for planning. Capacity and resilience remains a significant challenge to the delivery of elections. Concerns about resilience and capacity in relation to the delivery of elections remain, with Covid making it even more difficult to attract and retain experienced staff and book venues for polling stations. These issues are exacerbated by the challenges of delivering elections within an outdated and increasingly complex electoral law framework. We continue to support the Law Commissions' review of electoral law which would simplify and improve electoral law across the UK, supporting the effective delivery of elections. Recruiting and retaining staff to work at the elections remained a problem. The Chief Electoral Officer highlighted problems around recruiting and retaining experienced polling station and count staff, with a high number of recruits dropping out ahead of polling day. This issue is being seen across the UK, and has been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. We will continue to work with the Chief Electoral Officer and the wider electoral community to develop and deliver proposals that will support more resilient electoral management. Specifically, we have formed a sub-group of the UK Electoral Coordination and Advisory Board (ECAB) to discuss and identify solutions to the capacity and resilience challenges experienced by Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers across the UK. An immediate focus for this sub-group will be addressing the challenges around the recruitment of polling station staff. Challenges booking polling station venues Booking venues for polling stations is another aspect of managing the elections that has been highlighted as a continuing challenge. In part this appears to be an impact of Covid, with schools particularly reluctant to be used as polling stations. The ability for those running the polls to be able to access suitable venues is key to ensuring the smooth delivery of elections. The administration of polling day and the count generally went well, although candidates raised some concerns relating to the efficiency of the count. The administration of polling day and the count generally went well, with a majority of voters (82%) and a majority of the candidates responding to our survey (78%) reporting they were confident the election was well run. The counting of votes was undertaken at three venues across Northern Ireland: Titanic Exhibition Centre in Belfast, Ulster University in Jordanstown, and Meadowbank Sports Arena in Magherafelt. Candidates raised concerns relating to the efficiency of the count. Only 46% of respondents who attended the count reported that they were satisfied with how efficiently the count processes were run. Improvements introduced to the verification and primary sort in 2016 and 2017 supported the first stage of the count to move efficiently. Verification of the used ballot papers began at 8am on Friday 5 May and by that

afternoon a number of candidates had been deemed elected. However, unlike in 2017, the count was not completed on the same day, and it took until the early hours of Sunday 8 May for the last constituency to be declared. Historically election counts in Northern Ireland have taken two days to complete, with 2017 the first time a second day was not needed, in part due to how the votes transferred in the latter stages. At this year's election, there were many more stages of the count where only a small number of votes were able to be transferred at each stage, with more stages then needed before candidates had enough votes to get above the quota and be deemed elected. 3 These challenges were exacerbated by the issue of retaining experienced count staff due to Covid. While the way the votes fell in an STV election and the dropout rates of experienced count staff contributed to the time-consuming nature of the count, we believe there remains the potential for improvements to be made to the latter stages of the count. Recommendation 4 Recommendation 4 The Chief Electoral Officer should build on previous improvements to the first stages of the count process by examining where efficiencies can be made to the latter stages of the count. This should include looking at what role technology could play. Concerns raised by candidates on access and facilities at the count A number of free text comments were also provided in our survey of candidates that related specifically to access and facilities at the count. The most common concerns raised related to traffic management, admissions to the count and the lack of facilities in some venues. While the issues highlighted will not have significantly impacted the time taken to complete the count, they will have added to the frustrations of some candidates. The Chief Electoral Officer's survey of count staff has identified similar concerns and as part of a process of continual improvement is committed to reviewing these. Supporting evidence Northern Ireland Assembly election May 2022 Public opinion research tables 2022 Northern Ireland Electoral data 1. The spending limit is calculated by adding together a base amount and a variable top up that takes into account the number of registered electors in the constituency contested. The spending limit is £8,700 plus 6% of the number of eligible voters (in borough constituencies) or 9% (in county constituencies). The four Belfast constituencies are borough constituencies. The other constituencies in Northern Ireland are county constituencies. Candidates standing in the same constituency that publish joint election material or use the same election agent are considered joint candidates and have lower spending limits as they are sharing some costs. If they are one of two joint candidates their limit is reduced by 25% and if they are one of three or more joint candidates their limit is reduced by 33%. ■ Back to content at footnote 1 2. The spending categories that candidates use are different to those for parties, however both include 'Advertising' and 'Unsolicited material to electors' as categories. ■ Back to content at footnote 2 3. In STV elections, voters rank candidates in order of preference. Any candidate who obtains enough first preference votes to reach the minimum required to be elected (known as the quota), is deemed elected. If a voter's first-choice candidate does not get elected, or if they are elected with more votes than the next candidate, their vote can be transferred to help elect their second choice and so on. If no candidate has reached the quota at the end of a stage, the candidate with the lowest numbers of votes is excluded and their votes transferred. ■ Back to content at footnote 3 Page history First published: 21 September 2022 Last updated: 21 September 2022 Related content Report on the May 2022 local elections in England Read our report on the May 2022 local elections in England Report on the May 2022 elections in Wales Read our report on the May 2022 elections in Wales. Report on the May 2022 Scottish council elections Read

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