

Northern Ireland Assembly Parties Panel: 6 October 2020 | Electoral Commission Search

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Update CSPL Review of Electoral Regulation Mairaid highlighted that in June, the Committee on Standards in Public Life launched a review of the regulatory framework on electoral finance, enforced by the Commission, the police and the courts. The Electoral Commission circulated a link to the consultation to a range of NI stakeholders, including the parties, at the time, inviting them to submit a response if they wished to do so. In the Electoral Commission's consultation response, it is made clear the current regulatory framework broadly works well to support public confidence in the integrity of elections and referendums in the UK. We noted there are generally high levels of compliance with the law, and the framework has been updated over time. However, the response sets The Electoral Commission's suggested priorities for reform that are designed to deliver greater transparency, reflect new ways of campaigning, and provide sufficient deterrents to those tempted to breach electoral law. Mairaid advised that The Electoral Commission has recommended greater alignment between the party and candidate regulatory framework, to ensure the system is fairer and more proportionate for candidates and frees up police and court time.

PACAC Inquiry Mairaid advised that there is an ongoing inquiry from Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) into the role of The Electoral Commission. This will examine public and political confidence in the Electoral Commission and will be looking at its powers, remit, and functions. There is currently a call for evidence out which closes on 16 November 2020, and a link to the Call for Evidence would be circulated after the meeting. UK Government digital imprints consultation The Commission has welcomed the UK Government's consultation on digital imprints. We have previously recommended extending imprint requirements to digital election and referendum material. The consultation provides an opportunity to deliver real change for voters and give them a better understanding of who is trying to reach them online. The consultation seeks views on the technical scope of the new digital imprints regime and closes on 4 November 2020. We will be submitting a response, and would encourage parties to respond to the consultation too.

Online party conferences and events guidance We understand that some political parties will be holding digital conferences and other meetings which would otherwise have been held in person as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to this we have prepared some FAQs on our website to address how these events interact with the PPERA party funding rules. The rules on payments made in connection with digital conferences and events are treated in the same way as physical conferences and events under PPERA. We have also considered how the rules apply to advertisements at these online events and digital conference stands which parties may wish to sell.

Upcoming reporting dates for political parties 30 October 2020 - Deadline for submitting Quarter 3 2020 (1 July 2020– 30 September 2020) donations and loans report 28 October 2020 -Statements of Accounts for parties and accounting units with income and expenditure over £250,000 will be published. AoB Thanks and best wishes were passed onto Anna Carragher as this was her last meeting as Chair as she steps down from the Northern Ireland Commissioner role. Cahir advised that recruitment is ongoing for a new Northern Ireland Commissioner. The closing date for these applications is 14 October 2020. The House of Commons Speaker's Committee is planning on interviewing for this in early November. Recruitment is also about to commence for a new Chair of the Electoral Commission. The Speaker's Committee is also carrying out recruitment for a new Smaller Parties Commissioner. Proposed meeting dates 2021 Tuesday 19 January Tuesday 9 March Tuesday 8 June Tuesday 12 October