

Urgent action needed to remove barriers to voting in Northern Ireland | Electoral Commission Search Urgent action needed to remove barriers to voting in Northern Ireland You are in the section Home Posted: 13 September 2023 Urgent action needed to remove barriers to voting in Northern Ireland Voters in Northern Ireland were confident with how May's council elections were run, but over 5,000 postal and proxy applications were rejected due to a missing Digital Registration Number (DRN), according to a new report published today by the Electoral Commission. A DRN is required for those registered to vote online to apply for a postal or proxy vote. The rejection rates and low public awareness levels of the DRN are acting as a barrier to voters, a view that was explicitly expressed in feedback to the Commission from candidates, political parties, and electoral administrators. The Commission is calling on the UK Government to urgently review the operation of the DRN. Cahir Hughes, Head of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland, said: "Voters continue to have positive views about how elections are run, with most feeling confident and satisfied with the registration and voting processes. However, issues remain. A large number of postal and proxy applications were rejected due to a missing DRN, demonstrating that it continues to be a barrier to voters in Northern Ireland. "It is vital eligible voters can access their right to vote. We continue to call on the UK Government to urgently review the operation of DRN in Northern Ireland to ensure barriers are removed while also maintaining the integrity of the absent voting process." The report also finds that the capacity and resilience of election administrators, both in Northern Ireland and across the UK, remains a significant challenge. Recruiting and retaining experienced polling station and count staff continues to be difficult. Alongside this, these were the first elections with changes introduced from the Elections Act came into force, and further significant administration changes are expected ahead of the next set of elections. Cahir Hughes added: "It's important the UK Government carefully considers whether the necessary time and resources are available before making final decisions about implementing the remaining Elections Act changes." Ends For more information contact the Electoral Commission press office on 028 90 894 032, out of office hours 07789 920 414 or [press@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:press@electoralcommission.org.uk) . Notes to Editors In total there were 14,286 postal and proxy vote applications approved for the 2023 local government elections, with 7,014 applications rejected. Of those rejected applications, 5,118 (73%) were rejected because there was no DRN. This is a significant increase from the 2022 Assembly election in which 3,636 (60%) of all applications were rejected because there was no DRN. by: enabling the 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 regulating political finance – taking proactive steps to increase transparency, ensure compliance and pursue breaches using our expertise to make and advocate for changes to our democracy, aiming to improve fairness, transparency and efficiency The Commission was set up in 2000 and reports to the UK, Welsh and Scottish Parliaments.