

Northern Ireland Assembly Parties' Panel: 7 June 2022 | Electoral Commission

Search

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You are in the Party panels section Home How we make decisions Party panels On this page Minutes from NIAPP meeting Tuesday 8 March and any matters arising Issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting May 2022 post-election review – 5 May Northern Ireland Assembly Election Update from the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) 2022 Financial Reporting dates for political parties Modernising voting project Report on the canvass Upcoming meetings dates for 2022 Any other business First published: 15 February 2023 Last updated: 11 May 2023 Meeting overview Date: 7 June 2022 Time: 10:00am Date of next scheduled meeting: Tuesday 25 October Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting The Electoral Commission: Dr Katy Radford, Electoral Commissioner for Northern Ireland (KR) Cahir Hughes Head of Electoral Commission, Northern Ireland (CH) Jonathan Mitchell, Manager of Electoral Commission, Northern Ireland (JM) Roisin McDaid, Senior Office (Political Parties Liaison) (RM) Hannah Greenfield, Digital Comms Officer Electoral Office for Northern Ireland: Virginia McVea, Chief Electoral Officer (VM) Political Parties: Alliance Party - Peter McCully (PM) DUP - George Dorrian (GD) and Ashleigh Perry SDLP (Social Democratic & Labour Party) – Catherine Matthews (CM) Sinn Féin - Gary Fleming (GF) Ulster Unionist Party – Stephen Nichol (SN) Apologies: Alliance Party of Northern Ireland – Sharon Lowry Minutes from NIAPP meeting Tuesday 8 March and any matters arising The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. Issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting No specific issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting. May 2022 post-election review – 5 May Northern Ireland Assembly Election KR invited feedback from the Panel. CH advised that feedback would inform the statutory Electoral Commission (EC) report on the election. Absent voting CM raised that electors didn't know they needed to keep their digital registration number (DRN) to obtain an absent vote. CH noted that it was difficult to reach electors that needed to be aware of the number. The EC ran a highly targeted digital advertising campaign aimed at groups likely to apply for an absent vote, however JM raised that more digital and particularly partnership work was required to reach the target audience. VM raised concerns that it was difficult for people to obtain an absent vote and that the Secretary of State wouldn't allow her to move the absent vote deadline. The difficulty for EONI was the short time period between electors realising they needed their DRN and the deadline for sending in their absent vote applications. EONI attempted to get press coverage on the issue but this had low take-up due to the complicated nature of the issue. GF thanked EONI, EC, and the Royal Mail for their working relationships throughout the election period. GF reiterated the DRN was a major problem for the reasons outlined by VM, adding that the public aren't focused on the election until they receive their poll cards, which left a very tight window for receiving their DRN. CM restated that whilst party reps and candidates try to encourage engagement, it doesn't happen early enough. PM asked VM what the response time was for EONI sending out DRN notifications. VM stated there was no backlog on this during the election so letters were sent the same day (unless there was no post that day). VM advised that as there are no plans to amend legislation, more work will be required in future. Nominations GD raised a problem with a nomination paper that passed a pre-check but a subscriber moved house (before the papers were formally submitted) causing an issue in the final nomination process. VM advised that without advance notice from candidates it is not possible for EONI to foresee this type of issue. VM outlined the work EONI did to improve the nominations process such as using an online booking system and setting up pop-ups in council offices. Campaigning CH highlighted the unsavoury nature of some

campaigning at the election and requested views. GD raised that there had been damage to election posters and that some election posters had been stolen. This was more common in rural areas. CM stated that campaigning had been particularly difficult during this election with posters stolen and burnt and candidate subject to online abuse. CH stated that it is important that people do not feel intimidated when running as a candidate. VM advised she received complaints about the behaviour of some candidates on and around polling day. GD reiterated that there was more online abuse for both men and women. PM stated that for the Alliance Party there was more intimidation when entering certain communities, particularly towards younger candidates. KR highlighted that we would engage with campaigners to tackle this cross-cutting issue and highlighted the Assembly Women's Caucus as a potential group to work with on this issue. Candidate mailing (Royal Mail) CC stated there had been no major issues for the Royal Mail. CM thanked CC for the service provided however, in some areas, electors stated they hadn't received the addressed mail and others hadn't received the unaddressed mail. There were also three different postings to be sent at different times but some households received all three together. CM also questioned why all mail had to go to Mallusk. CC advised that for the Assembly Election the mailing is handled centrally, however she would raise this internally. SN also thanked CC for their help during the election. They commented that a small number of unaddressed mail had bleed-over from one constituency to another. They also raised an issue with artwork checking as some candidate mailings included information on joining a party which was not approved by Royal Mail. Public awareness JM outlined the Electoral Commission's six-week voter registration campaign in the run up to the election and the targeted DRN campaign. CH updated the panel on the learning resources created by the Commission to support young people's political literacy which will be built on at future elections. Polling stations CM raised concerns about the behaviour of some campaigners and polling agents at some polling places and that she thought that some polling staff were not confident challenging it. VM stated parties needed to ensure campaigners behaved within the rules and within the voluntary code of conduct and asked that parties let her know of issues on polling day so she could send out polling station inspectors. VM thanked parties for complying with Covid-19 guidelines but acknowledged the circulation of polling agents could have been an issue. GD advised they had noticed more campaign literature left in polling booths. He mentioned a particular polling place where restrictions on vehicle access close to the entrance had caused accessibility issues. VM advised she would look into this. GF stated they didn't have many issues, however early on polling day, some polling agents weren't allowed access to the polling station. VM advised this had been an administrative error and apologised. CH invited VM to raise any issues she had found. VM outlined difficulties with staffing as many had dropped out last minute citing Covid-19 as a reason. Another issue was that some schools did not want their grounds used as a polling place. The count CH invited feedback on the count. Participants acknowledged that the count took a long time. GD raised some issues with facilities given the length of the count. GF acknowledged the improvements to the Meadowbank count centre, however noted that a queue outside prevented access to the start of the count. He stated there were also issues with counts moving at different speeds. He suggested the use of a digital calculator to improve this. VM advised the slower pace was also due to the voting patterns of electors, but she would work with statisticians to examine where efficiencies in the count can be found. VM apologised about the issues with amenities and suggested that in future EONI may subsidise caterers. It was also raised that the layout of the

Jordanstown count centre had impeded a disabled attendee. CM reiterated the problem with the queue at Meadowbank, and also suggested count centres have a facility, such as a screen for privacy in case of medical issues. CM also highlighted that she had requested more chairs as people were on their feet for a long time at the count. VM advised EONI would review the efficiency of the count and look at what improvements can be made. Spending and reporting RM reminded the parties that returns were due in August. The guidance had been significantly updated this year and there were two briefings before the election for the candidates, and one for the parties. RM requested feedback on this. CM advised that candidates found the forms complicated and that the virtual seminars were appropriate but that they were not as helpful as in-person meetings. RM acknowledged that candidates had difficulties completing forms, but as they were prescribed in law she said the EC could look at how to make the explanatory notes link better to various parts of the form. GD stated there was a new generation of people taking on agent roles and acknowledged the party's role developing the knowledge of agents, but that any additional guidance would be welcomed. CH acknowledged that more guidance would be useful. RM asked the parties if earlier seminars would be useful. CM advised that the issue is more with ensuring the right people are taking on agent roles. Update from the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) VM advised that statistics from the election were available on the EONI website. VM acknowledged points raised earlier regarding the DRN and its impact on people applying for absent votes. VM reiterated she was keen to speak to parties' regarding the efficiency of the latter stages of the count and that work had already begun to examine where improvements could be made. EONI were looking into ways of improving accessibility and asked for any feedback or ideas on this. KR thanked VM and advised the EC were committed to helping EONI with this. 2022 Financial Reporting dates for political parties RM advised the parties of the following dates: Donation and loan reports for the period 1 April – 30 June 2022 had to be submitted by 30 July 2022 Audited statement of accounts for the year ending 31 December 2022 for parties with income or expenditure over £250,000 had to be submitted (with the auditor's certificate) by 7 July 2022 Parties should renew their annual confirmation of registered details at the same time as submitting their accounts by completing form RP8 Parties with campaign expenditure of £250,000 or less had to submit their report of campaign spending on or before 5 August 2022. Modernising voting project JM updated the panel on the modernising voting project that was being undertaken by the EC. The EC was gathering views on potential future improvements to voting in the UK. The work aimed to ensure that voting fits the needs and expectations of voters in 2022 and beyond. Last year the EC carried out research with public focus groups and published a summary of the findings on our website. JM stated they wanted to hear from parties to further develop the evidence base and to inform future policy debates about improving voting processes and information about elections. JM advised the panel that if they would like to be contacted and interviewed as part of this work to get in contact with the Northern Ireland team. He advised the panel would be sent more information on this by email after the meeting. Report on the canvass JM advised the panel that the report on how the 2021 Northern Ireland canvass was run was published in March 2022. The report welcomed the largest ever electoral register, with over 1.36 million people registered to vote. However it recommended that the UK Government reform the canvass and wider electoral registration process in Northern Ireland. Specifically it recommended the Government reform the canvass to allow a pre-canvass match between the electoral register and available datasets. As a result people could be accurately retained on the register and would not be required to re-register

unless their details had changed. The report also recommended integrating electoral registration into other public service transactions and exploring options for introducing automatic or automated registration. These changes would allow people who have recently moved to complete an electoral registration application simultaneously as part of, or alongside, accessing other public services and could be used to automatically register young people when they are given their National Insurance number. JM advised the EC continued to work in partnership with the CEO, government, data providers and the wider electoral community to develop and deliver these recommendations. He requested the panel get in touch with any questions. VM reminded the panel that due to the roll-over some electors would be coming off the register in December 2024. EONI had contacted these people but have received low levels of engagement. SN raised that the evidence required to register was inaccessible for young people. VM responded that this is due to legislation. CH advised that regular assessments take place of the register and the EC will be undertaking a comprehensive study of the register in December with findings published in 2023. Upcoming meetings dates for 2022 The next NIAPP meeting is due to take place on Tuesday 25 October. Any other business JM reminded the panel that the EC had sent an online survey to all candidates asking them to share their views of the election. There has been a good response so far but the EC wanted to make sure candidates from all parties had the opportunity to respond before the survey closes.