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Northern Ireland Assembly Parties Panel: Tuesday 18

January

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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

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On this page Welcome and introductions Notes of previous meeting held on 26 January 2021 and matters arising Issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting Update from Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland – Canvass 2021 Electoral Commission updates Any other business Proposed meeting dates 2021 First published: 17 June 2022 Last updated: 17 June 2022 Meeting Overview Date: 27 April 2021 Time: 9:30am Date of next scheduled meeting: Tuesday 8 June Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting The Electoral Commission Cahir Hughes (CH), chair of meeting Mairaid McMahon (MMcM) Roisin McDaid (RMcD) Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Virginia McVea (VMcV) Daryll Madine (DM) Political parties: Alliance Party - Cllr Sharon Lowry (SL) and Peter McCully (PMcC) DUP - Cllr George Dorrian (GD) Green Party - Kate Barry (KB) Sinn Féin - Gary Fleming (GF) and Cllr Ronan McLaughlin (RMcL) UUP - John Moore (JM) and David Riddell (DR) Apologies Alliance Party - Cllr Patrick Brown SDLP - Catherine Matthews Welcome and introductions CH welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted attendance. Notes of previous meeting held on 26 January 2021 and matters arising The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. CH provided an update on recent Commissioner appointments. He explained that John Pullinger has been appointed Chair of the Commission, and gave an overview of John's previous experience. CH also noted Alex Attwood has been appointed Smaller Parties Commissioner, but that we are still awaiting a decision from Speaker's Committee on the Northern Ireland Commissioner role. Issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting There were no issues raised. Update from Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland – Canvass 2021 VMcV gave an overview the legislative background to the postponement of the 2020 canvass, explaining that the Coronavirus Act 2020 had moved the date for the canvass to 2021, which would begin on 1 July and run until the new register is published on 1 December. She explained that the purpose of the canvass was to ensure everybody re-registers, but that there would be no impediment to people registering after the new register is published. A number of special category electors will not be included in the canvass, such as service or anonymous electors, who register in different ways. The administrative cut-off, to appear on the new register published in December, is 15 November. VMcV explained that, given that 80-90% of applications to register are now made online, the process of data matching would be much more effective than in previous predominantly paper-based exercises. VMcV explained how the process of data-matching will work, with applications going through the Cabinet Office registration portal and DWP data-matching. The EONI then also checks addresses against a range of data sets, such as Housing Executive data. If there is no match, EONI may ask for evidence, which could be from a list of accepted evidence sources. GF asked whether the EONI would check applications against data from the private rental sector or housing associations. VMcV said that EONI will try to gather as much data as possible, but while it could agree a data sharing agreement with the Housing Executive, this was harder to achieve with the private rental sector. She said conversations could be had with housing associations about data sharing, but that this would not be possible in advance of this canvass exercise. RMcL asked whether housing benefit data would be a better source of data, as it could cover the private rental sector as well as housing associations. He also asked how many data sources an application needs to be matched against. VMcV said there was only so much data the EONI could gather, but that they wouldn't be looking for matches across all sources. VMcV explained that if someone cannot provide evidence for their application, they could seek a declaration from

someone such as a councillor or GP. If they cannot get a declaration, the EONI will consider these on a case-by-case basis. VMcV said that, while EONI expect most people to register online, paper forms could be downloaded or requested. She asked parties to encourage people to register online, as this avoids information being missed from applications. EONI will also be sending out 4 key flyers to properties – one in June, one in July when the canvass begins, and reminders in August and September. In addition, VMcV explained the areas of additional support which the EONI will provide during the canvass. Canvassers have been recruited for every ward, and can be given up to date data every day. Using 2013 canvass data, areas with low levels of registration have been identified so static canvass sites can be set up in places such as leisure centres, and councils have also agreed to set up kiosks for people to access more easily if they cannot register online. Prepopulated forms will also be sent to over-75s, and those in the rented sector. VMcV noted the August introduction of the high street voucher/pre-paid card scheme, which EONI believes will be an incentive for people to register to vote as the electoral register will be used as a source to prevent fraud in applications. VMcV said that EONI was working with a range of organisations, including the CCEA, to launch a programme aimed at attainers, while those who are retained as 'rollovers' will be contacted to verify their details. RMcL asked whether information could be provided to polling station staff to flag those electors who had been rolled over that they need to register. VMcV said the EONI was looking at what could be done before the May 2022 elections, and will use any opportunity to get people registered. She said she was happy to meet the parties to discuss further. DM provided an overview and examples of how registration data will be displayed through interactive maps from the end of July, to be updated on a weekly basis. MMcM gave an overview of the Commission's planned media and public awareness work, which will fit around the key dates for the canvass and EONI flyer deliveries. This includes adverts on TV, radio, out of home locations such as retail and public transport, press and digital, and social media. CH said data from the canvass would be used to target these adverts if necessary. GF raised concerns that absent voting applications may be made difficult by people not having access to their Digital Registration Numbers, and concerns about EONI's capacity to deal with any increased volume of enquiries as a result. VMcV noted these concerns, but explained that legislation required DRNs and any changes to the absent voting process would need to be effected through legislation. She said the EONI would consider how to encourage people to remember and retain access to their DRN in its public awareness campaigns. She said she did not agree with concerns about EONI's capacity, and that digital advances had made its work more efficient. CH noted the Commission had raised similar concerns about DRNs and absent voting during consideration of the legislation. He confirmed that the Commission will consider how to raise awareness of the need for the DRN as part of the public awareness campaign for the next election. RMcL asked whether the static canvass sites would include the provision of elector ID, which could be an incentive to younger people. VMcV said this would not be the case at present, as it could cause queueing, but that EONI would monitor how the sites are being used. She explained she didn't expect them to deal with huge amounts of young people, as they would be more likely to register online. Electoral Commission updates MMcM provided an overview of the Commission's recent publication of research on political transparency in Northern Ireland. She explained the research's key findings, including that it highlighted the need for independent sources of information on political finances. RMcD explained the background to future legislative changes on imprint requirements. The UK Government plans to introduce

legislation to extend the requirements to cover all printed party and non-party campaigner material on 18 May, with a view to it coming into force on 22 July. The Commission will provide updated guidance on this in due course. SL asked if this would include online material; RMcD explained changes to online imprint requirements are expected in the Electoral Integrity Bill. RMcD reminded the parties that the following financial returns were due by 30 April 2021: Quarter 1 donation and loan reports, covering the period 1 January 2021 – 31 March 2021 Statements of accounts for parties with income and expenditure below £250,000. Accounting units with income or expenditure between £25,000 and £250,000 were also required to submit accounts by 30 April 2021. Any other business MMcM gave an update on the Commission's work preparing for elections in Britain, in the context of the ongoing public health situation. She explained the Commission's objectives for safe elections, and research on public attitudes to voting in the context of Covid-19. CH said the Commission would keep the APP updated on the reporting on those elections. Proposed meeting dates 2021 The next meeting was scheduled for 8 June.

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On this page Welcomes, apologies, and introductions Minutes from Tuesday 6 October Issues raised by parties Update from Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland Electoral Commission Update Meeting dates for 2021 Any other business First published: 17 June 2022 Last updated: 17 June 2022 Meeting overview Date: 26 January 2021 Time: 10:00am Date of next scheduled meeting: Tuesday 23 March Who was at the meeting Who was at the meeting The Electoral Commission: Cahir Hughes (Chair) Mairaid McMahon Hannah Greenfield Electoral Office for Northern Ireland: Virginia McVea Political Parties: Alliance Party - Sharon Lowry and Peter McCully DUP - George Dorrian Green Party - Kate Barry Sinn Féin - Gary Fleming Apologies: Roisin McDaid Welcomes, apologies, and introductions The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. Minutes from Tuesday 6 October Minutes from previous NIAPP meeting agreed. Issues raised by parties No issues were raised by parties in advance, or at the start, of the meeting. Update from Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland Planning for Canvass 2021 Virginia McVea provided an update on the plans for the re-scheduled canvass, now due to take place in 2021. She explained that the first activity would be delivery of an unaddressed mail-drop to all houses in Northern Ireland in June, to advise the public that the Canvass will begin in July. A second unaddressed mail-drop will be sent in July advising the Canvass is open. A pre-populated form will be sent out to each Housing Executive tenant to target this harder to reach group. People aged over 75, and those in their households, will also receive a pre-populated form. Another unaddressed mail-drop will be sent out in August, and a further targeted mail-drop will be sent in October to non-responders. Whilst there are no active plans to send canvassers out door to door on the scale used in previous years, contingency plans are in place for use of canvassers if it became safe and necessary to do so. During the registration period, the Electoral Office are planning to produce a weekly update of the response data in an interactive mapped format which should highlight the areas with lowest response rates. Attainers and pre-attainers will be identified through data provided by the Department of Education and will be contacted directly by email through the C2K system. On the basis that the canvass will close in December, Tuesday 9 November will be the deadline for applications for the December register. Applications received after this date will still be processed but will not be included in the December register. The Electoral Office are developing video guides, with step by step instructions and highlighting common errors, to help the general public complete their forms correctly. A party representative suggested that the electoral registration letters sent to the general public sometimes use difficult terminology that is not easily understood by the recipients. Virginia advised that, by law, the registration forms must include two pieces of legislation. However, the bulk of communication with the general public (the mail-drops) will be using plain and do not have the legislation inclusion requirement. Another party representative noted that it could be a particular challenge to register those aged over 75 given the pandemic climate. Turning to the public awareness campaign, Mairaid McMahon noted the Electoral Commission is working with the Electoral Office, as well as advertising and media agencies, on its development for the 2021 Canvass. The key message will be encouraging people to register online, and the Commission is working with the agencies to ensure the messaging is clear and effective, as well as identifying the best channels to use to target those who are traditionally harder to engage in campaigns like this, such as students for example. Once the campaign messaging and creative is finalised, she added that materials would be shared with the parties.

Electoral Commission Update Proposed changes to imprint requirements Mairaid McMahon explained that, in its recent consultation on transparency in digital campaigning, the UK Government had indicated its intention to extend imprint requirements to digital material. The Government also said it intended to legislate so that all printed election material in Northern Ireland will need an imprint. The proposed changes in relation to printed material will require all printed party and non-party campaign material in Northern Ireland to have an imprint. The changes will also mean that the imprint requirements on printed candidate material will be brought in line with Great Britain. She noted that we await the UK Government's response on the consultation and the associated legislative timings, and will advise further in due course. She also highlighted that the Scottish Government has already implemented legislation that will require imprints on digital material at the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May and at the next Scottish local government elections.

Party Conference Stands Mairaid informed the meeting that the Electoral Commission is currently carrying out a review of the maximum rate amount that parties can charge for the hire of a stand at a party conference before it constitutes a donation to the party. The current maximum is £15,000. The Commission has already spoken to a variety of parties whose charges range from significant amounts to much smaller amounts, which has provided us with a range of views. She concluded by suggesting that if any party would like to contribute to the review, they should contact Roisin McDaid.

Consultation on draft Disability Action Plan Mairaid advised that the Electoral Commission has recently published their draft Disability Action Plan for consultation, and that a link will be circulated to NIAPP members. She encouraged all parties to provide feedback on any aspect of the draft Plan, and in particular on the performance measures and targets that have been included. She also welcomed the opportunity to discuss further with any party that might be interested in doing so.

The First Count Mairaid noted that, following the previous NIAPP meeting, the Electoral Commission had launched The First Count, which is intended to be a quarterly newsletter summarising the key issues discussed at each meeting. She encouraged recipients to provide feedback on any aspect of its tone, content or presentation.

Update on Commissioner Appointments Cahir Hughes provided an update on the appointment of Electoral Commissioners to various vacant positions on the Commission Board. He began by explaining that the Speaker's Committee, who manage all of these appointments independently of the Commission, are in the process of recruiting a Northern Ireland Commissioner, filling the vacancy created when Anna Carragher's term of office concluded. As the deadline for applications was Friday 15 January, and there will be a process of shortlisting and interviewing in the coming months, as well as political and parliamentary scrutiny, he suggested that it could be early summer before any such appointment would be in place. Cahir noted that a recruitment process for the new Chair is also underway, filling the vacancy left by the departure of Sir John Holmes. It is anticipated that the successful candidate will take up the post before the summer. Finally, Cahir drew attention to the ratification by Parliament of the appointment of Alex Attwood as Commissioner representing smaller parties on 20 January, filling the vacancy created by the departure of Alastair Ross. As this appointment remains subject to the issuing of a Royal Warrant, it is anticipated that Alex will take up post in the coming months.

Meeting dates for 2021 Cahir reminded attendees of the following forthcoming dates for meetings: Tuesday 23 March Tuesday 22 June Tuesday 22 October Any other business Cahir reminded attendees for the forthcoming deadline of 30 January 2021 for submitting the quarter 4 (1 October – 31 December 2020) donations and loans reports.



As there was no further business, Cahir thanked everyone for their attendance and drew the meeting to a close.

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First published: 15 June 2023 Last updated: 15 June 2023 Meeting overview Date: 28 March 2023 Time: 09:30 am Date of next scheduled meeting: Tuesday 13 June 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) James Ringland, Support and Information Advisor (JR) Electoral Office for Northern Ireland: Sarah Ling, Interim Chief Electoral Officer (VM) Political Parties: Alliance Party - Tierna Kelly (TK) DUP - George Dorrian (GD) SDLP (Social Democratic & Labour Party) – Catherine Matthews (CM) Sinn Féin - Gary Fleming (GF) Ulster Unionist Party – Tim Lemon (TM) Royal Mail Claire Connolly (CC) Apologies: Alliance Party of Northern Ireland – Sharon Lowry, Peter McCully Virginia McVea, Chief Electoral Officer - EONI 1. Welcome, apologies and introductions 1.1 KR welcomed attendees. Apologies were made for Sharon Lowry and Peter McCully from Alliance who could not attend, Tierna Kelly from Alliance attended in their place. Virginia McVea had to cancel her attendance at short notice. Sarah Ling, interim Chief Electoral Officer attended in her place. Both Sarah Ling and James Ringland attended virtually. 2. Minutes from NIAPP meeting Wednesday 25 January and any matters arising 2.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. 3. Issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting 3.1. No specific issues raised by political parties in advance of the meeting. 4. Update from Electoral Commission. 4.1.1. Guidance update from RM. The Commission alongside EONI, Royal Mail and the PSNI are holding pre-election seminars to provide guidance on the rules on spending and donations, candidate freepost entitlement and candidate safety guidance. One seminar has been held in Belfast. There will be a seminar held in Omagh on March 29 and virtually on March 30th. The Commission will make presentations available online after all three seminars have been held. The Commission will be running advice surgeries for candidates regarding campaign spending and donations. There will be two before poll and two after. These will be 1-2-1 sessions between candidates and the Commission. The Commission remains contactable as usual if candidates/agents have any further queries. The dates of these surgeries will be published after the pre-election seminars. RM will email out guidance on difference between local campaigning and notional spending to parties. 4.1.2. Comms update from CH Update. The Commission's Got 5 campaign which launched 20 March across TV, radio, paid social and out of home advertising. The campaign will run until 28 April, the registration deadline. The Commission's separate DRN campaign which will run across paid social and print media will launch on March 27 and run until April 24, with a tapering off towards the end to prevent EONI being overwhelmed with a rush of applications. 4.2.1 SL provided an update from EONI. 4.2.2 SL provided a timetable for the elections. The publishing of notice of election will be on April 11 and nominations run from April 12-24. These nominations are to be given to local councils from 10:00-16:00 each day (except April 24 where the deadline is 13:00). SL asked parties to encourage candidates to put nomination papers in early as it would help councils process the applications but will also allow time to amend any mistakes made on nomination papers. The deadline for absent votes will be 26 April at 17:00 and the deadline to register is April 28. The publication of the final notice of registrations will be 11 May. Polling day will be May 18 and from close of poll on the 18 the verification of unused votes begins which will run into the 19 May. The counts are run by the councils and will start on

19 May at 8am and continue into the 20 May. EONI has seen a typical surge in registration applications of several hundred a day. A slightly higher than normal 1000+ temporary absent vote applications have been made. There have been just over 400 proxy vote applications which is also slightly higher than normal. Of all rejected absent vote (AV) applications, a high number are being rejected due to lack of Digital Registration Number (DRN). SL estimates this to be about 80% of all AV rejections. SL finished by asking all parties to raise awareness of DRN's as best they could. GF when voters are applying for DRN's, it must be using the same email they registered with. There is a concern for those who no longer have access to their old email addresses. Can this process be amended to allow those who this affects to apply for their DRN's. SL will speak to the EONI team and will get back to GF. 4.3.1 Update from Royal Mail. CC informed all that the 12 May is the final drop off date for campaign material. CM asked if campaign material must be addressed? CC confirmed that all campaign material had to be addressed and Royal Mail have asked candidates to use street sort. There will be 11 drop off points, one for each for council area and these listed in on the Royal Mail's candidate mail guide which can be accessed on the EONI website 5. Promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. 5.1. The panel was invited to discuss accessibility at the election. GD raised the issue of access in Braniel Primary School which is used as a polling place. Whilst there is a car park, staff have refused cars access which affects voters with mobility issues. SL confirmed she will discuss this issue with the school. SL advised EONI have new duties in terms of accessibility. Last year a telephone service for visually impaired voters started, and they will be providing this again. This service will read out the list of candidates as they appear on the Ballot paper. There was some very good feedback from those few who used it last year. EONI will raise awareness for this best they can but ask parties to promote it as well. Hearing loops will be available in Polling Stations on request. The request form for this will be on EONI's website. EONI continues to provide polling stations with the usual equipment for accessibility. On the back of the Commission's guidance EONI are providing pencil grips, magnifying glasses and handheld lights to voters. Additional training for Polling staff will be given so they can talk about accessibility equipment with voters. EONI are setting up a dedicated page on their website regarding accessibility provisions. The Commission alongside the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service and EONI have produced joint guidance on how candidates can stay safe whilst campaigning. This is on the back of growing incidents of harassment and intimidation, especially during the Northern Ireland Assembly Election in 2022. This guidance will be published this week and the Commission encourages parties to look at and share it. PSNI are very keen to hear all reports of any potential offences. KR raised a number of initiatives taken by the Commission. The Commission is reaching out to the race equality subgroups as convened by the executive office which comprises a range of groups representing the needs of minority ethnic groups. KR asks all to please stay in touch with EC about any concerns. The Commission has been in contact with the Equality Commission who are interested in seeing what data we have regarding equality monitoring of political representation in Northern Ireland. KR asks all to please stay in touch with EC about any concerns. The Commission has been in contact with the Equality Commission who are interested in seeing what data we have regarding equality monitoring of political representation in Northern Ireland. We plan to reach out to the Alzheimer's society who run a four nations peer support group to see how we can work in partnership to support to their users. 6. dates for political parties. 6.1. RM advised the deadline for parties with

income and expenditure of £250,000 or less to submit statement of accounts for year ending 31 December 2022 is 30 April 2023. Accounting units with income or expenditure over £25,000 (but less than £250,000) must also submit their accounts by 30 April 2023 The deadline for Quarter 1 Donation and Loan reports for the period 1Jan – 31 March 2023 is 30 April 2023. Reminders will be sent to parties. 7. Upcoming Meeting dates for 2023 7.1. Proposed dates are 13 June and 3 October. 8. Any other business. 8.1. CM thanked the panel for facilitating Jack Molly's attendance at the last NIAPP (25.01.2023). Jack was on work experience and the NIAPP was excellent insight to the electoral process for him. KR reiterated Jack's welcome and wanted it on record that such instances would be more than welcome from all parties to engage with young party activists. The panel acknowledged the contribution of Virginia McVea to the electoral process in Northern Ireland. CH agreed to pass on the panels thanks and best wishes for the future.

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First published: 11 May 2023 Last updated: 16 May 2023 Meeting Overview Date: 25 January 2023 Time: 9:30am Date of next scheduled meeting: Tuesday 28 March 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) Sarah Doherty, Senior Comms Officer (SD) James Ringland, Advice and Information Advisor (JR) The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland Virginia McVea, Chief Electoral Officer (VM) Political Parties Alliance- Alliance Party of Northern Ireland – Sharon Lowry (SL) and Peter McCully (PM) Democratic Unionist Party D.U.P. – George Dorrian (GD) SDLP (Social Democratic & Labour Party) – Catherine Matthews (CM) and Jack Molly (JM) Sinn Féin – Gary Fleming (GF) Ulster Unionist Party – Tim Lemon (TM) Apologies N/A Welcome, apologies and introductions KR welcomed attendees and introduced Sarah Doherty and James Ringland as two new Electoral Commission employees. Minutes from NIAPP meeting Tuesday 7 June 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. Planning for 2023 Local Council Elections VM provided an update from EONI. The electoral register currently has 1.37m electors registered. After the canvass there were 113000 non-responders. The Electoral Office will utilise data matching to confirm that these elector's details are accurate, non-responders who cannot be data matched will not be removed before the local elections. EONI are currently working on the polling station scheme for the local elections. Approximately 400 out of the usual 600+ stations have responded to their digital request for availability. The plan is for no polling station to serve more than one council area, however some may serve more than one DEA. Polling station scheme is set to published on 22 February. Training for senior count staff was held over the Christmas period. This included STV count and overnight verification training. Every template of count material will be available for staff online from next week. EONI election staff have been contacted about availability for working with the potential of 5000 staff of the list of over 8000 to be used. The 3 April Register will be used for the local elections with any changes needed to be made for a 3 May update. Digital Registration Numbers remain a big challenge and EONI are always open to suggestions from the parties about how to improve the process. GF reiterated concern for issues around DRN and that some electors were only made aware of the need for a DRN when they received their poll card. By this time, it was already too late for some to apply for an absent vote. Sinn Féin have been in contact with VM and EONI about potential solutions. SD responded on the upcoming DRN communications campaign which will run alongside the Commission's "Got 5?" voter registration campaign in the run up to the local elections. The campaign will run from 27 March to 24 April and will be backloaded with a higher spend in the week before the registration deadline when people are more aware of the elections happening and any issues they may have that would prevent them voting in person. The campaign will be running across print media as well as digital media. VM is sending figures regularly to the NIO so it is aware of challenges arising from DRN's. Update from the Electoral Commission RM advised that the Commission published its spending and donation guidance for candidates on 24 January 2023. Changes to the guidance following implementation of Elections Act provisions were highlighted. Parties were asked to share the guidance

with their candidates and agents. In advance of publication of notice of election (11 April), the Electoral Commission will run seminars for candidates and agents in conjunction with the Electoral Office and Royal Mail. Those will provide an overview of rules on candidate spending, nominations, count arrangements and accessing the candidate's free post entitlement. The Commission will invite the PSNI to the seminars to provide a briefing on safe campaigning. The Commission would be in contact shortly with arrangements. SD provided an update on the Electoral Commission's public awareness activity The "Got 5?" registration awareness campaign, will run across TV, digital, radio, and outdoor display for 5 weeks in the lead up to the local elections, commencing on 20 March and finishing on 28 April, the registration deadline. The Commission will be implementing a new stakeholder engagement plan over the next few months which is focused on revitalising existing partnerships and creating new ones in areas which are typically under-registered (young people, disabled people, private renters/recent movers, students and Black and minority ethnic voters). This will mean that the Commission can build on the focused pre-election information dissemination and begin creating year-round partnership working. Welcome to Your Vote Week will be running in Northern Ireland next week, with the theme "Our Democracy". 18 schools have signed up from across Northern Ireland to deliver presentations and lessons on the week and have been provided with a pack of resources including posters, social media assets and an assembly presentation. The Commission's youth voice partner, NI Youth Forum will also be marking the week by creating content including a vlog. Press releases from the Commission will be released promoting the week. The Commission hopes to be able to grow the week as the years continue and that increased popularity will give it more of a platform in wider education discussions. GD and GF requested a list of the schools which are signed up and the specific resources. Contingency planning for an Assembly election JM provided an update on the Commission's contingency planning. In the Autumn of last year, the Commission wrote to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on two occasions to highlight the challenges in planning for an election across multiple dates and continue to encourage the Government to provide clarity on arrangements for an election. Such clarity is important not only for the Chief Electoral Officer to prepare for the poll, but for voters and campaigners to be ready to participate – and for the Commission to be able to deliver its statutory duty to raise awareness of the poll and help voters understand what they need to do to take part. Despite these challenges both the Electoral Office and Electoral Commission are experienced in delivering well-run electoral events and maintain up to date contingency plans to enable them to respond quickly to any unscheduled polls. Elections Act changes RM advised members of several changes arising from the Elections Act. Members were advised of changes arising from the Elections Act including;

- Technical changes to notional spending and local non-party campaigning rules which parties were advised of in November last year.
- Controlled expenditure of third parties which means third parties based outside of the UK are now limited to spending £700 on campaigning during a regulated period.
- Third parties are not eligible to register as political parties and vice versa.
- The consultation on the draft Code of Practice on the laws relating to non-party campaigning closed last week and the Commission would consider the responses before producing a final draft, planned for the summer.
- New parties would be required to declare assets or liabilities over £500 when applying to register. Members were invited to contact the Commission for further information on any of the changes. SL asked how the spending limit for third party campaigners had changed? RM clarified

that at the local elections non-party campaigners can spend up to £50 plus a half a pence per elector in the DEA. The candidate's agent must authorise any additional spending and any spending authorised by the agent must be included in the candidate's spending return and there were forms that needed to be completed by the agent and party and submitted with the candidate's return. RM invited members to speak to the Commission directly to discuss what campaigns they were running and how the third-party campaign rules might apply. provisions. JM discussed how the provisions in the Elections Act have changed the level of assistance available to those with disabilities in a polling station. Disabled voters can now choose anyone who is over 18 to accompany and assist them when voting. The Elections Act also introduces a duty on the Commission to provide guidance for the Chief Electoral Officer on the requirement to provide reasonable equipment which enables disabled voters to vote independently and in secret. This guidance highlights barriers to voting and is designed to support the Chief Electoral Officer in making informed decisions on what can be done to help make voting accessible for all. The Commission have consulted extensively on the guidance with the statutory phase of the consultation closing on 16 January with the final guidance available in time to inform the support available for voters at the May 2023 elections. VM highlighted that EONI used a call line which would recite the candidate's names for sight impaired people during the last election yet found that the number of people using it was low. With an increased number of candidates (850 approximately) for the upcoming local elections it is still possible to use a call line but the user will need to input the DEA on the call line to hear the relevant candidates. Hearing loops are being considered where resources will allow. EONI are open to the idea of Elector's suggesting the polling stations where hearing loops should be used, so that EONI can locate them at Polling Stations where they are needed. KR raised the importance of equality and diversity and inclusion across the Commission's work and suggested a standing agenda item on this in future. Work to replace the Commission's online political finance system RM advised that the Commission has now halted work developing a bespoke online political finance system. The system would not achieve its aims in its current form, and it is more cost effective to stop the project and take a new approach. Instead the Commission would purchase and customise an off-the-shelf software product. The work done to date, both in terms of input from parties, would be used to procure and customise a new software product. Update from the Electoral Commission CH explained that every few years the Electoral Commission conducts a study into the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers. This involves drawing a sample of addresses across Northern Ireland and conducting face-to-face interviews with households. Information gathered from interviews is compared against the Electoral Register to allow the Commission to estimate the proportion of entries on the register which are correctly recorded (accuracy) and the proportion of eligible adults who are correctly registered (completeness). Ipsos MORI will be conducting interviews with households across Northern Ireland from January to March 2023, with the findings published in the Autumn. This study will be the Commission's first assessment of the register since the 2021 canvass. 2023 Financial Reporting dates for political parties RM advised the parties of the following date: Donation and loan reports for the period 1 October – 31 December 2022 had to be submitted by 30 January 2023. Upcoming meetings dates for 2023 The next NIAPP meeting is has been suggested for 28 March and JR will send correspondence to Panel members regarding this. Any other business CM raised concerns regarding the behaviour of polling agents, suggesting polling staff requiring more training to challenge behaviours. VM informed the panel that online training was

available for all election staff and that stations are frequented by polling station inspectors who keep staff and agents informed of what is permitted. VM will write to parties regarding this and is happy to meet with the SDLP to discuss. SD made the panel aware that after 20 years of APP's, the minutes from previous panel meetings are now required to be passed to The National Archives, and would be added annually. No issues were raised by attendees. VM, highlighted that HalfFare SmartPass and biometric residence permits will be accepted forms of ID at the local elections in May. Disabled person's blue badges cannot be used as there no date of birth on them. CH informed the panel that VM is now leaving her position as Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and on behalf of the Electoral Commission thanked her for her contribution to panel meetings and wished her well for the future.