

Focus on Northern Ireland You are in the Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22 section Home Our plans and priorities Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22 On this page Summary Canvass 2021 Northern Ireland Assembly election 2022 Looking ahead First published: 1 August 2022 Last updated: 1 August 2022 Summary Summary Our work in Northern Ireland over the last year has largely been dominated by the 2021 electoral registration canvass and preparations for the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly election. Alongside this, we continued to work closely with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, political parties and the electoral community across Northern Ireland. Despite our team in Northern Ireland continuing to work from home in response to the Covid-19 pandemic we were still able to provide advice and support to our stakeholders on issues relating to electoral law, financial reporting, campaigning and voter registration. The Northern Ireland Assembly Political Parties Panel continued to meet and we began to develop new resources specific to Northern in support of our learning and partnership strategies. Canvass 2021 Originally scheduled for 2020, but delayed by a year as a result of the pandemic, the canvass took place between July and November 2021. This was the first canvass to take place in Northern Ireland since the introduction of online electoral registration in 2018. We supported the canvass through a multimedia voter registration campaign, which reminded everyone that the register was being updated and that they should not ignore the canvass - even if they had been registered before. Over 1.3 million people registered to vote during the canvass, representing 93% of the eligible electorate. In March we published our report on the canvass, which highlighted that the register was at its highest ever level. However, we also found that the canvass in its current format is not an efficient tool for helping to maintain an accurate and complete electoral register. As such, we are now calling on the Government to reform the canvass and wider electoral registration process in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Assembly election 2022 The Assembly elections on 5 May 2022 were the first elections to take place in Northern Ireland since the start of the pandemic. We provided advice and guidance to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland on measures that could be put in place to protect voters, based on the experience of elections across Great Britain in 2021. As with all elections, we provided advice and guidance services to all of our stakeholders including candidates, agents, parties, campaigners and voters. New rules that extended imprint rules on printed campaign material came into effect for the first time at these elections. We updated and shared our guidance materials to promote compliance with these new rules. In partnership with the EONI and Royal Mail, we ran pre-election seminars for candidates and agents, including our first virtual seminar and our first face-to-face seminar since 2019. We also ran a new seminar specifically for political parties to help explain the reporting rules in place for them at this election. Our public awareness campaign began in March 2022 with a particular focus on reaching voters who had not responded to the canvass or whose details had changed since then. We also ran a digital campaign encouraging anyone who needed an absent vote to check that they had the required digital registration number when making their application. We also published our first suite of educational resources to promote political literacy in Northern Ireland. Looking ahead Our report on the Northern Ireland Assembly election will be published in autumn 2022. Preparations will also begin for the elections to the 11 councils across Northern Ireland in May 2023. We will continue to support parties and campaigners to comply with the law, while ensuring that political finance is transparent. We will also continue to provide support and guidance to the Chief Electoral Officer and EONI to

ensure the delivery of a well-run electoral service in Northern Ireland. We will build on our stakeholder engagement activity in Northern Ireland. Building on the work we have done so far to provide educational resources we will seek to establish new partners to promote and improve political literacy across communities less likely to be engaged in the democratic process. The implementation of the Elections Act, which received Royal Assent on 28 April 2022, will also have an impact on our work in Northern Ireland. Working closely with the NIO, the Chief Electoral Officer and other stakeholders we will seek to ensure that development and delivery of the changes made to the electoral process in Northern Ireland through the Act. This will include the implementation of relevant secondary legislation for Northern Ireland, updating and producing new guidance and promoting awareness of these changes to the electoral community in Northern Ireland. Navigation Previous Next Scotland (devolved) annual report Looking ahead to 2022/23