

Northern Ireland Assembly's Parties Panel: 1 October 2019 | Electoral Commission Search

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Ireland canvass was in 2013, with the next one scheduled for 2020. The Commission has renewed calls for modernisation of the electoral registration system in Northern Ireland, recommending that public data could be better used to help keep the electoral register accurate and complete throughout the year. Modernising electoral registration feasibility studies Craig updated the panel on the feasibility studies the Commission published in July. The studies explored how the system could be modernised further to make it easier for people to register to vote and for Electoral Registration Officers to maintain accurate and complete electoral registers. Craig said that our studies provided an evidence base for any future policy. Anna added that compared to NI, it is a more complex picture in GB with 381 separate registers. Gary said that they have serious concerns about the register but they support automatic registration of attainers when they get their national insurance number. Lee made the point of being careful with data and that people have the right not to participate. Anna acknowledged the point but added that people should be registered even if they choose not to vote. Craig mentioned the debate about automatic or automated registration. Update from Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland The CEO welcomed Cahir to his new role and thanked the Commission for its accuracy and completeness report. There are now 1.3m people on the register which is one of the highest levels it's been at. From 1 January to 1 October 2019 there were 21,849 paper applications and 117,089 online applications. The mid-year estimate for attainers is at 50%. EONI is looking at different data options to analyse registration levels and target outreach. Working with property services' data, EONI should be able to identify streets with the lowest levels of registration. The CEO would welcome opportunities to work with the Commission and parties on more raising more targeted public awareness. The CEO is also considering how to contact attainers and an option is to use a C2K network which would allow contact with ever pupil on the network. Working with CCEA the EONI is planning to provide lesson plan materials for 11-14, 14-16 and 16+ to support electoral registration. The CEO is working with Start 360 to reach those not in education or training. EONI is working with RQIA to improve engagement with care home residents and to develop care home standards that would support this. There was a discussion about the difficulties of getting access to care home residents and how this needs to be balanced with the pressures and priorities of care homes and families. This led to a discussion around access to apartment blocks and their residents' turnout rate. Anna asked if more could be done to improve and modernise access to electoral ID for attainers and the elderly. The CEO said that a legislative change is needed but highlighted some options that could modernise the process. This included using photos on the C2K network for young people. However GDPR legislation would have to be carefully considered alongside this. These are longer term projects and might need pilots to test if they work in practice. The CEO suggested working with the Commission given its experience of the ID pilots in Great Britain The polling station review is due to be published on or before 1 December. The CEO will confirm with parties when it will be published. The CEO will arrange a meeting with the panel to discuss how data sources could be more effectively used to manage the electoral register. Electoral Commission updates – recent Commission publications Codes of Practice on election spending Roisin updated panel members on the Codes of Practice. In July we submitted two codes of practice on election spending to the Minister for Constitution. One on candidate and one on party spending. The Minister now needs to decide whether to make any amendments to the codes before laying them before parliament to approve. The draft codes and our report on the responses to the consultation process were circulated to members in July and

are available on our website. The codes, if enacted will apply to elections to Westminster, Northern Ireland Assembly and Councils in Northern Ireland. These codes would also apply at local government elections in Northern Ireland where the regulated period was combined with the regulated period for another election. If you have any questions about the codes, please contact Roisin. Political finance – statutory return deadlines. Parties were reminded of the following deadlines: Donation and loan returns for 1 July 2019 – 30 September 2019 (Q3 2019) must be submitted by 30 October 2019. Donation and loan returns for 1 October 2019 – 31 December 2019 (Q4 2019) must be submitted by 30 January 2020. Lee raised concerns about advice received regarding the reporting of loans. Roisin said that we can meet to discuss any individual concerns. AOB – none raised. Proposed 2020 meeting dates: Tuesday 28 January, Tuesday 24 March, Tuesday 9 June, Tuesday 6 October.