



The  
Electoral  
Commission

## UK Parliamentary general election – Northern Ireland

# Guidance for candidates and agents

## Part 4 of 6 – The campaign

April 2017

This document applies to the 8 June 2017 UK Parliamentary general election in Northern Ireland. Further resources and forms are available from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI): [www.eoni.org.uk/elections/Information-for-candidates-and-agents](http://www.eoni.org.uk/elections/Information-for-candidates-and-agents)

Guidance and resources for other elections in the UK can be accessed from the Commission's website at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents).

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# The campaign

This section of the document contains our guidance on campaigning at the 8 June 2017 UK Parliamentary general election in Northern Ireland.

The EONI and the Commission are here to help if you have any questions. See our [Overview document](#) for contact details.

In this document, we use 'you' to refer to the candidate. We use 'must' when we refer to a specific requirement. We use 'should' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal or regulatory requirements.

We have included relevant deadlines throughout this document, but you can also find a separate [election timetable](#) setting out all the key dates on the EONI website.

## Campaigning dos and don'ts

### When can you start campaigning?

1.1 You can start campaigning at any time. You do not have to wait until you are validly nominated to declare that you will run for election, ask people to support you or publish campaign material.

1.2 Election spending limits apply ahead of a UK Parliamentary election. For more information on election spending, please see [Part 3 - Spending and donations](#).

### When does a person officially become a candidate?

1.3 The earliest you can officially become a candidate is on the date the UK Parliament is dissolved, i.e. on the 25<sup>th</sup> working day before the poll (3 May 2017).

1.4 You will officially become a candidate on this day if on or before this date you have already declared yourself a candidate at the election (or another person has declared that you are a candidate).

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1.5 If after this date you or others declare that you will be a candidate at the election, you will become a candidate on the date such a declaration is made, or on the date that you submit your nomination papers, whichever is the earlier.

1.6 Once you have officially become a candidate, you are entitled to a copy of the register of electors. You are also entitled to a copy of the absent voters list.

## During the campaign, you may...

- Encourage people who are not on the electoral register to apply for registration. The deadline for registering to vote in time for the election is 12 working days before the poll (22 May 2017). You can find out more about who can register at [www.eoni.org.uk/Register-To-Vote/Registration-FAQs](http://www.eoni.org.uk/Register-To-Vote/Registration-FAQs).
- Help voters with information about postal and proxy voting – you can find information at [www.eoni.org.uk/Vote/Voting-by-post-or-proxy](http://www.eoni.org.uk/Vote/Voting-by-post-or-proxy). The deadline for applying for a postal or a proxy vote for the election is 5pm on the 14th working day before the poll (5pm on 18 May 2017). After this date a person can only apply to vote by post or proxy for the election on the grounds of unforeseen circumstances relating to health or if they are appointed to work at the election either by the DRO or as a constable. In this case they may apply up to 5pm on 31 May 2017.

## During the campaign, you should...

- Avoid situations where the honesty or integrity of your supporters could be questioned.
- Make sure your supporters are courteous when dealing with other candidates and their supporters.
- Be aware of the deadlines for appointing an election agent, and agents to attend postal vote issue and opening sessions, polling stations and the count. Deadlines are set out in our guidance documents [Part 2a – Standing as an independent candidate](#) and [Part 2b – Standing as a party candidate](#)

- Check that your systems for recording spending and donations are working. For more information on donations and election spending see [Part 3 - Spending and donations](#).

### During the campaign, you must not...

- Knowingly make a false statement about the personal character of another candidate.
- Pay canvassers. Canvassing means trying to persuade an elector to vote for or against a particular candidate or party.

1.7 More information on election offences and how to report these can be found paragraphs **1.38** to **1.58**).

1.8 If either you or your agent have made a mistake and have acted in contravention of the rules, you can apply for relief from the consequences of having made a mistake. See paragraph **1.59** for more information.

### Use of the electoral register

1.9 Once you officially become a candidate as explained in paragraphs **1.3** to **1.5**, you are entitled to receive a free copy of the full electoral register. You are also entitled to the lists of people voting by post or proxy ('the absent voters' lists').

1.10 The version you will receive will be the current one at the time of your application. You can also request the list of electors who registered close to the registration deadline when it is published five working days before the poll.

1.11 The full electoral register contains people's personal data and so their use is very carefully controlled.

1.12 You can use the register for the constituency you are standing in to:

- complete your nomination form
- help you campaign

1.13 You can use the whole of the register to check that any donations you receive are permissible.

Registered political parties are entitled to receive a copy of the full electoral register at any time.

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1.14 You must not release any details from, **or give a copy of**, the full register to any person other than for the purposes set out above.

1.15 If you have supplied a copy of the register or absent voters' lists to campaign workers, they must also comply with the requirements above.

Any person found breaching the restrictions on use of the electoral register could face a fine of up to £5,000.

## Applying for a copy of the electoral register and absent voters' lists

1.16 To assist you with applying for a copy of the electoral register and absent voters' lists the DRO will provide a form which may be used to request these . A copy of this form can be downloaded from the [EONI website](#).

1.17 The register and absent voters' lists will be available for collection from Area Electoral Offices. EONI's policy is that they must be collected in person as they contain sensitive personal data.

1.18 The register will be supplied in electronic format (a comma separated values (CSV) file) unless you specifically request a paper copy. CSV files can be read using a number of applications including Microsoft Excel, Access and Word, and may be used to create mailing labels or merged letters. Instructions on how to create labels from a CSV file are available on the [EONI website](#).

1.19 In the event that you do not complete the nomination process the Chief Electoral Officer will ask you to return the register / absent voters' list.

## Freepost

1.20 If you are shown as standing nominated in the statement of persons nominated you will be entitled to free postage on an election address to electors in the constituency. The postal communication must only contain matters relating to the election.

1.21 Before the publication of the statement of persons nominated, if you declare yourself to be a candidate you are entitled to exercise this right, but only if you give such security as is required by Royal Mail for the payment of postage in case you are not shown on the statement as standing nominated.

1.22 You may have postage paid on either:

- one unaddressed election communication of up to 60 grams to every postal address, or
- one election communication of up to 60 grams addressed to each elector

1.23 If you are considering exercising this right, you should contact Royal Mail to make arrangements. Royal Mail's terms and conditions must be complied with.

1.24 We strongly advise that you consult Royal Mail's guidance on candidate mailings at [www.royalmail.com/candidatemail](http://www.royalmail.com/candidatemail).

## Campaign publicity dos and don'ts

1.25 You must:

- Use imprints on all your printed campaign material and any electronic campaign material that is designed to be printed off locally. See paragraph **1.29** below for more information.
- Comply with planning rules relating to advertising hoardings and large banners – you should ask the Planning Office at your local council for advice.
- Make sure that outdoor posters are removed promptly after the election – you must do this within two weeks of the close of the poll.

1.26 You should:

- Include an imprint on all non-printed campaign material, including websites.
- Consider how to make your campaign accessible to people who are visually impaired, have learning difficulties or low literacy skills, or whose first language isn't English. You may want to make contact with disability groups in your local area for advice.

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1.27 You must not:

- Produce material that looks like the poll cards sent to voters by the Chief Electoral Officer.
- Pay people to display your adverts (unless they display adverts as part of their normal business).

## Using imprints

### What is an imprint?

1.28 An imprint should be added to all campaign material and, in the case of printed material, must be added by law, to show who is responsible for its production. It helps to ensure that the campaign is transparent.

### What do you need to include?

1.29 On printed material, such as leaflets and posters, you must include the name and address of:

- the printer
- the publisher

1.30 You can use either home or office addresses.

### Example of an imprint

1.31 A standard imprint for candidates should look like this:

Printed by [printer's name and address].

Published by [e.g. agent's name] of [e.g. agent's address].

### Where do you put the imprint?

1.32 If your material is single-sided – such as a window poster – you must put the imprint on the face of the document. If it is multi-sided, you must put it on the first or last page.

### Social media

1.33 You should display your full imprint details prominently on your profile. You can include a shortened link to your imprint in your tweet or post. If it is impractical to place a full imprint on

to an image, you should include the text of a link, or a hyperlinked logo or emblem that leads to your full imprint.

1.34 We also suggest that if you use online discussion forums you make your identity as a candidate clear where possible.

### **Websites and other electronic material**

1.35 You should also put an imprint on electronic material, such as websites and emails. The imprint should include the name and address of the promoter and the organisation on whose behalf it has been produced.

## **Polling day dos and don'ts**

1.36 You should:

- Make sure that any polling agents working for you follow any guidance issued by the Chief Electoral Officer or DRO.
- Make sure that any agents who are attending polling stations, postal vote issue and opening sessions or the count understand the rules about the secrecy of the ballot. For more information, see the secrecy requirements for the poll, postal voting and the count on [the EONI website](#).
- Comply with requests by polling station staff or the DRO about campaigning near polling stations.

1.37 You must not:

- Campaign near polling stations in a way that could be seen by voters as aggressive or intimidating (for example, large groups of supporters carrying banners, or vehicles with loudspeakers or heavily branded with campaign material). All political parties have agreed to the Code of Conduct for Canvassers in the vicinity of the polling station. Copies of the code are available from the [EONI website](#). You should ensure that a copy of the code is provided to all of your canvassers.
- Breach the requirements on secrecy of the ballot. This is an essential part of any modern democracy and breaches are taken seriously.

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In particular, if you (or your agents) are attending postal vote opening sessions, you must not seek to identify and publicise how votes have been marked on individual ballot papers.

- Before the close of poll, publish exit polls or any other data based on information given by people about how they voted after they have cast their vote, including a postal vote.

## List of offences

1.38 You should be aware of a number of electoral and non-electoral offences, and should seek your own legal advice where necessary.

### Bribery

1.39 The offence of bribery includes where someone directly or indirectly gives any money or procures any office to or for any voter, in order to induce any voter to vote or not vote.

### Treating

1.40 A person is guilty of treating if either before, during or after an election they directly or indirectly give or provide any food, drink, entertainment or provision to corruptly influence any voter to vote or refrain from voting. Treating requires a corrupt intent - it does not apply to ordinary hospitality.

### Undue influence

1.41 A person is guilty of undue influence if they directly or indirectly make use of or threaten to make use of force, violence or restraint, or inflict or threaten to inflict injury, damage, harm or loss upon or against any person in order to induce or compel that person to vote or refrain from voting.

1.42 A person may also be guilty of undue influence if they impede or prevent any voter from freely exercising their right to vote – even where the attempt is unsuccessful.

1.43 Undue influence doesn't exclusively relate to physical access to the polling station. For example, a leaflet that

Neither the Commission nor the EONI regulate any of these offences.

For details of how to report any allegations of electoral malpractice see paragraph **1.55**.

threatens to make use of force in order to induce a voter to vote in a particular way could also be undue influence.

## Personation

1.44 The offence of personation includes where an individual votes as someone else either by post or in person at a polling station, as an elector or as a proxy. This offence applies if the person that is being personated is living, dead or fictitious. Aiding, abetting, counselling or procuring the offence of personation is also an offence.

## False statements

### About a candidate's personal character or conduct

1.45 It is an offence to make or publish a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of a candidate in order to affect the return of a candidate at an election.

1.46 False statements that are not about a candidate's personal character or conduct are not illegal under electoral law, but could be considered as libel or slander.

1.47 It is also an illegal practice to make a false statement of a candidate's withdrawal in order to promote or procure the election of another candidate.

### In nomination papers

1.48 It is an offence to provide a false statement on a nomination paper, which you know to be false. For example, if you know you are disqualified from election you must not sign the consent to nomination.

## False registration information and false postal/proxy voting information

1.49 It is an offence to supply false information on a registration, postal vote or proxy vote application form. False information includes a false signature.

## False application to vote by post or by proxy

1.50 A person is guilty of an offence if they apply to vote by post or proxy to gain a vote to which they are not entitled or to deprive someone else of their vote.

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## Multiple voting and proxy voting offences

1.51 There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting in person or by post as an elector or proxy knowing that you are subject to a legal incapacity to vote and inducing or procuring another to commit the offence.

## Breaches of the secrecy of the ballot

1.52 Everyone involved in the election process or attending certain proceedings must maintain the secrecy of the ballot. The DRO will give a copy of the official secrecy requirements to everyone who attends the opening of postal votes or the counting of ballot papers and to polling agents. It will also be published on the EONI website [www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Information-for-candidates-and-agents](http://www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Information-for-candidates-and-agents).

## Campaign publicity material

1.53 Certain offences relate specifically to election campaign publicity material. Printed election campaign publicity material must contain an imprint, not resemble a poll card and not contain a false statement of fact as to the personal character or conduct of a candidate.

## Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987

1.54 Under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987, it is an offence to publish or distribute written material which is threatening, abusive or insulting with the intention of stirring up hatred or arousing fear, or which is likely to do so. 'Fear' and 'hatred' under the Order mean fear or hatred of a group of persons in Northern Ireland defined by reference to religious belief, colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origin.

Neither the Commission nor the EONI regulate the content of campaign material and are not able to comment on the legality of any particular electoral material beyond what is covered in this guidance.

## Reporting allegations of electoral fraud

1.55 If you are concerned that electoral fraud may have been committed, you should first speak to the DRO for your constituency or contact the Chief Electoral Officer.

1.56 They may be able to explain whether or not electoral fraud has been committed. They can also provide you with the details of the police contact at the PSNI so that you can report the allegation yourself.

1.57 If you have evidence that an electoral offence has been committed you should contact the PSNI **immediately**. You should be prepared to give them a statement and substantiate your allegation.

1.58 Please note that if your allegation relates to party, election or registered campaigner finance matters, such as spending or donations, then you should follow the advice given at the following link: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement/making-allegations](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement/making-allegations).

## What if you have made a mistake?

1.59 If either you or your agent has mistakenly acted in contravention of the election rules, you can apply for relief from the penalties for any offence.

1.60 You should always seek legal advice if considering applying for relief.

1.61 For more information, contact:

The Clerk of the Crown  
Royal Courts of Justice  
Chichester Street  
Belfast  
BT1 3JF

Tel: 030 0200 7812

Email: [adminoffice@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:adminoffice@courtsni.gov.uk)