

The Transparency of Donations and Loans etc. (Northern Ireland Political Parties) Order 2018

Overview

This briefing provides the Electoral Commission's view on the Transparency of Donations and Loans etc. (Northern Ireland Political Parties) Order 2018. The Order is scheduled for debate in the House of Lords on Tuesday 27 February.

The Commission supports this Order. Transparency is an essential component of increasing public confidence in the democratic process. Information on how political parties, candidates and other campaigners raise and spend money should be open to timely public scrutiny. Once in force, this Order will allow us to start publishing regular information about donations and loans to political parties and other regulated entities in Northern Ireland for the first time.

What the Order will allow us to do

Subject to coming into force, the Order will allow us to publish information about donations and loans reported by Northern Ireland political parties and other regulated entities from 1 July 2017 onwards as part of our regular publication cycle.

If this Order is not made then the Commission will continue to be prohibited from publishing any information relating to political donations in Northern Ireland, which would be disappointing for voters and others who want transparency.

We have published an update on our website and a factsheet to inform political parties and other regulated recipients of donations or loans about the proposed changes. It is available at: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/guidance-for-political-parties/reporting-donations-and-loans-northern-ireland>. We have also written to all MPs, MLAs and Northern Ireland parties to inform them about this guidance.

Our view on transparency from January 2014

This Order represents the first opportunity for us to begin publishing information about donations and loans to political parties and other regulated entities in Northern Ireland. We will continue to recommend that a further Order should be brought forward in the near future to provide for full transparency back to 2014, as anticipated by the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014.

The 2014 Act said that the names of donors and lenders from January 2014 may be made public at some point in the future. At that time we wrote to all of the political parties in Northern Ireland to advise them that they should make clear to their donors that any donations received from January 2014 may be made public.

We strongly urge the UK Government to bring forward a further Order at a later date that would enable us to publish donation and loan information for the period dating back to 1 January 2014. This would however require detailed separate consideration about how to ensure information from the period before 31 December 2013 was kept confidential as required by the law.

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