



The
Electoral
Commission

UK Parliamentary general election – Northern Ireland

Guidance for candidates and agents in Northern Ireland

Overview document

April 2017 (updated August 2022)

This document applies to a 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

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

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Purpose of our guidance for candidates and agents

1.1 Our guidance aims to provide practical advice for anyone who wants to stand as a candidate or be an agent at a UK Parliamentary general election in Northern Ireland. It covers the whole election process, including the main steps towards standing as a candidate, the campaign and election periods, the declaration of the result and election spending. It includes relevant factual material as well as a guide to sources of further information. Standing for election can be complicated, but we hope that our guidance will make it as straightforward as possible.

Data protection legislation applies to the processing of all personal data.

Please contact the [Information Commissioner's Office](#) for further information about how the legislation affects you.

How to use our guidance

1.2 Our guidance is made up of six parts, setting out the different stages candidates and agents need to go through when standing at a UK Parliamentary general election. All of the relevant guidance is available on our dedicated webpage for candidates and agents at a UK Parliamentary general election: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate/candidates-and-agents.

1.3 Further resources and forms are available from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) website at: www.eoni.org.uk/elections/Information-for-candidates-and-agents

1.4 The following parts make up our full guidance for a UK Parliamentary general election:

- [Part 1 – Can you stand for election?](#)
- [Part 2a – Standing as an independent candidate](#)
- [Part 2b – Standing as a party candidate](#)
- [Part 3 - Spending and donations](#)
- [Part 4 – The campaign](#)
- [Part 5 – Your right to attend key electoral events](#)
- [Part 6 – After the declaration of result](#)

1.5 Before starting the process of standing for election, potential candidates need to be confident that they meet all of the requirements to stand for election. You should therefore first read [Part 1](#) of our guidance, which covers qualifications and disqualifications.

1.6 Once satisfied that you can stand, you should read [Part 2a](#) (if you are an independent) or [Part 2b](#) (if you are a party candidate), which deal with the nominations process and guide you through which forms you need to submit and by when.

1.7 Candidates and agents at a UK Parliamentary general election must follow certain rules about how much they can spend, who they can accept donations from, and what they must report after the election. [Part 3](#) of our guidance explains these rules. There are also rules on spending and donations that political parties have to follow in the run-up to an election. Information on these can be found in our [guidance document for political parties](#).

1.8 [Part 4](#) covers what you need to bear in mind when campaigning, including rules on the publication and display of campaign literature.

1.9 Candidates and agents are also able to attend key electoral events. These are: the issue and opening of postal votes; the poll; and the count. Additionally, candidates can appoint representatives to attend these electoral events on their behalf. Details on your rights and what to expect at these events are provided in [Part 5](#).

1.10 Finally, there are a number of things candidates and agents will need to do once the result has been declared, including submitting their spending returns to the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland. This is covered in [Part 6](#).

1.11 To keep the guidance as relevant to the reader as possible, we have split most guidance parts into an 'Essential information' section, which all candidates and agents should read as it contains information that is relevant to all, and a 'Supplementary information' section, that will be relevant only to some. You will be directed to the 'Supplementary

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information’ section at relevant points throughout the ‘Essential information’ section.

Who does what at a UK Parliamentary general election in Northern Ireland

The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

1.12 The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is Virginia McVea. She is the Returning Officer for all elections in Northern Ireland and the Electoral Registration Officer for the whole of Northern Ireland.

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

1.13 The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) is the collective name for the staff who assist the Chief Electoral Officer in the delivery of her statutory duties. These staff are based in five Area Electoral Offices throughout Northern Ireland and at EONI Headquarters in Belfast.

The Electoral Commission’s role

1.14 The Electoral Commission is an independent statutory body established in November 2000 by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The Commission is headed by ten Commissioners, including a Chair, and reports directly to the UK Parliament through a committee chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

1.15 The Commission is responsible for overseeing a number of aspects of electoral law – the registration of political parties and third parties, the monitoring of significant donations to registered political parties, and the regulation of party spending on election campaigns. The Commission also has a role in promoting voter awareness and is required to report on the administration of every major election and, if requested, on any

There are two types of constituency: borough and county. There are 4 borough constituencies in Northern Ireland (all of the Belfast constituencies). The other 14 are county constituencies.

Campaign spending limits are different depending on whether you are standing in a borough or county constituency. This is covered in detail in [Part 3](#) of our guidance.

other electoral matter. The Commission also accredits observers to be present at election proceedings.

1.16 The Commission does not run elections but has responsibility for providing advice and assistance on electoral matters to all those involved in elections, including the Chief Electoral Officer, political parties and candidates.

1.17 Commission staff are here to help, so please get in touch if you have any questions. Contact details can be found below.

Contacting us

1.18 If you have any questions about the election, please contact [the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland](#).

1.19 If your question is about **spending or donations**, please contact the Electoral Commission's Northern Ireland office:

Tel: 0333 103 1928

Email: infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk