



Doncaster Council

Report

7th July 2020

**To the Chair and Members of the
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

CANVASS REFORM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update to Members on a number of key work streams being undertaken by the Electoral Services Team in relation to the Register of Electors and Annual Canvass.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Committee is asked to note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. Ensuring the Electoral Register is as up to date as possible and carrying out proactive electoral activity is key to public engagement to ensure residents are registered to enable them to vote when an election occurs.

BACKGROUND

5. Each year the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty to carry out a full annual review of the Electoral Register by contacting all residential addresses to establish if the information currently held on the Electoral Register is complete and accurate, before publishing a new revised Electoral Register on the 1st December each year. This is called the Annual Canvass
6. Last year the Government consulted on changes to the Annual Canvass which would become 'Canvass Reform'. The UK Government's Canvass Reform statutory instrument was debated in Parliament on 31st October

2019, and signed by the Minister for the Constitution on 4th November 2019. This means the reforms have formally become law in relation to the UK parliamentary register and the local government register in England.

7. The overall aim of canvass reform is to deliver a more efficient system by which Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) can maintain their electoral registers with no negative effect on citizens, or on the accuracy and completeness of the registers.

CANVASS REFORM

Objective

8. The intention is that the legislation governing the reformed annual canvass is less prescriptive and therefore more permissive than is currently the case.

The objectives of canvass reform are:

- to make the process simpler and clearer for citizens;
- for EROs to have greater discretion to run a tailored canvass which better suits their local area;
- to reduce the administrative burden on EROs and the financial burden on taxpayers;
- to safeguard the completeness and accuracy of the registers;
- to maintain the security and integrity of the registers;
- to include the capacity for innovation and improvement, with a model that is adaptable to future change.

The purpose of the reformed canvass of households will be the same as before, that is to find out:

- the names and addresses of persons who are entitled to be registered, but who are not already registered;
- those persons who are on the register, but who are no longer entitled to be registered at a particular address (normally because they have moved).

Summary

9. The new canvass will incorporate a 'data step' at the outset of the process. This will inform the ERO, based on the data available to them, which properties are likely to have an unchanged household composition, based on matching their data on the electoral register against national Government data and, where relevant, locally held data sources. Where the data the ERO holds on electoral register matches data in another reliable and accurate dataset, the ERO can have some confidence that the details they hold on their register remain accurate.

The ERO will then follow one of two routes for each property:

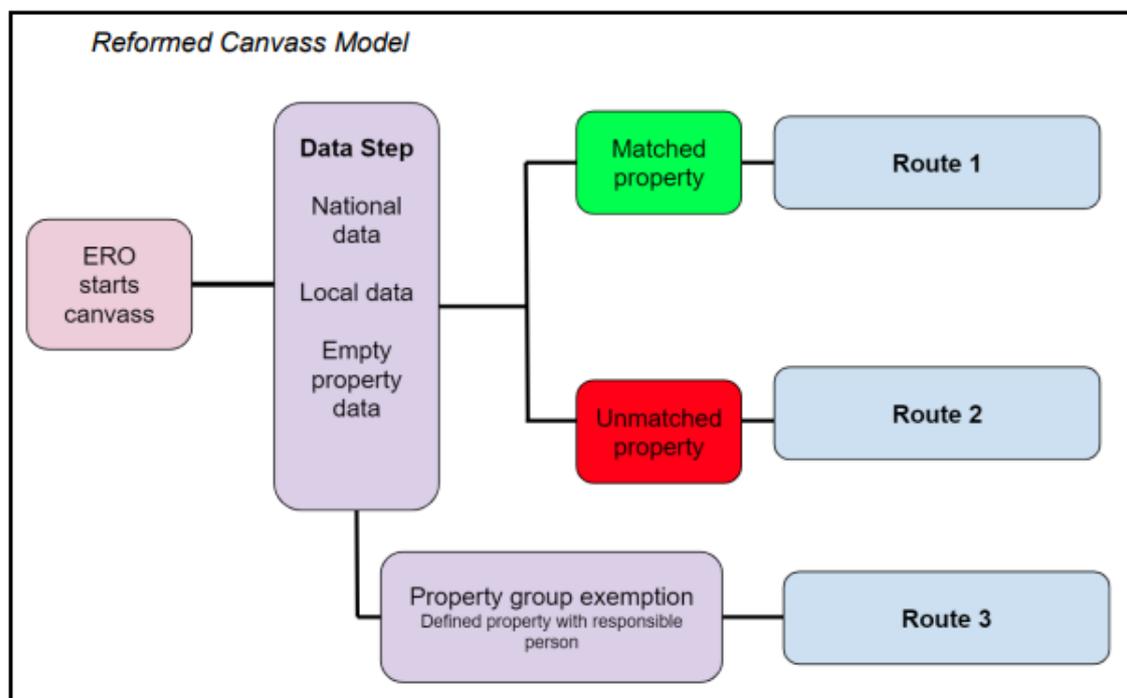
Route 1 - the matched properties route, this will be used for properties where the data indicates no change in household composition.

Route 2 - the unmatched properties route, this will be used for properties where data matching has highlighted that there may be a change to the information the ERO currently holds for the property.

This will allow the canvass process to be streamlined for those households that have not changed since the previous year. It will enable the ERO to target their resources to where responses and updates to the electoral

register are believed to be required. The draft legislation clearly states that electors in both Route 1 and Route 2 properties will be contacted during the canvass to give them the opportunity to inform the ERO of any changes as needed, this means if all details are correct when we contact them they need only respond if there are any changes.

A third route, **Route 3** - the defined properties route, will be available for property types which do not fit clearly within Routes 1 and 2. The characteristics of these property types mean that the ERO can more effectively and efficiently obtain information on residents using an alternative approach, where they are able to identify a 'responsible person' to provide the information in respect of all residents. Examples of these property types are care homes and student halls of residence. Should the ERO be unable to successfully obtain information about the property from a 'responsible person' they will need to canvass these property types using the Route 2 process. Properties eligible for Route 3 will be identified at the start of the canvass process, but will not be exempted from the data match step



EROs will have the discretion to match the data they hold on registered electors against local datasets, in addition to matching against the national dataset. These local datasets might include council tax records, customer service records, registrar's data and other datasets held by the local authority. Local datasets are available to the ERO under their existing powers, provided by Regulations 23, 35 and 35A of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001.

Statistics

10. The National data matching process must take place between 1st June to 31st August 2020 and Electoral Services carried out the National data match download on 4th June 2020. There are currently 140,159 properties and 229,721 registered electors in Doncaster and 99,329 (70.85%) properties and 197,455 (85.95%) electors successfully matched from the initial National data matching download for Route 1. As of 25th June, Electoral Services had managed to match a further 10,997 properties and 13,310

electors using the Councils local datasets and will continue to request data to establish further matches at Route 1. At present, we are already at 110,326 (78.71%) of matched properties at the start of the Canvass compared to last year's annual canvass final return of 117,000 (84.20%) properties. There is likely to be less emphasis on the traditional canvass visits to elector homes due to Covid-19 with other forms of contact e.g. telephone being emphasised.

As a result of the Covid-19 situation, the Cabinet Office have indicated that they intend to bring forward new legislation to extend the deadline for Electoral Registration Officers to delay their publication of the revised annual Electoral Register from 1st December to the 1st February 2021, allowing more time and flexibility for EROs to conduct these canvass activities. The current Doncaster plan is to complete by 31 December 2020 given the election activity due to take place in 2021.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11. Electoral Registration is a statutory function and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

12. All of the above are statutory duties and must be carried out in accordance with statutory requirements. This report is primarily for information only.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

13.

Outcomes	Implications
<p>Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	
<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	
<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	
<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	
<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	<p>The Council has statutory duties to support elections</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

14. Every effort is made to drive Individual Electoral Registration to ensure the Council meets the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards and complies with its legal duties.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SRF Date: 25/06/2020]

15. There are comprehensive statutory provisions covering the delivery of electoral registration activity.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH Date: 25/06/2020]

16. This work is funded from the Registration of Elections budget (NC003). The Cabinet Office also provides an annual funding contribution, this year's funding is £21,578 which is lower than past allocations but this is due to the expected savings from Canvass Reform.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

17. Human Resources implications have not been requested.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

18. Technology implications have not been requested.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

19. Health implications have not been requested.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: TB Date: 24/06/2020]

20. The Council has a duty to ensure all eligible electors can register to vote easily and are provided with several ways in order to do so. Registration information is also available in alternative languages, Braille and by video (YouTube) on the Council Web page.

CONSULTATION

21. N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

22. Electoral Commission - Delivering the Annual Canvass Guidance

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