



Doncaster Council

Report

24 November 2020

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

ANNUAL CANVASS – PROGRESS REPORT

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. It is a legal requirement for the Electoral Registration Officer (“ERO”) (Damian Allen) to carry out an annual canvass to ensure that the electoral register is up to date. As part of the prescribed process, an ERO must conduct household visits to properties that have been required to respond but have not done so.
6. With the introduction of the canvass reforms this year, only properties where all the electors cannot be matched against national and/or local data are required to respond. 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.

Annual Canvass

7. The annual canvass commenced in August 2020 and at that point there were 140,280 properties in Doncaster and an electorate of 229,670.
8. **Route 1** – These properties are unlikely to have changed as the information held on the electoral register matched against national Government data and, where relevant, locally held data sources. These households only need to respond if they want to make a change to the information we hold on the electoral register for their property. In total, there was 111,808 properties that successfully matched and sent a notification letter to make necessary changes if applicable.
9. **Route 2** – These properties are the un-matched ones that do require a response. We originally sent letters to 28,399 properties of which 7,959 responded. Therefore we sent a further reminder letter to the outstanding 20,440 and received to date a further 4,281 responses back which gives a total of 12,239(%) returned, leaving 16,154 still outstanding and requiring a response.
10. **Route 3** – These properties are defined as Care Homes and Homes of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) all of which are required to provide an update on their current occupants. The Electoral Services Team have been contacting these properties directly due to the high turn around in these types of properties to establish that everything is as up to date as possible, so far we have achieved a 91% response rate and are continuing to chase in order to hope to gain a 100% response.
11. Due to the introduction of the reforms, it is difficult to compare the response rate of this canvass with previous years, especially as 80% of properties have not been required to respond. However, in previous years when all properties had been required to respond, the number of outstanding responses after the household visits were conducted the number of outstanding properties was still much higher than our current outstanding figure so far.
12. Overall for Route 1 and 2 which includes those properties which do not require a response, as of 11th November 2020 we have a total response rate of 88.43% which is higher than previous years:

Year	Responses received at the end of Canvass	% of Responded properties at end of Canvass	Number of properties outstanding
2020*	124,047(currently)	88.43% (currently)	16,154 (currently)
2019**	117,000	84.20%	21,948
2018	119,859	86.42%	18,836
2017	118,017	85.70%	19,698
2016	112,364	82.87%	23,230

* 2020 is current pre-household visit figures

** 2019 Canvass ended early due to snap Parliamentary election on 12 December 2019

13. The Cabinet Office confirmed that even with the Covid-19 pandemic, EROs are still required to meet their statutory duties regarding the canvass, including conducting household visits where it is safe to do so, taking into account recent public health guidelines. If an ERO felt household visits could not take place, then they would need to be clear as to the reasons why.
14. To provide EROs with more time to carry out household visits during the pandemic, legislation has been passed to change the deadline for publishing the revised register from 1st December 2020 to 1st February 2021. However, with multiple Elections taking place in Doncaster next year, (Elected Mayor, all out local borough Cllrs, all out Town/Parish Cllrs, postponed Police & Crime Commissioner and Edenthorpe Neighbourhood Planning Referendum) we did not plan to go beyond the original date of 1st December 2020, so that the Electoral Services team can focus on what is expected to be a very complex election planning process.
15. On the 28th October 2020 the ERO along with advice from the Director of Public Health, and taking into consideration the current response rate to the annual canvass the ERO took the decision not to carry out household visits due to Doncaster at that time in Tier 3 Restrictions with Covid-19 cases on the rise in the area. The subsequent Prime-ministerial announcement on 31st October 2020 of a second national lockdown for four weeks from the 5th November meant that in any event household visits were not possible.
16. In line with Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission guidance, if household visits do not take place or have to be stopped, the ERO should look to carry out mitigating actions to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. Therefore the Electoral Services team are now carrying out the following mitigating actions:
 - Contact elector's via email, where an email address is held on the electoral register
 - Contact elector's via telephone, where a phone number is held on the electoral register
 - Data matching and data mining against Council records (Council Tax, Housing Benefit etc)
 - Additional Corporate Comms messages to encourage non-responders to respond.
 - Reminder Canvass Forms (with pre-paid return envelopes, which were not previously sent) posted to non-responding properties where we hold no other form of contact details.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

18. 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

19.

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 • 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

20. 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: 13/11/2020]

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH Date: 13/11/2020]

22. This Annual Canvass 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

23. Human Resources implications have not been requested

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

24. Technology implications have not been requested

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

25. Health implications have not been requested.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials SD Date]

26. 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

27. N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

28. Previous EDSC reports.

REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS

Trina Barber
Electoral Services Manager
Legal & Democratic Services
Tel: 01302 734398
E-mail: trina.barber@doncaster.gov.uk

Damian Allen
Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer