



Doncaster Council

Report

2nd February 2021

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

ANNUAL CANVASS UPDATE

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) which Damian Allen, Chief Executive is appointed, to carry out an annual canvass to ensure 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.
8. Route 1 – All electors registered at these properties matched against the national government database. We sent letters to 111,808 matched properties informing them they did not need to respond unless they wished to make changes to the information we hold on the electoral register for their property.
9. Route 2 – These are the un-matched properties that do require a response. We originally sent letters to 28,399 properties of which 7,959 responded to stage one. Therefore, for stage two we sent a further reminder letter to the outstanding 20,440 properties and received a further 4,281 responses. As the ERO had taken the decision not to conduct household visits due to the Covid-19 pandemic, for stage three the Electoral Services team carried out telephone canvassing, e-mailing and in depth data mining against Council records (Council Tax, Housing Benefit etc) to the 16,159 non-responding properties that would have normally received a household visit. The team managed to gain a response from a further 8,711 properties, bringing the total response to 20,951 properties, 73.73% response rate for Route 2.
10. Route 3 – These properties are defined as Care Homes and we had 57 on the electoral register all of which were required to provide an update on their current occupants. The Electoral Services Team contacted the care homes directly due to the high turn around in these types of properties to establish that everything was as up to date as possible. We managed to obtain occupant information including personal identifiers for 53 of these Care Homes (93%) and we continue to contact the outstanding ones although they have informed us they are extremely busy and sometimes short staffed due to isolating.
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 were much higher than the final response outcome this year despite not carrying out household visits.
12. Overall for Route 1, 2 and 3 which includes those properties which did not require a response, the total response rate at the end of the canvass was 94.68% 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	132,812	94.68%	7,468
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

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

13. The total number of outstanding properties was 7,468, **the lowest it has ever been** which is partly due to the streamlined way of the Canvass Reforms.
14. To provide EROs with more time to complete the annual canvass during the pandemic, legislation was passed to change the deadline for publishing the revised electoral register from 1st December 2020 to 1st February 2021. However, with multiple Elections taking place in Doncaster in May this year and a good response already received to the canvass, we decided to publish on the original date, so that the Electoral Services team could focus on what is expected to be a very complex election planning process. Therefore, on 1st December 2020, Electoral Services published the new revised Electoral Register, which had an electorate of 227,191; this is an increase from the previous year's 2019 published register, which had an electorate of 226,658. A detailed breakdown of the 1st December 2020 electorate by ward is provided at **Appendix A** of this report.
15. Each year the Cabinet Office accept Justification Led Bids for extra funding towards the cost of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) activities including the annual canvass. This year the Cabinet Office provided Doncaster with £21,578 funding towards IER which is £53,739 lower than received the previous year, as it was expected large savings would be made due to the Canvass Reform. However, our costs this year including the annual canvass have still been as high as previous years. Therefore a detailed bid for £42,687 has been submitted to the Cabinet Office for consideration for any extra funding towards the cost of Individual Electoral Registration.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. 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

18.

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</p>	

<p>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

19. 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: 20/01/2021]

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH Date: 20/01/2021]

21. 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 was due to the expected savings from Canvass Reform.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

22. Human Resources implications have not been requested

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

23. Technology implications have not been requested

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

24. Health implications have not been requested.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials TB Date 19/01/2021]

25. 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

26. N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

27. Previous EDSC reports.

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