



Doncaster Council

Report

23rd November 2021

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

ANNUAL CANVASS

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 the 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

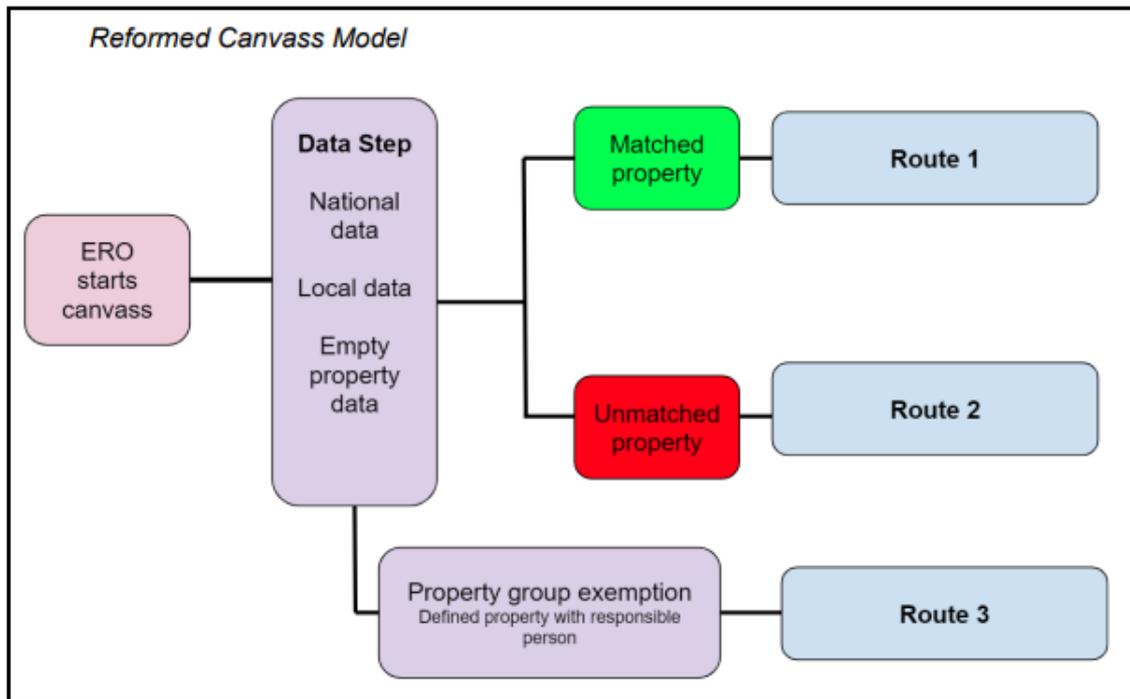
5. Each year the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty to carry out a full annual review of the Electoral Register by contacting all residential addresses to establish if the information currently held on the Electoral Register is complete and accurate, this is called the Annual Canvass. The purpose of the canvass is to identify everyone who should be on the electoral register. This means identifying citizens who should be registered but are currently not, as well as identifying electors who are no longer at a property and should therefore be removed from the register. A revised version of the electoral register must be published by 1 December, following the conclusion of the annual canvass.

6. With the introduction of the canvass reforms last 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 ACTIVITY

7. The canvass will incorporate a 'data step' at the outset of the process. This will inform the ERO, based on the data available, which properties are likely to have an unchanged household composition, based on matching data on the electoral register against national Government data and, where relevant, locally held data sources. 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.
8. The ERO will then follow one of three 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.
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.
9. Throughout June Electoral Services carried out the National Government data match and then attempted to match any remaining unsuccessful properties using local Council data such as Council Tax and Customer Services. This resulted in a total of 104,590 (74.20%) properties successfully matching and put into Route 1 and 36,319 unmatched properties put into Route 2.
10. All those electors in Route 1 properties were sent a notification letter advising them to make the necessary changes online or inform the ERO of their changes and we amend the electoral register accordingly. However, if all details are correct when we contact them they need not respond and they will not be chased several times like under the old canvass system.
11. All those in Route 2 that have not been successfully data matched will also be contacted, however all these properties will require a response and any non-responders will be chased and then personally canvassed via phone and/or visit.
12. 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.



Statistics

13. Route 1 - The National data matching process must take place between 1st June to 31st August 2021 and Electoral Services carried out the National data match download on 9th June 2021. At that time there was 140,966 properties and 225,197 registered electors in Doncaster and 101,701 (72.15%) properties and 192,885 (85.65%) electors successfully matched from the initial National data matching download for Route 1. Electoral Services managed to match a further 2,889 properties and 25,180 electors using the Councils local datasets and will continue to request data to establish further matches at Route 1. At present, we are currently at 104,590 (74.20%) of matched properties for Route 1 at the start of the Canvass.
14. Route 2 - These properties are the un-matched ones that do require a response. Under stage 1, we sent letters and e-mails to 28,674 properties of which 9,600 properties responded. Therefore for stage 2, we sent a Canvass forms to the outstanding 19,081 and received a further 2,850 responses back. This left approx. 16,200 properties still outstanding and requiring a personal door knock visit for stage 3. Canvassers are currently visiting these outstanding properties and are trying to obtain a response or accurate update for the ERO and so far a further 2,138 properties have responded giving a total response of 14,587 (50.88%) to Route 2 so far.
15. Route 3 – These properties are defined as Care Homes 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 80% response rate and personal visits will now take place in order in order to hope to gain a 100% response.

16. **Pro-active activity**

In line with Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission guidance, 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, customer services data 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.
- Canvass forms (open and not enveloped) posted to properties when a canvasser has visited several times and not been able to obtain a response in the hope that they read it and respond knowing it's been hand delivered.

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	

<p>of Doncaster</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and Electoral Registration.</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

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

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: SRF Date: 11/11/2021]

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH Date: 12/11/2021]

22. This work is funded from the Registration of Electors budget (NC003). The Cabinet Office usually provide an annual funding contribution, however this year they have advised due to the Canvass Reform, savings will be made and they will not be providing any funding. This is the case for almost every Council.

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: TB Date: 11/11/2021]

26. The Council has a duty to ensure all eligible electors can register to vote easily and are provided with several options 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.

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