



# Doncaster Council

## Report

---

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> February 2022

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

### **ANNUAL CANVASS OUTCOME**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. This report provides an update to Members on the final outcome of the Annual Canvass and a detailed breakdown of the statistics for each Route.

#### **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.

With the introduction of the canvass reforms in 2020, 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**

6. The canvass commenced in June 2021 by incorporating a 'data step' at the outset of the process which enabled the ERO to understand 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.

7. **Route 1** - the matched properties route, this was used for properties where the data indicates no change in household composition as all electors registered at these properties matched against the national government database.

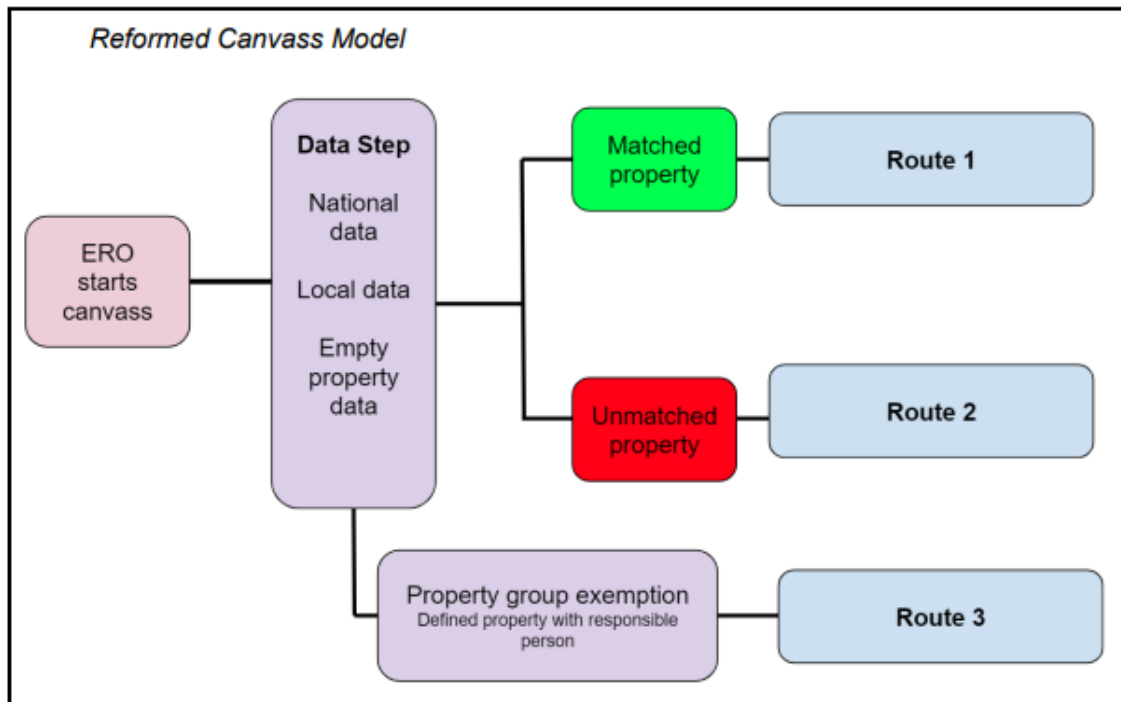
All properties in Route 1 were sent a notification letter advising them to make any necessary changes online or inform the ERO of their changes and as such we amended the electoral register accordingly. However, if all details were correct they need not respond and they were not chased several times like under the old canvass system.

8. **Route 2** - the unmatched properties route, this was used for properties where data matching has highlighted that there may be a change to all or some of the information the ERO currently holds for that property.

All those in Route 2 that have not been successfully data matched were contacted, however all these properties did require a response and any non-responders were chased and then personally canvassed via phone and/or personal visit.

9. **Route 3** - These properties are defined as Care Homes and Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs), all of which were required to provide an update on their current occupants.

The characteristics of these property types meant that the ERO could 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. Any properties where the ERO was unable to successfully obtain information about the property from a 'responsible person' those properties were moved to the Route 2 process.



## STATISTICS

10. Route 1 - The National data matching process must take place between 1<sup>st</sup> June to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 and Electoral Services carried out the National data match download on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021. At that time there was 140,966 properties and 225,197 registered electors in Doncaster. The outcome of the data matched 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. The Electoral Services Team continued to data match throughout the Canvass with a final total of 106,415 (75.49%) matched properties for Route 1.
11. Route 2 - These properties are the un-matched ones that do require a response. There are three stages taken for properties which fall under Route 2, each stage is taken until a response is obtained. Stage 1, we sent letters and e-mails to 28,674 properties of which 9,598 properties responded. Stage 2, we sent Canvass forms to the outstanding 19,074 and received a further 2,850 responses back. This left 16,226 properties still outstanding and requiring a personal door knock visit along with 5,820 HMOs moved to Route 2, providing a total of 22,046 properties outstanding for stage 3 a personal visit. Canvassers visited those outstanding properties to try and obtain a response or accurate update for the ERO. These properties are either empty, have a high turnaround of occupants or who generally do not respond. The Canvass staff managed to obtain a further 4,062 responses by carrying out personal visits and a further 6,501 responses were obtained through data mining, providing a final total of 23,011 (66.71%) responding properties, leaving 11,483 outstanding for Route 2.
12. Route 3 - These properties are defined as Care Homes and Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs), all of which were required to provide an update on their current occupants. Due to all properties not being personally canvassed during the last annual canvass due to Covid and being unable to

identify one person holding accurate information for HMOs it was decided that all Care Homes would remain under Route 3 and all HMOs would be moved into Route 2 in order for any non-responding HMOs to have a personal visit or more complex data mining.

Due to the high turnaround and the personal relationship we have built over the years with Care Home Managers the Electoral Services Team contacted the Care Homes directly again this year to establish that everything was as up to date as possible. Any that we were unable to receive a written response from received a personal visit. We achieved 100% response rate from the 57 Care Homes for Route 3.

13. With only two Canvasses carried out under the new reforms, it is difficult to compare the response rate of this canvass with previous years, especially as 75% 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 for the past two years under the Canvass Reforms.
14. The overall response rate for all three Route properties including those who did not need to respond was 91.85% which is slightly down the previous years return, however, due to Covid a foot canvass was not carried out the previous year so is not a true comparison:

Year	Responses received at the end of Canvass	% of Responded properties at end of Canvass	Number of properties outstanding
2021	129,483	91.85%	11,483
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 was ended early due to snap Parliamentary election on 12 December 2019

15. The revised full annual Electoral Register was published on December 1<sup>st</sup> to meet the Electoral Registration Officer's statutory duty. The new Electorate as of 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 is 227,875 electors which has risen by 2,678 electors since the start of the annual canvass. A detailed breakdown of the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 electorate by ward including postal vote breakdown is provided at **Appendix A** of this report.

## PRO-ACTIVE ACTIVITY

16. In line with Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission guidance, the ERO carried out mitigating actions to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. Therefore the Electoral Services team carried out the following mitigating actions:
  - Contacted electors via email, where an email address was held on the electoral register
  - Contacted electors via telephone, where a phone number was held on the electoral register
  - Data matching and data mining against Council records (Council Tax, Housing Benefit, customer services data etc)

- 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 canvasser had visited several times and not been able to obtain a response in the hope that they read it and responded knowing it had been hand delivered.

## ANNUAL ABSENT VOTE REFRESH

17. By 31 January each year the Electoral Registration Officer must write to each elector who has an absent vote (postal, proxy and postal proxy voters) who's signature on the postal identifiers register is more than five years old, informing them they must refresh their signature in order to maintain voting by post. This is known as the absent vote refresh and it takes place in January every year in all Local Authorities. Absent voters who have been granted a waiver are not affected by the refresh provisions, as they do not have a signature on the personal identifiers record. Letters and forms have been sent to 5,287 electors in Doncaster who are due to refresh theirs. Electors have six weeks to return their refreshed signature forms, a reminder is sent after 3 weeks. Should they not reply then the elector will lose their entitlement to vote by post and they will need to re-apply by completing a full fresh new postal vote application (including DOB) should they wish to remain a postal voter.

## OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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

## REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

19. 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

Outcomes	Implications
<p><b>Doncaster Working:</b> 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"> <li>• Better access to good fulfilling work</li> <li>• Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish</li> <li>• Inward Investment</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Doncaster Living:</b> 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"> <li>• The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster</li> <li>• More people can live in a good quality, affordable home</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport</li> <li>• Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean</li> <li>• Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Doncaster Learning:</b> 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"> <li>• Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school</li> <li>• Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better</li> <li>• Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Doncaster Caring:</b> Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have the best start in life</li> <li>• Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust</li> <li>• Older people can live well and independently in their own homes</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Connected Council:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A modern, efficient and flexible workforce</li> <li>• Modern, accessible customer interactions</li> <li>• Operating within our resources and delivering value for money</li> <li>• A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents</li> <li>• Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths</li> <li>• Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance</li> </ul>	<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: 28/01/2022]

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

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials: PH Date: 28/01/2022]**

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: 28/01/2022]**

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

## **REPORT AUTHOR & CONTRIBUTORS**

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

**Damian Allen**  
**Returning Officer/Electoral Registration Officer**