



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 22 November 2022

To: The Chair and Members of the

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE

Report Title: Canvass Update

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision?
Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources	All	No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update 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. This report is not exempt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

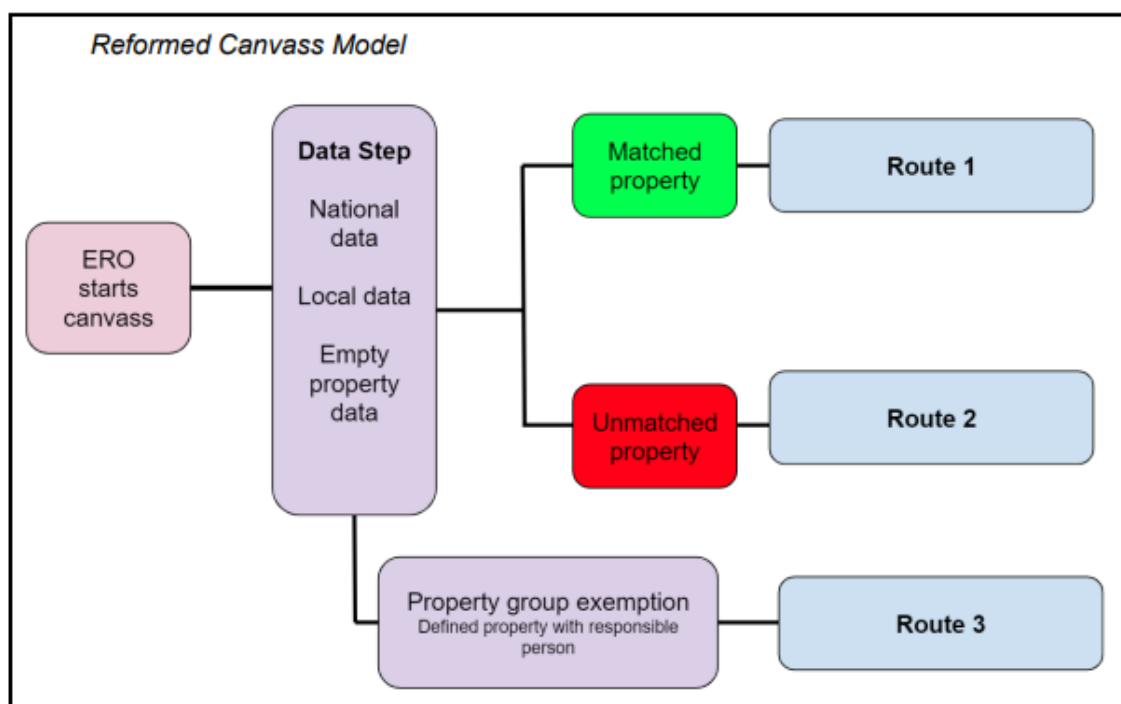
3. The Committee is asked to note the report and make any additional comments in relation to the contents.

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

- 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 December 1st each year, 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.
- The canvass incorporates a 'data step' at the outset of the process. This informs 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 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.

Route 1

9. The National data matching process must take place between 1 June to 31 August 2022 and Electoral Services carried out the National data match download on 23 June 2022 and were provided with the results on 27 June 2022. There were 227,383 registered electors and 142,519 properties in Doncaster and 110,867 (77.79%) properties successfully matched from the initial National data matching download for Route 1.

10. Electoral Services managed to obtain confirmation from 23,148 Route 1 properties reducing the number of letters needing to be sent to Route 1 properties from 110,867 letters to 87,719 letters. Letters were sent to those 87,719 properties on 16 August 2022 advising residents to contact us, only if the information we currently hold is incorrect.

Route 2

11. These properties are the un-matched properties that do require a response. Under stage 1, we sent letters and e-mails to 31,551 properties and 7,980 (25.29%) properties responded.

12. Therefore for stage 2, we sent a Canvass form to the outstanding 23,571 and received a further 3,628 (15.39%) responses back. This left approx. 20,000 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 Canvass staff have managed to obtain responses for a further 4,208 properties giving a total response of 15,816 (50.17%) to Route 2 so far which is on par with this stage of the canvass last year.

Route 3

13. 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 84.31% response rate and personal visits will now take place in order to ensure a 100% response.

Pro-active activity

14. 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 have been 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)
- Liaising with Council Tax, St Leger Homes, local letting agents, new home developers, the National Residential Landlords Association to encourage and capture new tenants
- 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.

15. In line with previous annual canvass outcomes, Electoral Services are on track to complete in time for the ERO to publish the revised Electoral Register on 1st December 2022.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

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








REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION


17. This report is primary for information only.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL’S KEY OUTCOMES

18.

Great 8 Priority	Positive Overall	Mix of Positive & Negative	Trade-offs to consider –	Neutral or No implications
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			Negative overall	
 Tackling Climate Change				✓
Comments:				
 Developing the skills to thrive in life and in work				✓
Comments:				
 Making Doncaster the best place to do business and create good jobs				✓
Comments:				
 Building opportunities for healthier, happier and longer lives for all				✓
Comments:				
 Creating safer, stronger, greener and cleaner communities where everyone belongs				✓
Comments:				
 Nurturing a child and family-friendly borough				✓
Comments:				
 Building Transport and digital connections fit for the future				✓
Comments:				

 Promoting the borough and its cultural, sporting, and heritage opportunities				✓
Comments:				
Fair & Inclusive	✓			
<p>The Council has a duty to ensure all eligible electors can register to vote and respond to canvass forms 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) link on the Council Web page.</p>				

Legal Implications [Officer Initials: SRF | Date: 11/11/2022]

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

- Representation of the People Act
- The Representation of the People (England & Wales) Regulations
- The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass Amendment) Regulations
- Local Government Act
- Electoral Registration and Administration Act

Financial Implications [Officer Initials: PH | Date: 10/11/2022]

20. This work is funded solely from the Registration of Electors budget (NC003). Central Government no longer provide Councils with funding towards the annual canvass due to the reduction in the cost of delivering the Canvass under the Canvass Reforms.

Human Resources Implications

21. There are no Human Resources Implications arising from this report.

Technology Implications [Officer Initials: PW | Date: 11/11/2022]

22. The 'Electoral Automated Service' is used to allow electors to respond to canvass communication anytime via an automated service; on-line, text, phone or e-mail rather than just by the more expensive option of return post. The Technology Governance Board (TGB) recently approved a request to renew the contract for this service to 31/08/24, in line with the contract for the Xpress Electoral Management Software. The Gov.UK Notify solution is also used for emailing electors in relation to the annual canvass.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

23. 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.

CONSULTATION

24. Not applicable

BACKGROUND PAPERS

25. Previous EDSC reports.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

26. ERO – Electoral Registration Officer
TGB – Technology Governance Board

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