


REPORT TO

General Purposes and Arbitration Committee

30 June 2020

Subject:	Canvass Reform 2020
Director:	Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer Surjit Tour
Contribution towards Vision 2030:	
Contact Officer(s):	Tracey Hurst – Electoral Services Manager

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That :

1. the committee note and endorse the changes to the revised canvass 2020 (administration and delivery) as detailed in content of this report.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 On the 4 November 2019 a statutory instrument was passed to enforce the changes to Annual Canvass. The reformed Annual Canvass will take effect from 1 July 2020.
- 1.2 This report outlines the key principles and the framework of the delivery of the Annual Canvass under Canvass Reform.

2 **IMPLICATIONS FOR VISION 2030**

The effective delivery of Canvass Reform will ensure that citizens of Sandwell are given the opportunity to participate in exercising their democratic right to vote. The changes to Canvass should simplify the process for electors and enable contact in more digital way. Canvass reform makes a positive contribution to Ambition 10.

3 **BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain are required to conduct an annual canvass of all residential properties in the area for which they have responsibility.
- 3.2 Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) places a duty on EROs to maintain the electoral register for their area. Section 9D of the RPA 1983 requires EROs to conduct an annual canvass of all residential properties in their area.
- 3.3 The purpose of the canvass is to identify everyone who should be on the electoral register. This means identifying citizens who should be registered at a property and identifying electors who are no longer living at a property and should be removed. A revised version of the electoral must be published by the 1 December following the conclusion of the annual canvass.
- 3.4 Under the old annual canvass model ERO's were required to send every household an annual canvass form known as a household enquiry form (HEF) The HEF requires a response by law regardless of whether there any changes to the property. Failure to respond is an offence and fines can be imposed of up to £1000. ERO's must follow up any non-responses to the HEF with two further reminders and carry out a household visit. Each paper HEF must be accompanied by an addressed business reply envelope. It was a legal requirement for electors to respond to the form which included "no changes "to their circumstances. Upon receipt of the information the ERO is then required to send an Invitation to register (ITR) to invite the individual to register.
- 3.5 It is widely recognised that the framework surrounding the current annual canvass is outdated and highly resource intensive. There are many prescribed steps to the canvass that do not take account of the differences between registration areas. The current framework is heavily paper based, complex for electors and expensive.

4 THE CURRENT POSITION

The administration of the annual canvass under the revised rules must take effect from 1 July and complete with the publication of the revised register on the 1 December 2020. The annual canvass under the revised rules is centred around a more targeted approach but consistent with the intention that every property will receive a canvass communication. Households will be split into different canvass routes depending on if they have “matched” or “not matched” against the government database. This will allow the ERO to apply targeted communications to households and streamline the process. A more detailed explanation the framework of the new canvass is detailed in appendix 1

5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)

The introduction of Canvass Reform is a legislative change. Cabinet office as part of this process carried out necessary consultations with all relevant stakeholders.

6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

This report seeks that the Committee note and endorse the changes and therefore, no alternative options need to be considered.

7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no strategic resource implications arising from this report.

8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) has a duty under Section 9A of the Representation People Act 1983 (as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013) to take all necessary steps to comply with their duty to maintain the electoral register, and to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that all those eligible are registered in it.
- 8.2 Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) places a duty on EROs to maintain the electoral register for their area. Section 9D of the RPA 1983 requires EROs to conduct an annual canvass of all residential properties in their area.
- 8.3 The revised annual canvass must be delivered in accordance to The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass) (Amendment) Regulations 2019

- 8.4 In addition to the statutory requirements for Electoral Registration Officers, the Electoral Commissions performance standards framework details the objectives that all EROs must deliver, these are detailed in appendix 2 of this report.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An equality impact assessment is not required for this report. This is legislative change and a EIA has been carried out by Cabinet Office in relation to changes,

10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Under the reformed canvass ERO's have the discretion to match the data they hold against local data sets available within the Council. In accordance with the Data Protection regulations 2018 a comprehensive data sharing agreement will support any sharing of personal data between council departments. The ERO has the right to exercise the use of any available council local sets under Regulations 2, 35 and 35A of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001

11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 There are no crime and disorder to detail in this report. A risk assessment will be carried out as part of the overall project planning for delivering canvass reform.

12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS

- 12.1 There are no direct sustainability issues arising from this report.

13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)

- 13.1 The coronavirus pandemic is continuing to impact on society and will present challenges for ERO's in preparing for and delivering the 2020 canvass. All necessary health and safety guidelines and appropriate mitigations will be applied as part of the delivery of the canvass to ensure the safety of both residents and staff.

14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND

There are no issues relating to Council managed property or land arising from this report

15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

That the committee note and endorse the changes to the revised canvass 2020 as detailed in content of this report and attach appendices.

16 APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 – Canvass Reform Framework Briefing Paper

Appendix 2 - Electoral Commission Performance Standards for Electoral Registration Officers

Appendix 3 Canvass reform paper communications pack of documents

**Surjit Tour
Director of Law and Governance
and Monitoring Officer**