

# **Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**

## **Electoral Services**

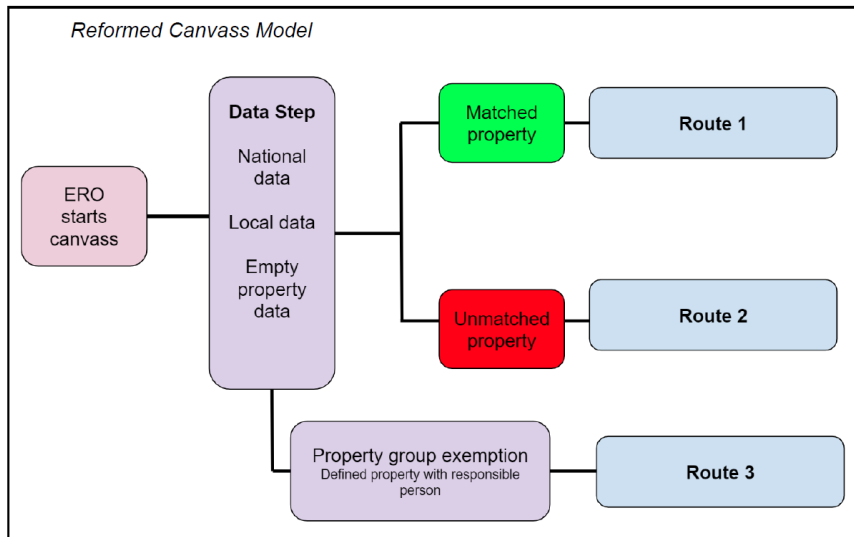
### **Canvass Reform 2020 Briefing Paper**

#### **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Electoral Registration Officer (EROs) are required to conduct an annual canvass of all residential properties in the area that they have responsibility. This briefing paper provides an overview of reforms to improve the annual canvass of the register of electors and details the process that the annual canvass will follow this year in Sandwell.

#### **2 Summary of the New Canvass Model**

- 2.1 A key change to the revised canvass is the introduction of a “data step” at the beginning of the process. The electoral register in the first instance will be matched against national government data and local data sets if applicable. On completion of the matching process properties within the borough will be split into two groups. Route 1 properties are matched property where everyone in the household has “matched” with national data. Route 2 is the unmatched property route this route is for properties where the data matching process has indicated a change to the information currently held. The inclusion of this data step will allow for a more streamlined efficient approach to be taken with the matched properties and a more target robust approach applied to the unmatched properties.
- 2.2 A defined property route, route 3 has been introduced as part of canvass reform. This is designed for properties that do not fit into routes 1 and 2. Examples of route 3 properties include, care homes, and student halls of residence. In Sandwell there are 86 care homes that will fit within route 3. A responsible person within each care home will be out single point of contact to ensure that the route 3 properties are kept up to data and accurate with any changes.
- 2.3 The table below shows the reformed canvass model and the routes properties will take following the national data matching exercise.



2.4 Following Sandwell’s national data match that took place on 2 June and Local data matching against council data initial results have indicated that there will be 120685 properties in route 1 and 14549 in route 2. On completion of the National data matching EROs can utilise reliable local data sets to convert a Route 2 property to Route 1.

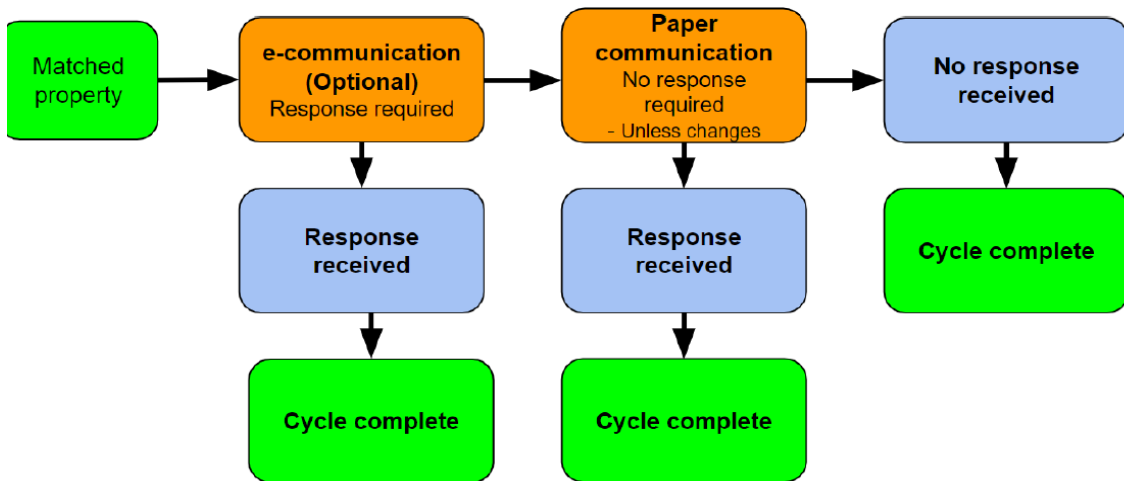
## 2.5 **Route 1 – Matched Properties Route**

2.6 Route 1 will be a more streamlined approach to the annual canvass. Following the data matching all route 1 properties will be sent a single prescribed written communication (Canvass Communication A) This will provide residents with the opportunity to advise of any changes. It is important to note that residents do not need to respond unless there is a change to be made. The number of properties in Sandwell that will follow route 1 receive at CCA is 120685. This equates to 88% of the number of properties on the register which is an excellent indication of the accuracy and completeness of the register. It should be noted that there is no requirement in law to enclose a pre-paid envelope because residents are not required to return the physical form.

2.7 It is not necessary for the ERO to chase any outstanding properties that have not responded to the Canvass Communication A. Once the communication has been issued there is no further requirement to continue the chase cycle.

2.8 The process map for route 1 properties is shown below.

## . Route 1 - The Matched Properties Route

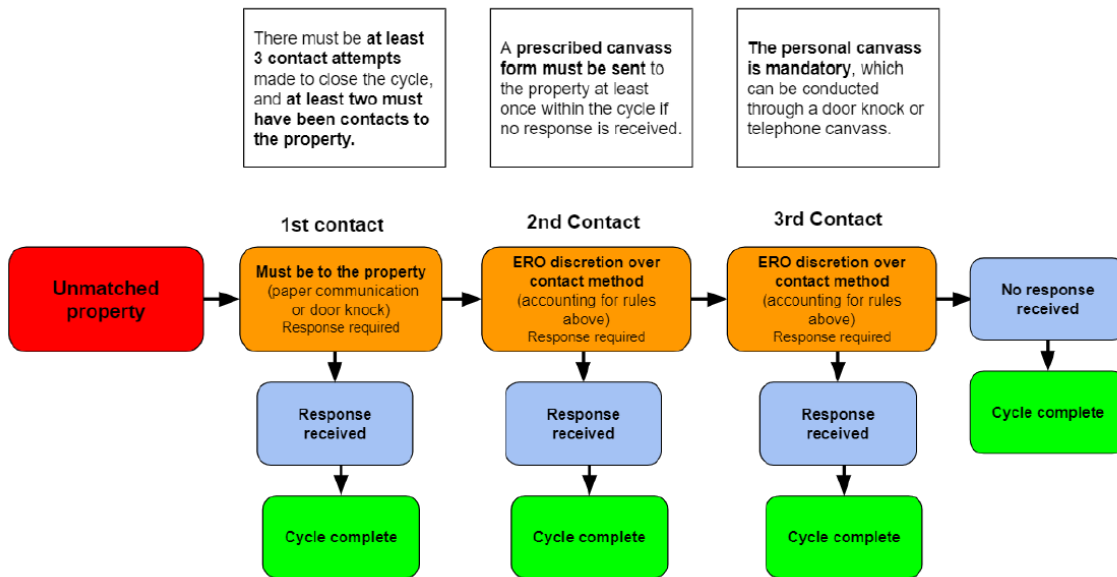


### 3 Route 2 – Unmatched Properties Route

- 3.1 Following on from the results of the data matching step, if the data suggests that there may be a change to the information EROs currently hold for a property on their register, they must conduct a 'full' canvass of the property under Route 2. In the case where the non-match is correct and new citizens have moved into the property, and/or former occupants have left, it is vital for EROs to receive this change information.
- 3.2 Equally, if the non-matched elector is still there, it will be important for EROs to receive confirmation of this in the form of a no change response. Both scenarios rely on the occupier returning a response to the ERO.
- 3.3 To comply with their statutory duty ERO's must meet the following requirements during the route 2 process.
  - A minimum of three contacts must be completed during the canvass process
  - Two of the three contacts must be a communication with the property (this can be a written communication or a household visit)
  - A personal canvass (which under the revised rules is by telephone or a personal visit to the property.)
  - The prescribed canvass form must be sent at some point in the cycle along with a pre-paid envelope.
- 3.4 The first contact with the property will require the ERO to either send a written communication to the property or to carry out a household visit.

- 3.5 There are two types of written communications available to ERO's to use which are both prescribed by the Electoral Commission: Canvass Communication B (CCB) and a Canvass Form.
- 3.6 The Canvass form is an A3 style document which residents are more familiar. This form must be accompanied by a business reply envelope and cannot be sent electronically. It must be sent to the property and it is a legal requirement to respond to the form with any changes or if there are no changes to report. An example of all canvass written communication forms can be found in Appendix 3.
- 3.7 The Canvass Communication B (CCB) is one of the new suite of forms designed specifically to encourage online responses from residents. Unlike the Canvass form, the CCB is A4 and does not need to include a business reply envelope. This form can be sent electronically maximising the use of e-communications. A response must be received by the ERO to the CCB. The form does not allow responses to be written on the form; residents are encouraged to make use of the online and texting responses available.
- 3.8 Where the ERO holds email addresses or mobile phone numbers, they may choose to send an e-communication as the second or third contact stage. If so they will be required to send e-communications to all matched electors who they hold relevant contact details for. This is because it is likely to increase the chances of successfully contacting the household and prompting a response.
- 3.9 If a response is received at any stage, the chasing cycle will be closed, and no further canvass contacts will be required.
- 3.10 The route map and process for unmatched properties is shown below.

## Route 2 - The Unmatched Properties Route



### 4 Route 3 The Defined Properties Route

- 4.1 Route 3 will require the ERO to consider which properties should be included in this route and for Sandwell this will be residential care homes and houses of multiple occupancy. Contact will be made with a responsible officer for the properties to obtain the information required, which is how these properties are currently canvassed.

### 5 Canvass Reform the plan for Sandwell

- 5.1 Following the completion of the national data matching exercise officers are now analysing the results and carrying out local data matching using a variety of council data to “match” any residents who did not match as part of the national data matching exercise.
- 5.2 The total number of properties in Sandwell is currently 135,320. The table below shows the numbers of properties in each route:

Route	Number of Properties	% of households
Route 1 Matched Properties	120685	88%
Route 2 Unmatched Properties	14549	12%
Route 3 (care homes)	89	

5.3 The following methods of communications are being used for each route

Property Route	First Contact	Second Contact	Third Contact	Cycle complete
Route 1	Canvass Communication A	n/a	n/a	Yes
Route 2 (E-comms)	Canvass Form	Canvass Communication B E-comms	Door Knocking	Yes
Route 2 (Non-E-Comms)	Canvass Form	Canvass Communication B paper version	Telephone canvass	Yes

5.4 In addition to the steps shown in the table above, ERO's can chose to send discretionary email communications to maximise response rates. To ensure compliance to GDPR regulations and "unsubscribe" link will be added to the elections website which will allow people to opt out of their emails being used.

5.5 It is requirement for EROs to ensure that the legal framework around canvass reform it met. The table above shows that the all the required steps detailed previously in the report are being met

5.6 The key dates for the reformed annual canvass are shown in the table below.

Dates	Activity	Details
29 June - 30 July	Local public awareness campaign. Implement Communications plan to raise awareness of the key changes to the canvass.	
30 July	<b>All Route 1</b> matched properties receive a canvass communication A	Total number of Route 1 properties 120685
17 August	<b>All Route 2</b> unmatched properties receive a Canvass Form via royal mail	Total number of route 2 properties 14459
10 September	<b>All Route 2</b> non – responding properties without email to receive a physical Canvass Communication B via royal mail	

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Details</b>
10 September	<b>All Route 2</b> non – responding properties with email receive E- comms communication	
15 September	<b>Start Route 3</b> canvass of care homes	86 care homes currently on the register
30 September	Telephone canvassing of all non-responding route 2 properties to commence	
6 October	Optional final reminder CCB to be issued by royal mail to all non-responding properties	
6 October	Door Knocking commences subject to electoral commission guidance and national COVID level.	
1 December	Publication of the revised register	

- 5.7 Sandwell’s comprehensive participation and engagement plan is currently being updated to reflect the changes in the canvass and the approach that is necessary. Under canvass reform the number of properties that require the “full” canvass is significantly reduced. This enables officers to ensure a more targeted approach to residents particularly around the hard to reach sections of the community and ethnic minority groups.
- 5.8 The revised canvass approach allows the ERO to have a more “bespoke” method to canvassing based on the Local Authority demographics and circumstances. The reduction in the need for multiple reminder forms and the numbers of households that require the full canvass process will result in a reduction of the cost to administer the canvass. It will be necessary to have in place a robust evaluation process to analyse returns and response rates at each stage.