

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Governance and Ethics Committee

12 January 2023

Report title	Evaluation of Annual Canvass 2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Paula Brookfield Cabinet member for Governance and Ethics	
Accountable director	David Pattison, Chief Operating Officer	
Originating service	Electoral Services	
Accountable employee	Alice Peacock Tel Email	Deputy Electoral Services Manager 01902 55 0551 Alice.Peacock@wolverhampton.gov.uk
Report to be considered by	Election Board	16 January 2023

Recommendation for action or decision:

The Governance and Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Provide feedback on the 2022 annual canvass.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 To provide an evaluation of the 2022 annual canvass.

2.0 Background

2.1 It is a legal requirement for the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) to carry out an annual canvass to ensure that the electoral register is up to date.

2.2 This is the third year of the reformed annual canvass. The annual canvass started with a national data match of the electoral register with Department for Work and Pension (DW) records to categorise properties into route one – matched properties (indicating no change in household composition), or route two – no match (indicating a change in household composition). This allows the ERO to take a flexible approach and target resources on properties where there is a change.

2.3 Route one properties receive a ‘light touch’ canvass, where they are sent a canvass communication but only need to respond if there is a change. The route two properties must respond and are sent multiple different types of communications including a door knock to elicit a response. There is also a route three for properties with a senior responsible officer who can respond on behalf of the residents. In Wolverhampton, Care Homes with a senior responsible officer are assigned to route three.

2.4 The earliest the annual canvass can start by 1 July and conclude by 1 December for the publication of the revised register. Wolverhampton started contacting electors as part of the annual canvass on 12 July 2022.

3.0 Overall Evaluation

3.1 On 1 July 2022, there was an electorate of 184, 048. The national and local data match took place in July using the same approach as last year, and there was a positive increase compared to last year as 2% more properties matched, so there were fewer properties that needed to be canvassed via route two. The following table shows the number of properties and responses by route for 2021 and 2022.

Canvass	Route one	Route two	% response to route two	Overall completion rate
2021	79% (92, 227)	21% (23, 283)	67.1% (15, 623)	93.4%
2022	81% (93, 805)	19% (22,420)	69.3% (15, 549)	94.1%

3.2 Evaluation by the Electoral Commission in 2021 revealed that nationally 75% of properties were allocated to Route one, so Wolverhampton was higher than the average both in 2021 and 2022, and higher than the West Midlands average of 77.5%. The Electoral Commissions’ evaluation for 2022 had not been produced at the time of this report.

- 3.3 The overall canvass completion rate was higher than last year at 94.1% compared to 93.4%. This could be attributed to a higher match rate to begin with, and the additional responses gained from canvassers conducting the door knock. A total of 6,871 properties were outstanding a response at the end of the canvass. All of these properties received two written communications, two door knocks and a leaflet through the door encouraging them to respond to the canvass communications.
- 3.4 The annual canvass concluded on 1 December 2022, when the revised register was published. There are 185, 399 electors on the electoral register and 34, 442 postal voters.

4.0 Route one evaluation

- 4.1 Properties in route one only needed to respond if there was a change, except for those who received an initial email as they were required to respond to ensure that the communication had reached the property.
- 4.2 Emails were sent to 42, 838 properties this year compared to 15, 507 in 2021, and there was a 29.7% response rate (12, 735), which was an increase on the 27% (4,198) response rate at this stage in 2021. In 2021 there were some queries from residents checking whether the email was legitimate as they had not been contacted in this way before. There were minimal queries this year and more communications were put out in residents' newsletters and on the website to inform residents that they may receive this email.
- 4.3 Households without email addresses and those who did not respond to the email were sent a Canvass Communication Form A which was a two-sided A4 letter without a pre-paid envelope showing the names of people registered at this address and to invite them to respond online only if there were changes required. The table below shows the outcome of the route one contacts:

	2021	2022
Properties	92, 227	93, 805
Full responses	10, 705 (11.6%)	25, 446 (27.18%)
Changes (electors added/deleted)	30	76
No changes	10, 679	25,394

- 4.4 Properties in this route only need to respond if there is a change. The vast majority of those who responded reported no change. Overall, there was a positive outcome as there were much fewer changes made compared to last year, indicating a more accurate and up to date register at the beginning of canvass. The following table shows the contact methods electors used to respond, which shows a sustained channel shift towards more online responses:

	2021	2022
Post	280 (2.6%)	86 (0.3%)
Internet	9, 827 (91.8%)	22, 176 (87.1%)
Phone	83 (0.8%)	1,779 (7%)
Text	38 (0.4%)	740 (2.9%)
Email	21 (0.2%)	84 (0.3%)
Phone call to customer services/electoral services	454 (4.2%)	460 (1.8%)

4.5 An area of improvement for the 2023 Annual Canvass for route one properties will be to further increase the number of emails being sent out and responded to, to reduce the cost of printing and postage. Data mining and data matching options with other council databases were used as part of this year's data match which led to a higher percentage of properties in route one. It is recommended to explore using additional databases to see if more email addresses can be imported into the electoral register.

5.0 Route 2 evaluation

5.1 All households in this route are required to respond and the ERO is required to contact these households three times and one of these must be a personal canvass such as a telephone call or door knock

5.2 All 22, 425 properties received a Canvass Communication Form B letter which was an A4 double sided letter without a pre-paid envelope and electors were encouraged to respond online. Properties who did not respond at this stage were then sent an A3 double sided Canvass Form with a pre-paid envelope. Properties who did not respond to the canvass form then received 2 door knocks and a leaflet posted through the door. The table below shows the outcome of the route two contacts:

	2021		2022	
	Properties contacted	Response rate	Properties contacted	Response rate
Stage 1: CCB letter	23, 283	32% (7, 530)	22, 425	33 % (7, 471)
Stage 2: Telephone canvass	0	N/A	2, 297	28 % (637)
Stage 2: Canvass Form	15, 753	20% (3, 217)	12, 656	8.5 % (1078)
Stage 3: Door knock	12, 536	39% (4, 876)	10, 671	60% (6, 354)

- 5.3 In 2021 there was a software glitch with the Elections Management System which meant that the telephone canvass option could not be utilised that year. The provider, Civica resolved the issue for this year's canvass allowing an additional contact stage to be trialled for the 2022 annual canvass. Telephone canvassing further reduced the amount of Canvass forms sent out in stage 2.
- 5.4 Due to industrial action the delivery of the stage 2 canvass forms was delayed resulting in a timetable crossover of stage 2 and 3. This led to a reduced response rate for stage 2 but an increased response to canvassers door knocking in stage 3. An area of improvement for 2023 would be to examine the canvass timetable to account for possible disruption in future.
- 5.5 The following table shows the contact methods electors used to respond, which shows a sustained channel shift towards more online responses and less by post:

	2021	2022
Post	11.5% (1, 804)	3.1% (694)
Internet	51.9% (8, 107)	35.6% (7, 993)
Phone	4.9% (773)	2.4% (543)
Text	1.1% (172)	0.4% (82)
Email	0.08% (12)	0.04% (9)
Door knock	18.8% (2, 951)	22.1% (4, 951)
Phone call to customer services/electoral services	11.5% (1, 801)	3.1% (686)

- 5.6 The door knock was trialled at a later stage in the annual canvass so that canvassers worked right up to the register publication date. Canvassers worked from the beginning of October up until end of November. In previous canvasses they have worked from the beginning of September up until the end of October. The feedback from canvassers was that they preferred working September – October due to the weather and daylight hours. This will be accommodated in next year's canvass timetable.

6.0 Route 3 evaluation

- 6.1 Electoral Services contacted 76 care homes by emailing and calling senior responsible offices up to three times. After the third contact, they were sent a canvass form in the post with a pre-paid return envelope. 41% (31) of care homes responded to the canvass communication, which was higher than last year when 20% of care homes responded to a single member of staff canvassing properties.

7.0 Financial implications

7.1 Against the background of a high data matching rate the cost of the annual canvass has been met from the £375,000 budget set aside for electoral registration in 2022-2023. The costs of future canvass operations will continue to be closely monitored as inflationary increases in postage costs are anticipated. Forecasts will be incorporated in quarterly revenue monitoring reports and any emerging budget pressures highlighted as part of that process. [GE/20122022/K]

8.0 Legal implications

8.1 The statutory provisions for the annual canvass have been met by the ERO. [DP/04012023/B]

9.0 Equalities implications

9.1 Due to the nature of population turnover in each ward, each ward does have a different percentage of properties that are allocated to each route. The nature of the reformed Annual Canvass enables Electoral Registration Officers to focus resources on the wards where the data indicates that there has been a change in household composition.

10.0 All other Implications

10.1 There are no other implications arising from this report at the present time.