

Item 7

ELECTORAL REGISTRATION ANNUAL CANVASS

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to appraise the Board of the current draft proposals in respect of changes to the annual household electoral registration canvass.
- 1.2 These draft proposals have been created following consultation between the Cabinet Office Electoral Registration Reform Team, Electoral Commission, AEA and SAA.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The primary objectives of the changes to the annual canvass are to:-
 - Create an alternative canvass procedure that has a lower financial cost to operate;
 - Create an alternative canvass procedure that generates the same or higher volume and quality of information supplied to EROs.
- 2.2 Under the control of the Cabinet Office 24 pilot exercises were conducted by ERO's during the 2017 annual canvass. The pilots focused on such changes as increased use of email, telephone, replacing the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) with a simpler Household Notification Letter (HNL), and the use of data sets to validate existing electors. All the pilots were evaluated in terms of the volume of information gathered, the quality of that information, and the impact on cost, by comparing outcomes to change response rates, addition and deletion rates, and existing costs of canvass taken from previous canvass periods.
- 2.3 The pilot evaluation process sought to establish alternative approaches that gave either the same or better canvass outcome at lower cost.

The Cabinet Office pilot evaluation found:-

- Between 57% and 83% of properties presented no change during the canvass;
- Consensus that significant financial and staff savings driven by the use of data matching, emails and HNL's;
- Staff workload had been significantly reduced and the canvass period less stressful;
- Reduced workload allowed ERO's to focus resource on other areas of electoral activity.

Noted below are links to an Electoral Commission pilot evaluation report, and a cross-government consultation into proposals for canvass reform.

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https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/244608/Annual-canvass-reform-pilot-scheme-evaluation.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposals-for-the-reform-of-the-annual-canvass>

3 CURRENT CANVASS PROCESS

- 3.1 The current canvass process involves the issue of a paper HEF to all households in Lothian. Where there is a non return two further forms can be issued, followed by a doorstep canvasser call.
- 3.2 During the 2017 Canvass 409,380 initial HEF's were issued, followed by 200,208 stage 1 reminders, with a further 150,265 stage 2 reminders following. In addition, in excess of 80,000 canvasser calls were made. In total 759,853 forms were issued as part of the household contact process. This achieved a return rate of 73.1% against the initial issue of 409,380.
- 3.3 This process relies heavily on the use of paper and postage throughout each of its stages. While electors are encouraged to respond using electronic means, for example online, text, or phone over 56% of returns are received via paper.
- 3.4 The final accounting position for 2017/18 indicated that £275k was required by way of additional funding to support the IER process, all of which was accounted for as postage, printing and canvasser costs.

4 PROPOSED CANVASS MODEL FROM 2020

- 4.1 The Cabinet Office intend to finalise the new canvass model during early 2019. While a number of areas remain under consideration and consultation Appendix 1 provides a broad overview of the likely process to be adopted.
- 4.2 The key elements of change involve the use of national and local data sets to provide a degree of certainty that electors are still residing at the address shown on the electoral register. Such an elector shall be marked "Green".
- 4.3 Where an entire household of electors is marked green then a lighter approach to canvass (Route 1) can be taken. This would involve either the issue of an email, where a response of no change or notification of changes is required, or the issue of a paper HNL or abbreviated HEF. In this case no response is expected. This difference between the two methods is in recognition that there is less assurance that an email has been received within the household as opposed to delivery via post. Where there is no response to the sent email, then a paper HNL of HEF shall be issued.
- 4.4 Where a household is marked "Red" in respect of all or some of the electors residing there, then the following canvass process (Route 2) shall be adopted. Following the issue of an initial HEF, two further contacts are required either by email, text, phone, paper, or canvass call, where one of the two must be canvasser or telephone. This not only provides a range of contact options but also removes one of the steps from the current canvass process.
- 4.5 The Cabinet Office are also considering how best to incorporate HMO's, void properties, and recent pre-canvass IER applicants into the new model.

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5 BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED CANVASS MODEL

5.1 The Cabinet Office have identified the following benefits from the proposed canvass model:-

- The generation of cost savings within the canvass process;
- Every household still receives a communication giving an opportunity to amend details;
- Increasing use of technology meeting citizen expectations;
- Resources can be targeted on properties that most require it during the canvass;
- Resources can be targeted on other registration processes;
- National and local data sets can be used to inform the canvass process.

6 IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED CANVASS MODEL

- 6.1 Following release of the proposed canvass model preliminary analysis has been undertaken to assess the impact.
- 6.2 The Cabinet Office as part of the canvass model development process were able to analyse the IER 2014 Confirmation Live Run, where individual electors were matched to DWP records for the purpose of passporting them into the new IER regime, and convert these into results indicating Green and Red households.
- 6.3 The Green match rate for Lothian was as follows, City of Edinburgh 76%, West Lothian 82%, East Lothian 83%, and Midlothian 83%. These figures do not reflect any impact of local data matching which, it can be expected, would increase the percentages.
- 6.4 Overall in terms of Lothian households these match rates indicate that 338,660 would be marked as Green and 92,340 as Red.
- 6.5 For those households marked Green a single contact via email or amended HEF only is required. Preliminary analysis results indicate that under this process 118,531 emails would be issued, and, allowing for non-responses from email, 303,101 amended HEF's.
- 6.6 For those households marked Red a HEF shall be issued. Based on current response rates it is anticipated that 46,170 households would require further contact using one of the options available, and following that 30,011 of these households would require yet further contact. One of the options adopted in this process must be by way of personal contact either as a canvasser call or telephone.
- 6.7 Based on the 2017 canvass, preliminary analysis indicates that the volume of HEF's issued during the canvass period is estimated to reduce from 759,853 to 436,000.
- 6.8 Further analysis is ongoing focusing on the adoption of the variable elector contact options and assessing the impact on current canvass costs.
- 6.9 The Cabinet Office have been requested to consider the adoption of a Dry-Run during 2019 or early 2020. Not only would this allow proper testing of the technological aspects of the new model, but also furnish ERO's with up to date Green and Red percentages upon which they could undertake final analysis.

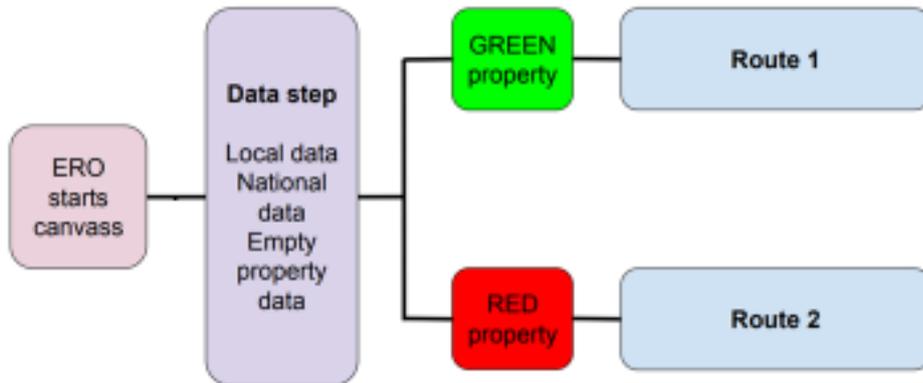
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7 RECOMMENDATION

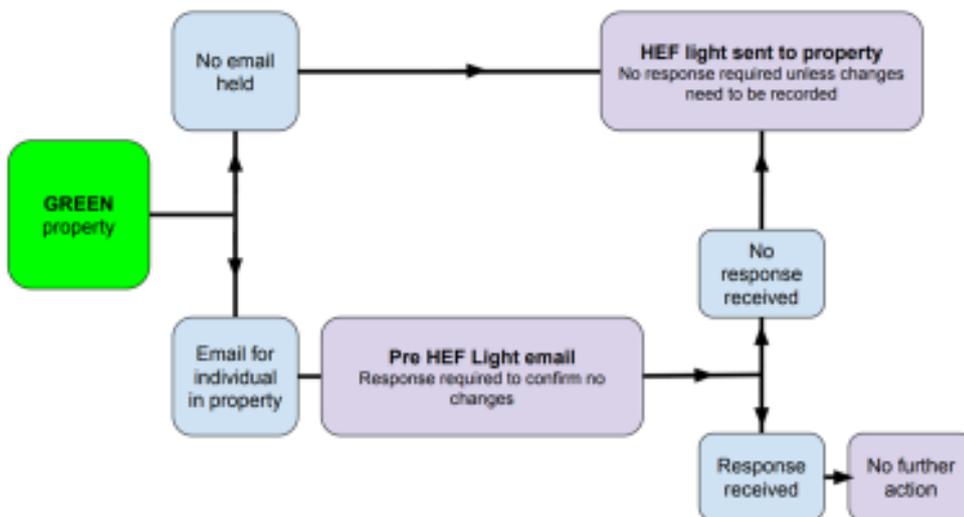
- 7.1 The Board is asked to note the content of this report and be advised that further reports shall be provided by the ERO during 2019/20.

Graeme Strachan
ASSESSOR & ERO

High level model



Route 1



Route 2

