

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE ON 24 MARCH 2022

SUBJECT: Annual Canvass 2021

REPORT AUTHOR: Jackie Follis, Interim Electoral Registration Officer

DATE: 21 February 2022

EXTN: 01903 737580

AREA: Policy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report presents a review of the 2021 Canvass for consideration by Members. It summarises the changes resulting from the 2020 Canvass Reform Regulations, sets out the outcomes for Arun, what worked well, and lessons learned.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Corporate Support Committee:

- a) notes the report; and
- b) agrees that the Electoral Registration Officer continues to implement change as necessary to the 2022 Canvass process

1. BACKGROUND:

Overall process

- 1.1 The annual canvass process was reformed in 2020. Prior to this, every household was sent a form which required a response to confirm or change the information we held for that property
- 1.2 From 2020, local authorities had to undertake national data matching (with optional local data matching) at the start of the process, and the results of this are used to assign each property to a 'route'. Where electors matched, they became 'green', and when all electors in a property matched, the property became 'green'. Properties with any unmatched ('red') electors, or with no registered electors, became 'red' properties.
- 1.3 Green, or matched, properties then follow Route 1, where written communication is sent (this confirms the information we currently hold about electors at that property), which requires no response unless that information is incorrect).
- 1.4 Red properties follow Route 2, and a response is required from these properties, whether there are changes or not.

- 1.5 Route 3 properties are required to have a single responsible person who is authorised to respond on behalf of all electors at that property, and these are mainly care homes and student accommodation, but we are also considering whether we can use this route for other types of accommodation.
- 1.6 For Route 1 properties e-mails can be sent prior to written communications and, if a full response to the e-mail is received, then no further communication needs to be sent. In 2020 we did not send any of these e-mails, and feedback from other local authorities who had chosen to do this was quite negative, but useful, and we decided to do this additional step in 2021. The purpose of these e-mail communications was to make responding easier and quicker for residents and the council and reduce paperwork. Sending early e-mails to Route 1 properties reduced the number of paper forms to be posted/hand delivered by over 9,500.
- 1.7 Appendix 1 shows the different routes for canvass communications which we are required to use. This shows the different stages and the communications which must be sent at these stages, until we receive a response (for Route 2 properties). Appendix 1 shows the diminishing number of contacts needed at each stage as we received responses.
- 1.8 In 2020 all forms were posted to properties due to Covid, with no personal canvassing at later stages (door-knocking) to follow up on non-responders.
- 1.9 In 2021 the majority of initial forms were delivered by hand via our own canvassers resulting in some savings, but as important we gain useful intelligence by visiting each property in person.

Data matching

- 1.10 The figures below demonstrate the added value of local data matching in addition to the national data matching which we are obliged to carry out. We are looking carefully at how we can make this more effective as the current system is very sensitive to address formats, commas in different places etc all of which must be identical to match.

National data matching 2021	National data matching 2020
86.36% elector match	86.58% elector match
72.81% Route 1 (57,474 properties)	71.4% Route 1 (55,364 properties)

After local data matching 2021	After local data matching 2020
94.18% elector match	92.76% elector match
81.13% Route 1 (64,083 properties)	80.00% Route 1 (61,972 properties)

1.11 The reformed canvass process we suspect means that we are not being notified of a number of changes to electors in Route 1 properties, so in a year when we have no planned elections the register is likely to be less accurate than previously as people are not always required to make a return. In a year when we have major elections, our mitigation will be to send letters to all properties early in the year to confirm registration information. Although this results in a spike of registration activity, we anticipate that the impact of a second spike, when the poll cards are sent out, should be lessened. This will certainly apply in 2023 for local elections and 2024 for parliamentary elections.

Response Channels and Totals

1.12 The table shown as Appendix 2 sets out the different response channels for 2020 and 2021. These are divided into route 1 and route 2 responses, that is;

- route 1 where we do not require a response because of data matching; and
- route 2 where we do, because data does not match.

1.13 Our preferred method for people to respond is to go online using the automated system and use the security codes we provided. We are confident that the much higher level of responses online from route 1 properties in 2021 is because of the e-mails that we sent that needed a response and it was easier for people to simply continue online to respond.

What Went Well

1.14 A number of things went well in the second year of the new canvass process, having learned lessons (good and bad) from the first year both our own practices and sharing experiences with other authorities. Main headlines are:

- a) The decision to use e-mails dramatically reduced the amount of paperwork to be handled and processed. We also sent route 2 reminder e-mails before canvass forms were printed to reduce this further
- b) We had updated e-mail addresses from people responding to canvass forms online so were able to e-mail many individual ITRs (Invitation to Register) and have continued to do this with the weekly ITR mailing. We have also been able to use data from the University of Chichester to e-mail students their ITRs
- c) Good social media promotion using Electoral Commission templates worked well in explaining the process to the public
- d) Canvass forms, either e-mailed or paper, required on online response resulting in a high proportion of online returns and very few complaints. Electors did have our contact details in case they were unable to respond online
- e) Very regular contact with all those involved in the canvass and close working with Arun Direct, ensured an efficient process. Arun Direct staff did most of the telephone canvassing making best use of their particular skills.
- f) Deliverers and personal canvassers were much keener to work than last year
- g) Data matching went more smoothly and was much quicker in the second year, both internal and at national level.

Lessons to be Learned

1.15 As in the previous section, this highlights the main points:

- a) Necessary to do more manual data-matching than we have done previously as a lot of electors who should have matched did not for formatting reasons, (e.g. use of commas). Allow more time for this earlier in the process in 2022 to reduce the numbers of route 2 contacts needed
- b) Some people in route 1 responded when there was no change, resulting in duplicated effort as these needed to be checked. We will consider the timing and wording of e-mails to reduce this for 2022
- c) We were unable to do in-depth face to face training with personal canvassers last year but are building it into our plans for 2022.
- d) Ongoing problems with the canvass on caravan sites and lack of access – need to consider this further
- e) Want to test use of SMS messaging for initial contacts next year
- f) Send Route 1 communications (both e-mails and CCAs) later in the process so that the information received is more accurate closer to the publication date of 1 December
- g) Send letters to all households early in 2023 to encourage up to date registration information.

Conclusion

1.16 The Electoral Services Team has worked hard in 2021, learning lessons from the first-year implementation of Canvass Reform in 2020, to deliver a smoother process for residents and the Electoral Services team themselves. There seems to have been recognition from most electors that the more digital approach works and is more efficient. The Electoral Services Team would like to express its thanks to the many other staff involved in helping to ensure the most accurate Electoral Register possible. I would particularly like to thank them as they continue to embrace change and seek to continuously improve their service to customers.

2. PROPOSAL(S):

To note the report

Agree that the Electoral Registration Officer continues to implement change as necessary to the 2022 Canvass process

3. OPTIONS:

N/A

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		✓
Relevant District Ward Councillors		✓
Other groups/persons (please specify)		✓

5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial		√
Legal	√	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment	√	
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		√
Sustainability		√
Asset Management/Property/Land		√
Technology		√
Other (please explain)		

6. IMPLICATIONS:

It is a legal requirement for the Authority to maintain an accurate and up-to-date Electoral Register for a number of reasons, in particular so that all our residents can carry out their democratic right to vote in all relevant polls

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

To understand how the new canvass process is bedding in, what advantages this brings and what areas need further improvement for 2022

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendices attached