

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<i>Consultation on the detailed proposals for the modernisation of the annual canvass in England, Scotland and Wales.</i>
<b>RELEVANT MEMBER:</b>	Governance & Electoral Arrangements Committee Chairman - Councillor Patrick Hogan
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>	<i>Head of Legal and Democratic Services</i>
<b>REPORT AUTHOR</b>	<i>Mat Bloxham , 01494 732143, Mathew.Bloxham@Southbucks.gov.uk</i>
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED</b>	<i>'Not Ward specific';</i>

### 1. Purpose of Report

Views are being sought by the Government on the overall structure of the proposed new canvass model. Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) have observed that the current annual canvass of electors is outdated and expensive to administer. It is also clear that the current process leads to confusion for some residents, who are not aware of the two stage process. Pilots of four different models for conducting the annual canvass were run in 2016 and 2017 in England, Scotland and Wales and a hybrid model has been developed, taking the successful elements of each.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That Members comment on the current consultation and note that responses are requested by 5pm on 30 November 2018.**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Chairman of the Governance and Electoral Arrangements Committee to submit a response to this consultation.**

### 2. Reasons for Recommendations

Member comments are sought on the Government's consultation on modernising the annual canvass which aims to streamline the canvass by targeting resources more efficiently and thereby reducing costs and avoiding the current requirement for all households to respond, when a majority of which will remain the same as the previous year.

### 3. Content of Report

3.1. Currently, all ERO's are required to conduct an annual canvass of all residential properties in the area for which they have a responsibility. In 2014, Individual Electoral Registration was introduced to replace the household registration system, where one person in every household was responsible for registering everyone who lived at that address. As online registration has been overwhelmingly successful, residents are now increasingly opting to register outside the canvass period. The canvass is only one of numerous ways that the ERO is able to update their electoral register.

- 3.2. The annual canvass is still a crucial means to help EROs identify additions and changes to the electoral register. Therefore the Government are not looking at abolishing the annual canvass period as a whole. The Government believes there is merit in enabling the EROs to more effectively target their resources towards the properties where the occupiers have changed and the electoral register needs to be updated.
- 3.3. The proposed new canvass model would incorporate a 'data discernment step' which would inform the ERO which properties have not changed household composition, based on data held on other sources. The ERO would then have the choice to follow one of two routes for each property. Route One – no change and Route Two where there is a change to information the ERO currently holds for that property. With Route One it would be expected that the ERO would contact the household at least once during the canvass, however the crucial difference is that if no response is received then the ERO would have the option to not follow up a response.
- 3.4. At the start of the canvass process, each ERO would be required to upload their electoral register to the Individual Registration Digital Service (IER DS) which is the system used to verify the identity of applicants to register to vote. A data matching exercise would then be undertaken, comparing each electoral register against national data set/s. The data matching process will include name, date of birth etc. and a Unique Property Reference Number.
- 3.5. In addition to the national match, ERO's would also have the discretion to match their electoral register against locally held datasets such as council tax. If the property is 'matched' it is deemed green and if an elector does not appear on the national or local data sets it would be marked red. ERO's would then be required to make up to three contacts with a household, the initial contact being a paper contact. In the event of a non-response, the ERO would then be required to send up to two further reminders with a mandatory personal contact stage (Route Two).
- 3.6. The Government propose that house to house enquiries should continue where an ERO does not receive the information required in Route Two. It is anticipated that only a quarter of households would need to go down the Route Two process.
- 3.7. In terms of empty properties if the ERO had sufficient details it could be marked as a green match or if not a red match and to then follow Route Two. A suggestion has also been made not to include the single occupancy tick box on registration application forms as it has caused confusion in the past.
- 3.8. There would be a Route Three process for multiple occupants at the same address where the ERO can require a single officer responsible for the property to provide a list of eligible residents at the property. The data provided would only inform the ERO who should or should not be on the register and the ERO would then issue Invitations to Register (ITRs) to those not currently registered. Certain property types such as care homes are already defined in legislation, where a single responsible officer could be identified.
- 3.9. If the ERO has the correct information on who lives in the property, whether they are a register or a potential or pending elector, the ERO should be able to focus

their resource on the registration rather than the canvass process and should be included in the data matching.

#### **4. Consultation**

The Government consultation is available via the following link:-

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

The questions in the consultation, and draft responses are attached as an Appendix to this report.

#### **5. Options (if any)**

This is a response to a consultation so no alternative options need to be considered. In terms of the pilots, all models had strengths and delivered cost savings.

#### **7. Corporate Implications**

The proposals for reform of the annual canvass should be more cost effective. Electoral administrators reported that the piloted models allowed them to re-focus their available resources on targeting citizens who were not currently registered, particularly those from under-registered groups with whom it is more difficult to engage. Whilst the new model would not require every household to respond there are safeguards in place to protect the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register. One of the risks identified was the proposal to use e-communication, as there is no clear connection between a property and an email address. Therefore specific confirmation would be required from the elector that their details are still correct to act as a safeguard. Future developments would allow for notification through a Council account.

#### **8. Links to Council Policy Objectives**

The recommendations in this report aim to support the delivery of the Council's Objective 1 (Efficient and effective customer focused services).

Key Objectives available here:

<http://www.southbucks.gov.uk/prioritiesandperformance>

#### **9. Next Steps**

A copy of the Council's draft response is attached for Member consideration. Delegated authority is sought to enable the draft responses to be amended following Member comments. It is the Government's intention to amend legislation governing the annual canvass during 2019 and that the changes be implemented from the start of 2020 annual canvass.