

2021 canvass in Great Britain: July - September | Electoral Commission Search
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November 2021 Purpose This report highlights the key findings from our engagement
with EROs from July to September 2021, and also draws out some examples of good
practice which have emerged. Summary Data provided by Electoral Registration Officers
(EROs) has shown that the allocation of properties to canvass routes after national
and local data matching has followed a similar pattern this year to last. 75% of
properties were allocated to Route 1 – the matched property route, which EROs use to
canvass properties where they are satisfied that there are no changes needed and have
no reason to believe that there are any additional electors to be added. 24% of
properties were allocated to Route 2, which is the route EROs use where they think
changes are needed to the register. Good progress is being reported with delivery of
the canvass as a whole, with the majority of EROs not having identified any
significant barriers to delivering this year's canvass (75%). However, of the
remainder of respondents, nearly two-thirds noted that budgeting/funding and/or
staffing have been particularly challenging elements of the canvass so far this year.
We will continue to engage with EROs and their teams over the remainder of the
canvass and throughout the period leading up to the May 2022 elections, and will next
report on the findings from this engagement and our analysis of the data and
information we are provided, following the publication of the annual registers.

Context This year's annual electoral registration canvass in Great Britain is the
second canvass since reforms to the process were introduced. Our report on the 2020
electoral registers highlighted that while COVID-19 presented particular challenges
for EROs and their teams, the first reformed canvass in Great Britain was largely
successful and the use of national and local data matching allowed EROs to target
their resources towards those households where changes were needed. In June 2021,
after consultation with the electoral community, we finalised new performance
standards for EROs , and have used these throughout the canvass period to inform our
engagement with EROs and their teams. During the period covered by this report – July
to September 2021 – we have focussed on the planning approach taken by EROs and on
the first stages of their work to administer the canvass, principally data matching,
the allocation of properties to canvass routes and initial contact with households.
We also asked all EROs to complete and return an ERO survey in September, to help us
to build up a picture of how the canvass is progressing as well as supporting our
engagement with EROs and their teams. Taken together, this has helped us to build up
a picture of how the canvass is progressing. We have produced this summary report to
highlight the key findings, as well as to draw out and share examples of good
practice which have emerged. Delivering the canvass Determining routes Each year,
before conducting the annual canvass, EROs must disclose data to the Minister for the
Cabinet Office as part of a national data matching exercise known as the national
data match step. EROs can also choose to carry out data matching of all or part of
their electoral register against locally held data sets, such as council tax or
housing benefit data. The purpose of the exercise is to help EROs to identify
properties where residents may have changed, to enable them to target their canvass
activity accordingly. The ERO will then follow one of three routes for each property:
Route 1 is the matched property route. It can be used to send canvass communications
to properties where EROs are satisfied that no changes are needed based on the
results of national and any local data matching. Households are only required to
respond where the information is incorrect. Route 2 is the unmatched property route.

All properties by default start by being allocated to Route 2, and EROs can use Route 2 for any property at any time. EROs must make a minimum of three contact attempts with a property and/or individuals at that property, unless a response has been received. Route 3 is the defined property route. It allows EROs to obtain the information required by the canvass for certain types of prescribed properties, such as care homes, from a responsible person, where one can be identified. Findings As shown in the chart below, following national and local data matching, respondents reported that, on average, three-quarters (75%) of their properties were allocated to Route 1. 24% were allocated to Route 2, and the remaining 1% were allocated to Route 3. This is similar to last year, where around a quarter of properties (26%) went down the Route 2 process. These findings are fairly consistent across nations: 76% of allocations in Scotland and Wales are Route 1, compared to 75% in England. Wales has a slightly higher proportion of Route 3 allocations (3% compared to 1% in England and Scotland). Similar to last year, there is variation across England, with Greater London having a much lower average proportion of Route 1 allocations (66%) than other regions, and the North East having the highest proportion of Route 1s (80%).

Proportion of properties in each route, by nation and region, 2020 and 2021

	Route 1 2020	Route 1 2021	Route 2 2020	Route 2 2021	Route 3 2020	Route 3 2021
England	73.4%	74.7%	25.7%	23.9%	0.9%	1.4%
North East	78.9%	79.8%	20.8%	19.3%	0.3%	1.0%
North West	73.4%	76.0%	25.9%	22.9%	0.8%	1.2%
Yorkshire and the Humber	73.2%	72.9%	25.4%	25.9%	1.4%	1.2%
East Midlands	74.9%	76.7%	23.8%	21.6%	1.3%	1.8%
West Midlands	73.4%	77.5%	25.3%	21.1%	1.4%	1.4%
East of England	76.9%	75.8%	22.5%	22.1%	0.6%	2.3%
London	66.4%	66.1%	32.6%	32.6%	1.0%	1.4%
South East	73.4%	74.8%	25.9%	24.0%	0.7%	1.2%
South West	75.8%	74.3%	23.7%	24.6%	0.5%	1.1%
Scotland	72.1%	75.8%	26.6%	23.1%	1.3%	1.3%
Wales	75.1%	75.7%	23.7%	21.8%	1.2%	2.8%
Great Britain	73.3%	74.8%	25.7%	23.7%	1.0%	1.5%

The overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) said that the results of the national data match step were as expected (an increase from last year, where 94% responded yes to this question). Among those who said they were not as expected, the majority indicated that they expected a higher match rate. In addition, when asked whether there were particular elements of the canvass which have been successful so far this year – the national data match was highlighted as a particular success – with just over two-thirds (67%) of respondents selecting this response. A majority (92%) of those who responded to the ERO survey said that they have carried out local data matching to help inform their allocation of properties to routes, which is an increase of 10 percentage points on last year where 82% of respondents said that they had carried out local data matching. Similarly to last year, the most popular source of data was council tax data, which was used by 94% of those who had carried out local data matching. The next most popular piece of data was housing benefit data, used by just under a third (32%) of respondents (an increase from 29% last year). We also asked EROs whether their approach to local data matching was the same as or different to last year: a majority (87%) of those who responded to the ERO survey said that their approach was the same. For those that decided to take a different approach, the responses suggest that they used a broader range of data sources and allowed more time to do data matching, earlier on in the process. As part of our analysis of data following the publication of the revised registers, we will be able to identify the impact that the local data matching step has had on the total figures for route allocations and how effective this step was. Challenges to delivering the canvass Through our ERO survey we found that the majority of respondents have not identified any significant barriers to deliver this year's canvass (75%). Of the remaining respondents, nearly two-thirds noted that budgeting/funding and/or staffing have been

particularly challenging elements of the canvass so far this year. Many of these responses identified that recruitment of canvassers has been challenging due to the ongoing concerns around COVID-19. Respondents also highlighted that the reduction in the number of properties requiring a personal canvass, which was an expected result of the reformed canvass, had also presented some challenges for the recruitment of canvassers. This was particularly noted in rural authorities where the geographical areas to be covered by canvassers had grown significantly, with far fewer individual visits required within an area. Personal canvass Almost two-thirds of respondents (63%) said that they plan to undertake the personal canvass element of the canvass via a combination of visits to properties and telephone canvassing, with over a quarter (28%) saying that they are carrying out visits only. We also found that there were a small number of EROs who were either planning on carrying out telephone canvassing only (8%) or not planning to do a personal canvass (1%). We have engaged with these EROs to understand the reasons for their proposed approach and what they are doing to minimise any risk to the accuracy and completeness of the registers. Many highlighted that COVID-19 is still presenting challenges, with an increase in infection rates a deterrent for visiting properties. Some also highlighted a local authority-wide no door knock policy, put in place in response to rising COVID-19 cases in their areas and not wanting to put staff at risk or to contravene wider safety messaging being used by the local authority. In addition, some of the respondents also highlighted local by-elections taking place in their areas which meant that resources were being prioritised for election activity, limiting the resources available to carry out house-to-house enquiries. For these EROs, we understand that plans are in place to mitigate the risks of not being able to visit properties. For many of those that are carrying out telephone canvassing only, this includes actively seeking to ensure that their database of contact numbers is as complete as possible. We also heard that some of these will be carrying out further data matching against locally held records, as well as issuing household notification letters in the spring ahead of the May polls. We will continue to engage with these EROs to understand the impact that might flow from being unable to carry out property visits to pursue responses. As part of our analysis of data following publication of the revised register we will look at the potential impact of this on the quality of the registers and the effectiveness of the canvass.

Plymouth City Council: increasing the number of contact phone numbers

Plymouth City Council have been taking steps to increase their database of contact phone numbers. This work has included inputting contact details collected from all HEFs and ITRs, which are checked and updated as necessary when new information is received from the household or as a result of checking against local data sets monthly (for example, any changes from Council Tax, Payroll and Parking). All residents accessing services online are asked for their email address and contact numbers (landline and mobile), which are then shared with the ERO. The use of the data is highlighted to the resident at the point the information is collected. All data gathering activities have been pre-agreed with the Council's Data Information Officer and are in line with GDPR. In the last year, Plymouth City Council electoral services team have been able to harvest and import contact details from pre-agreed local data sets – Council Tax, Payroll and Parking, to their electoral management system. This is in addition to the contact details that are collected through communications with residents by email and telephone directly to the electoral services team. Plymouth City Council now hold contact details for over 50% of their electorate – compared to less than 5% in January 2018

Measuring

impact As part of our work using the new performance standards throughout the canvass period, we have been supporting EROs with developing relevant and appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs), to help them set targets and baseline their performance. KPIs are important as they can show progress towards goals and targets, help identify improvement opportunities and support accountability to stakeholders by enabling reporting on performance. To support EROs in developing KPIs, we have made available KPI setting guidance , which includes practical information on how to develop, monitor and evaluate against KPIs to assist EROs with establishing a baseline of their own performance and setting targets which take into account their own specific circumstances. 45% of respondents to our ERO survey confirmed that they already have KPIs in place, and we have seen a variety of examples of these in the course of our engagement with EROs and their teams during the canvass. Cheshire West and Chester: considering impact Cheshire West and Chester: considering impact Cheshire West and Chester have developed a set of high-level measures that take into consideration the overall outcomes of the performance standards and the activities undertaken by the ERO. They are using the available data to identify areas where improvements may be made and to set benchmarks for their performance. We are continuing to work closely with them as they build from this to develop future targets for their KPIs, to support reporting on the success of their activities.

Measuring impact continued Amongst those who said that they do not currently have KPIs in place, there was a general view that whilst they are looking at their available data to understand what it is telling them and identifying where improvements can be made, they are doing so in an informal, undocumented way. We have found that EROs and their teams are generally keen to explore setting up KPIs, and we are committed to supporting them to get more formalised KPIs in place to help them to better understand and demonstrate the impact of their activity. We will continue to draw out and share further examples of KPIs being used by EROs which others might find helpful. We are also starting work with a sample group of EROs to develop a reporting template informed by examples of how they report on their KPIs and wider performance, and will make this available to assist other EROs and their teams with reporting on performance.