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| Non-Executive Report of the: General Purposes Committee 8 December 2020 |  |
| Report of: Asmat Hussain, Corporate Director, Governance | Classification: [Unrestricted] |
| Electoral Canvass 2020 | |

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| Originating Officer(s) | Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services |
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Summary

This information report informs the Committee of the 2020 revision of the electoral register published on the 1 December 2020 and the implications of canvass reform introduced for the first time and implemented over the four month canvass period.

The electoral register canvass has traditionally been carried out from July to the end of November with the revised register published on 1 December each year.

The council's appointed Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is Will Tuckley and this role is independent of the local authority and the duties and responsibilities associated with the role are personal to him.

The ERO has a duty in law under Section 9A of the Representation of the People Act 1983 to take all necessary steps to maintain the electoral register and to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that all those eligible - and no others - are registered in it.

Unfortunately, with the Covid pandemic the canvass had to be slightly curtailed with the final stage, where non responding properties who would ordinarily receive a personal visit from an electoral canvasser to ascertain those resident, has not taken place following careful consideration by the ERO that this exercise would compromise the safety of residents and also those recruited to carry out the exercise.

This report highlights the changes that have taken place and the statistical analysis of the three canvass reform routes now in place.

All members will receive the statistical analysis for their own wards after the publication date on the 1 December 2020.

Recommendations:

This report is an information item with no recommendations for the committee.

1. **REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

1.1. This report is an information item

2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

2.1 None.

3. **DETAILS OF REPORT**

3.1 The Annual Canvass 2020 was the first electoral canvass delivered under the canvass reform framework. While the principles of the electoral canvass remain the same, namely to establish the names and addresses of those who are entitled to register but not already registered and those who are on the register but no longer entitled to be registered at a particular address, the changes introduced allow Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) to better focus their resources on households more likely to have experienced a change in composition, i.e. an addition or deletion from the register is required.

3.2 Canvass Reform introduced a mandatory national data match, whereby the electoral register was uploaded to the Department of Work and Pensions and cross referenced against their records. The results of this national data matching, alongside local data matching using locally held data sources, identified those properties that were likely to have an unchanged household composition.

3.3 These results determined which of the three routes the property will take under the canvass reform framework.

3.4 There are 141,720 residential properties that have been canvassed

3.4 Route 1

- These are properties who have matched with DWP and the data indicates there are no changes in household composition
- Where an email address is held, electors at these properties were sent an email encouraging them to confirm whether the details the ERO holds are correct or not.
- One person from each household had to respond to this email, if no response is received, a Canvass Communication A (CCA) letter was sent to the property
- All other route 1 properties received a Canvass Communication A
- No response was required to this letter; however, households were able to use the letter to notify the ERO of any changes if necessary.
- 89,135 properties matched with DWP and marked as no changes
- The match rate was 62.90%
- 51,309 emails were sent to route one properties (36.20%)
- 37,826 CCA's were posted (26.69%)
- 13,501 responses were received via the internet to amend minor changes or to update the household (9.53%)

3.5 Route 2

- These are properties who did not match, and data indicated that there may be a change in household composition
- There are three stages to the canvass cycle under route 2 and a response is required from the household to end the canvass cycle for that property

- There are two forms which can be used at the discretion of the ERO
 - A Canvass Communication B (CCB) form
 - A Canvass Form
- Properties in route 2 must also receive a personal canvass if no response is received either by a telephone call or visit to the property by an electoral canvasser.
- 42,980 properties did not match exactly and were sent CCB's (30.33%)

3.6 Route 3

- Only defined properties can go through Route 3 and these were identified by the electoral services team, such as care homes and student accommodation buildings
- These properties were all contacted and a named "responsible person" ascertained who would be the contact for information required and that person willing an authorised to provide the information in respect of all residents at that property
- If the information cannot be obtained from the "responsible person", the property was changed to follow route 2
- 9,013 properties were identified as Route 3's and responsible persons allocated (6.36%)

3.6 All potential new electors identified have been sent an invitation to register (ITR), and where no response received, a chase cycle commences with reminders issued and where practicable a personal visit arranged.

3.7 The final statistics will be the first produced under the new legislation and are not comparable with previous figures produced because of the three routes now being used.

Data relating to the registered electorate will be completed on publication of the register on 1 December 2020 and circulated to all members once completed.

4. Local data matching

4.1 For the first time, and encouraged by the new legislative changes, local data matching was undertaken utilising data held by the council.

4.2 The Representation of the People Regulations 2001 contain three key provisions to enable EROs to access and obtain data information. The first is regulation 23, the 'Power to Require Information', the second is regulation 35, the 'Registration Officer's right to inspect certain records', and third is regulation 35A, 'Disclosure of certain local authorities' records.

4.3 Utilising the council's data sets enabled the ERO to match individuals with the existing electoral register database

- Education Authority - 7,248 matched
- Housing benefits - 8,397 matched
- Parking Services – 422 matched
- C/tax – 117,293 matched
- Payroll – 1,069 matched

5. Covid

5.1 The Covid pandemic presented logistical issues for the ERO particularly where electors have not responded to correspondence sent to their household. Ordinarily the ERO would recruit several electoral canvassers who would door knock nonresponding properties to try and ascertain who was resident and advice those at the property on how to register to vote or obtain further information on the doorstep. Covid and the unpredictability of the infection rates placed doubt in the viability of this final stage in the electoral canvass this year.

- 5.2 This did place the ERO in a quandary because the legislation, which was not changed, places a duty on him to undertake this door knocking process and would technically be in breach of the legislation if this final process was not undertaken. However, nationally questions were being asked as to the viability of this final process given the necessity to put the safety of the electorate and those recruited at the forefront of any decision.
- 5.3 The issue was also considered by the Electoral Commission and the Information Commissioner following the concerns expressed and whilst it was acknowledged that the legislation would not be changed provided an ERO could detail the rationale as to why door knocking was not undertaken then this was highly likely to be accepted during this national crisis. Given the circumstances at the time, with many canvassers also not willing to door knock anyway, the decision not to door knock was taken.
- 5.4 It was also announced by the Minister Chloe Smith, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to provide additional flexibility to EROs in the conduct of this year's annual canvass, that an ERO could delay the publication deadline for the final revised 2020 electoral register by two months from 1 December 2020 to 1 February 2021
- 5.5 No extension of the publication date was considered necessary and the register will be published on 1 December 2020.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL COMMENTS

- 7.1 This report is for information only and there are no legal implications arising from its contents

8. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 There are no equalities or diversity implications arising from this report

9. BEST VALUE (BV) IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no implications arising from this report

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1 There are no SAGE implications arising from this report.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The predominant risk is the reliance on the DWP data at Route 1 stage.
- 11.2 With Canvass Reform being introduced for the first time the fact that Tower Hamlets has a diverse transient population with a high churn rate and the canvass reform data matching exercise with DWP a single snapshot in time confirming thousands of data records who may not make amendments until very close to an election.
- 11.2 Whilst all these households received letters confirming that no change would be made on the register and the household would not need to complete a return these may be missed or dismissed so regular registration engagement will still be necessary as we approach polls each year.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE.

Appendices - None

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended) list of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report

- NONE.

Officer contact details for documents:

- Robert Curtis, Head of Electoral Services