



Register of Electors Canvass

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 To approve the reintroduction in 2005 of the personal canvass for the third stage of the annual canvass for the Register of Electors.
- 1.2 To note the policy of carrying-forward, for one year, the names of registered electors at households where no canvass form is returned.
- 1.3 To review canvass methods for 2006 and future years when details of changes to the legislation covering the registration of electors are known.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 Until 2002, the annual canvass for the Register of Electors comprised three stages:

Stage 1	Initial delivery of a canvass form to every household in Derby
Stage 2	Delivery of a second reminder form to all households that did not respond to Stage 1
Stage 3	Personal canvass of households that did not respond to Stage 2. This involved a personal visit to the premises by the canvasser to get the form completed and signed.
- 2.2 Canvassers were paid a flat fee per form delivered for Stages 1 and 2. For the personal canvass at Stage 3, they were required to make up to two visits to the premises and were only paid for successful visits, i.e. where contact was made and the form completed, or the form was left and subsequently returned.
- 2.3 From the 2003 canvass, the Stage 3 personal canvass was discontinued. This was done:
 - a) as one of a number of actions to reduce expenditure to meet spending targets within Corporate Services. These actions were approved by full Council as part of the budget setting process for 2003/04.
 - b) to address health and safety concerns amongst canvassers.
- 2.4 It was acknowledged, when the proposal was made, that discontinuing the personal canvass could reduce the response rate. This is borne out in the following table:

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Stage 1	57.87%	59.64%	59.64%	56.82%	57.20%
Stage 2	12.73%	14.83%	14.84%	18.04%	15.01%
Stage 3	26.84%	16.85%	16.43%	n/a	n/a
Total	97.44%	91.32%	90.91%	74.86%	72.21%

2.5 In common with many other authorities, Derby has for many years operated a practice of carrying forward names for one year. Under this policy, where no form is returned from a household, the electors registered at that address remain registered for another year and are only removed from the Register if no form is returned for a second, consecutive year. This has been recommended in Government guidance and is now part of electoral legislation.

2.6 The nationwide fall in the return of canvass forms, combined with the withdrawal of our personal canvass of non-responders, has resulted in a marked reduction in the electorate as shown below:

Year	Personal Canvass	Electorate
2000	Yes	171,385
2001	Yes	170,082
2002	Yes	169,471
2003	No	165,524
2004	No	154,683

Note – the electorate figure is at 1 December following the canvass.

2.7 Because of concerns over the falling electorate and the potential for significant numbers of Derby residents to be disenfranchised through deletions from the Register, follow-up canvasses were carried out in February 2004 and February 2005. This involved sending a third form, by post, to all households that had not responded to Stage 2 in the previous year's canvass. The form was accompanied by a letter stressing the importance of being registered for the elections in those years. 'New' electors were added to the Register through the rolling registration procedure. 2,889 electors were added in 2004 and 4,389 in 2005.

2.8 As Electoral Registration Officer, I am required, by the Representation of the People Act 2000, to carry out an annual canvass for the Register of Electors and to make such house to house inquiries as I think fit where no canvass form is reformed. I believe that the follow-up canvasses, carried out in January 2004 and January 2005, whilst beneficial, did not increase the overall response rate to the levels I would wish. I therefore feel that the third stage personal canvass should be reinstated this year on a trial basis.

2.9 The independent Electoral Commission has published a series of reports which together amount to a wide-ranging review of our electoral arrangements. These are 'Voting for Change' (2003), 'Delivering Democracy' (2004) and 'Securing the Vote' (2005). The Government has responded with a policy paper on electoral administration produced by the Department for Constitutional Affairs. A Bill is to be introduced in this session of Parliament. One of the likely proposals is to introduce a system of individual registration from the 2006 canvass. This would represent a major change to the current canvass arrangements.

- 2.10 Given the pending legislative changes, I propose that a third stage personal canvass be introduced for the 2005 canvass and the position reviewed for canvasses in 2006 and future years when the details of the new legislation are known.
- 2.11 A risk assessment will be carried out on the canvassers' duties and appropriate health and safety training or advice given.

For more information contact:	Steve Dunning 01332 255462 email steve.dunning@derby.gov.uk
Background papers:	Electoral registration statistics
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. The additional cost of a third stage personal canvass is estimated at £20,000. This can be contained within the current year's Revenue Budget provision for the conduct of elections as, apart from the by elections in Abbey and Derwent Wards, there are no Council elections in 2005/06. Provision will have to be made in future year's Revenue Budgets for any changes to the registration system.

Legal

- 2.1 The statutory provisions relating to the annual canvass for the Register of Electors are contained in the Representation of the People Acts 1883 and 2000. They provide for:
 - an annual canvass, using a prescribed form or similar, of all residence in the authority's area to ascertain the names of all people entitled to be registered as electors as at 15 October
 - house to house inquiries to supplement information on a form or where no form has been received
 - publication of the new Register on 1 December each year showing all electors entitled to be registered following the canvass.
- 2.2 The provisions relating to the retention and removal of electors, where no form has been received, are set out in the Representation of People Regulations 2001. There is no provision allowing carry-forward, for more than one year, of electors registered at a property which does not return a canvass form.
- 2.3 The Electoral Commission reports and the Department for Constitutional Affairs policy paper can be found on the Commission web site at www.electoralcommission.gov.uk

Personnel

- 3.1 The canvassers of the Register of Electors are appointed annually. Most are Council employees who carry out the canvass duties as an additional employment in their own time.
- 3.2 A risk assessment will be carried out on the revised duties and appropriate health and safety training or advice given. This will address the concerns expressed by canvassers when the personal canvass was last used.

Equalities Impact

4. An explanatory leaflet is issued with every canvass form. It is translated into the principal ethnic minority languages and made available in Braille and large print format.

Corporate Objectives and Priorities for Change

5. None directly arising.