



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities



Government  
Social Research

# **Evaluation of the Modern Electoral Registration Programme**

2022 Report

April 2023

Electoral Research & Analysis Division



© Crown copyright, 2022

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown. You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence visit

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

This document/publication is also available on our website at [www.gov.uk/dluhc](http://www.gov.uk/dluhc)

If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication, write to us at [correspondence@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:correspondence@levellingup.gov.uk) or

Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF  
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

For all our latest news and updates follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/luhc>

April 2023

## Contents

Evaluation of the Modern Electoral Registration Programme .....	1
Contents .....	3
Overview .....	5
Executive Summary .....	6
Approach .....	9
Research Strand 1: Qualitative Research .....	9
Sampling Approach .....	9
Thematic analysis .....	9
Research Strand 2: Electoral Services Experience Survey .....	10
Limitations .....	11
Net satisfaction change .....	11
Section A: Electoral Services Experience .....	14
Question 1: How satisfied were you with the level of discretion you and your team had to run a tailored canvass to suit your local area under the second year of the reformed annual canvass? ..	14
Question 2: How satisfied were you that the second year of the reformed annual canvass process allowed your team to exercise innovation and improvement? .....	15
Question 3: How effectively could you and your team target your time and resources under the second year of the reformed annual canvass requirements? .....	17
Question 4: How satisfied were you with the processes for the national data match under the second year of the reformed annual canvass? .....	18
Question 5: How satisfied were you with the Route 1 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass? .....	20
Question 6: How satisfied were you with the Route 2 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass? .....	21
Question 7: In your opinion, how effective is the door knock as part of the canvass process? .....	22
Question 8: How satisfied were you with the Route 3 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass? .....	24
Question 9: Overall, how satisfied were you and your team with the second year of the reformed annual canvass? .....	25
Section B: Electoral Registers .....	28
Question 10: How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to safeguard the completeness of your electoral register? .....	28
Question 11: How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to safeguard the accuracy of your electoral register? .....	29
Question 12: How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to maintain the security and integrity of your electoral register? .....	30
Section C: Elector Experience .....	32

Question 13: How satisfied were you that the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes were simple and clear for citizens?.....	32
Question 14: Frequency of different categories of correspondence around the canvass process..	33
Question 15: In your opinion, how satisfied do you think citizens were with the second year of the reformed annual canvass process?.....	35
Section D: Management Information and EMS .....	38
Question 16: How satisfied were you that the data and statistics during the canvass period allowed you to make informed decisions on how to conduct the second year of the reformed annual canvass in your area? .....	38
Question 17: How effectively did you feel you could evaluate the effectiveness of the canvass under the current Management Information (second year of the reformed canvass)?.....	39
Section E: 2021 In Context .....	40
Section F: Moving Forward .....	41
Conclusion.....	42

## Overview

This publication reports on research on the second year of the reformed annual electoral canvass, which took place in 2021 ahead of the publication of the revised register on December 1, 2021. This report combines two research products: qualitative research with Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and electoral administrators conducted between December 2021 and February 2022, and a survey of electoral administrators conducted in May 2020 (Baseline), 2021 (Year 1), and 2022 (Year 2) to provide an overview of changes in satisfaction compared with the pre-reform canvass.

The annual canvass gathers information on potential additions and changes to, and deletions from, the register. The new model adds a data matching step, where the registers are compared with data held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). EROs are also able to compare their registers against locally held data, such as council tax. Data matching informs EROs where there are likely to be changes to household composition and therefore to the register and allows them to put properties into different routes based on this. Route 1, the matched properties route, is used for properties where the data indicates no change in household composition. Route 2, the unmatched properties route, is used for properties where data matching has highlighted a potential change to the information the ERO holds for the property and therefore requires different and more steps to be followed by the ERO. The final route, Route 3 – the defined properties route, is used for property types which do not fit clearly within Routes 1 and 2 and can include places such as residential care homes and student halls of residence. The reformed canvass also gives much greater flexibility for how EROs choose to communicate with electors.

This research contributes to the evaluation of the Modern Electoral Registration Programme (MERP). MERP was introduced by the UK, Scottish, and Welsh governments to create a more efficient registration system, make the process simple and clear for citizens, and give EROs more discretion, whilst maintaining completeness and accuracy of the registers. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is evaluating MERP against four key themes:

- Theme 1: Maintain the completeness and accuracy of the registers
- Theme 2: Create efficiencies in the registration system
- Theme 3: Improve the citizen experience
- Theme 4: Improve the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) experience

Although this research contributes to findings across all themes, it was designed to focus on themes 3 and 4: citizen experience and ERO experience. Whilst the research strands included in this report also touch on electoral service teams' views on the impact of canvass reform on completeness and accuracy along with efficiencies, this relates only to the opinions of the participants and not quantitative findings.

The Electoral Commission conducts regular completeness and accuracy research, the next study is due to be completed in 2023. To study the potential impact of canvass reform on completeness and accuracy in the interim, high-level analysis of electoral registration data has been completed by the Electoral Commission<sup>1</sup> (2021 data), which we will refer to throughout the report. Where relevant to opinions voiced in qualitative research by participants, quantitative findings from the most recent analysis by the Electoral Commission have been included. It is therefore recommended that the Electoral Commission report is read in conjunction with this one.

In 2024, we will publish a final report which synthesises findings from across the themes of the evaluation and will include research covering the third year of canvass reform, as well as research into completeness and accuracy.

## Executive Summary

### Section A: Electoral Services (ES) Experience

Overall administrators were relatively satisfied with the second year of canvass reform. Many felt more confident with the process and trialed new approaches as a result.

**Tailoring and flexibility:** Many administrators found they had a greater amount of flexibility than pre-reform. Several had adapted their methods from the first year of the reformed canvass based on what they had found to work well and planned to continue to review the success of processes going forward. However, some felt they still were limited by their Electoral Management Software (EMS)<sup>2</sup> systems' functionality or by some legislative requirements of the canvass.

**Innovation and improvement:** Administrators felt more familiar with innovative methods of communication and using datasets and felt able to make better use of them than in the first year of the reformed canvass. Some would still like to be able to take their ability to innovate further, for example being able to contact anyone through e-comms.

**Time and resource:** The introduction of routes and the reduction in printing, postage, and administrative work for Route 1 continued to be seen as cost effective for many administrators, allowing them to target their time and resources where there were more likely to be changes. However, some felt this cost saving may be at the detriment of register quality.

**Data matching:** The national data match was praised for being quick, easy, and effective; however, some respondents were concerned about data accuracy. Administrators had learnt to allow more time for the local data match and would like to continue to make the most of this through accessing more datasets and evaluating the most suitable ones to use.

**Routes 1 and 2:** Whilst some administrators were concerned about the impact of Route 1 on register quality, many welcomed the reduced administrative burden which allowed them to focus on Route 2. However, many would like further discretion in Route 2, particularly around

---

<sup>1</sup> Electoral Commission (2022). *Electoral registration in Great Britain in 2021*. Available at: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/electoral-registration-great-britain-2021>

<sup>2</sup> Electoral Management Software (EMS) refers to election and electoral registration software provided by external suppliers to support electoral services teams to manage electoral processes.

the door knock which administrators believed was highly cost and resource intensive for limited benefit.

**Route 3:** Many continued to work outside of the EMS with Route 3, either due to limited in-built functionality or because they had always worked that way. In many cases, success was dependent on existing relationships with the Senior Responsible Officer of Route 3 properties, and those without relationships in place had more difficulty receiving the data they needed.

## Section B: Electoral Registers

**Completeness and accuracy:** Several administrators felt their registers were no less complete and accurate than pre-reform, and some who had run elections in 2021 felt this has been confirmed. However, others continued to have concerns that Route 1 poses a risk for missing changes, particularly adding attainers<sup>3</sup>, and this was supported by the number of changes from Household Notification Letters (HNLs) sent in January. Many still believed a UK General Election would be the best test of register quality. Research on electoral registration cannot yet draw conclusions on completeness and accuracy, but there is some quantitative evidence that supports these concerns. For example, the Electoral Commission's review of electoral registration in 2021 reported issues with lags in the data matching process, necessary changes to electors' details potentially not reflected on the registers, and the under-registration of attainers.

**Security and integrity:** Many administrators had no real concerns about canvass reform in relation to security and integrity. Some felt the ability to scrutinise data in more detail improved register integrity, whilst others felt the lack of contact with Route 1 may pose a risk. Tablet canvassing, and the general reduction in posted forms, were seen as positive in terms of data security.

## Section C: Citizen Experience

**Understanding:** Administrators felt there had been some improvement in understanding from the previous year, possibly due to a bedding in of new canvass processes. The two-stage registration process continued to be confusing for electors, although this was not related to canvass reform. Some felt the Route split continued to be confusing for electors and had put in place mitigations to help clarify this where possible.

**Satisfaction:** The key issue for citizens, according to administrators, was the amount of correspondence received around voting and elections. Many reported that citizens complained about the cost of the canvass. Citizens continued to question whether e-comms were genuine, although this was reported to have reduced since it was first introduced.

## Section D: Management Information

**EMS:** Some administrators felt there had been an improvement in their EMS since the first year of canvass reform, which was welcomed. Some administrators voiced concerns that they didn't feel the statistics they could access were accurate, whilst others struggled to interpret the data and would use alternatives to make decisions about the canvass.

**Reporting:** Overall, administrators felt there were more reports from their EMS available to them, although some wanted this to go further and be able to access bespoke reports to

---

<sup>3</sup> An attainer is someone who is not yet old enough to vote but will achieve the required voting age for certain types of polls by the end of the twelve months following the 1 December after the relevant date.

evaluate the canvass fully. Others felt that it was impossible to properly evaluate the success of the canvass post-reform until a UK General Election.

### **The Canvass in Context**

**Covid-19:** Due to the impact of Covid-19 during the 2020 canvass, many felt that 2021 was the first 'proper' canvass post-reform. Covid-19 had a considerably smaller impact in 2021, although administrators found that it still impacted the door knock, for example with canvasser recruitment, as well as forward-planning when restrictions were regularly changing.

**Elections:** Some administrators had elections in May 2021. These were generally viewed positively in relation to canvass reform, as it meant the register was more up-to-date than otherwise at the start of the canvass process and it also enabled administrators to test the quality of the registers in the run up to their elections.

### **Moving Forward**

Whilst many administrators were positive about canvass reform, in line with the previous year's research, several believed that more could be done to further improve the electoral service team and citizen experiences. Within their own teams, administrators hoped to evaluate the success of previous canvasses to select the most suitable approaches for their electorate going forward. More widely, administrators would like to see further functionality within their EMS and even more discretion about what processes should be carried out to create a successful and efficient canvass. Generally, administrators viewed the issue of functionality as something they needed to negotiate with their suppliers, particularly by grouping together with other councils to strengthen their case.



# Approach

## Research Strand 1: Qualitative Research

There were two methods of qualitative research, each conducted in-house by social researchers from Elections Research and Analysis. This follows the same approach to qualitative research (interviews and focus groups with electoral teams), from Year 1 of the evaluation:

1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with electoral administrators from 18 local authorities across England, Scotland, and Wales (held from December 2021 to February 2022).
2. Two focus groups with seven EROs from England and Scotland (held in February 2022).

### Sampling Approach

Purposive sampling was used to gather respondents across the following three areas of focus:

- Proportion of Route 3 properties - This was selected as a characteristic of interest as Route 3 was a common concern for participants in the first year of qualitative research. Out of the 20 authorities with the highest proportion of Route 3 properties (all of whom had over 4%), 5 participated in the research.
- Number of register additions and deletions - This was selected to gather further administrator insight on the impact of canvass reform on completeness and accuracy. Besides reflecting the nature of the area, i.e., high population churn, these major changes can act as indicators of the quality of the electoral register. It can be assumed that a higher number of changes represents a more accurate register. Between 5 and 10 participating authorities were intended to have some of the highest proportions of additions and deletions out of the authorities for whom data was available.
- Re-sampling local authorities from the 2021 (Year 1) research. This was selected as a characteristic of interest to add a longitudinal element to the interviews, understanding how views towards canvass reform may change over time. A maximum of 5 authorities who previously participated were included in the Year 2 sample, and these were selected to ensure broad representation across authority characteristics.

In addition, the sample was selected with the aim of having broad representation of authority demographics including region, rural/urban classifications, average elector age, deprivation, and net migration. This sampling approach mirrors the Year 1 research but with additional characteristics of interest based on previous findings.

### Thematic analysis

Recordings of the interviews and focus groups were transcribed by an external contractor. Transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis, where data were organised into codes and higher-order themes.

## Research Strand 2: Electoral Services Experience Survey

The Electoral Services (ES) Experience Survey was designed to gather feedback from Electoral Registration Officers and those in electoral service teams on their experience of the second year of the reformed annual canvass. Only one response per local authority / Valuation Joint Board (LA/VJB) was allowed, from someone familiar with the canvass process. The survey ran from 23 May 2022 to 6 July 2022, a similar timeframe to the 2020 (baseline) and 2021 (Year 1) survey. Overall, 257 LAs/VJBs responded to the survey from a total of 364 across Great Britain (excluding Northern Ireland); a response rate of 71%. This is higher than the response rate in the 2020 and 2021 surveys, which were 62% and 54% respectively.

### Data Cleaning

The data received from the survey was cleaned prior to analysis, which included the removal of nine duplicate responses (3.5%). There was one response which did not include an authority name; however, as there was no other missing data for this response and it would likely have very little or no impact on the findings, this response was kept in the data set.

### Analysis and reporting

The majority of the questions asked the participants to rate level of satisfaction with different aspects of canvass reform, ranging from very satisfied, to very dissatisfied. This publication reports on 'overall satisfaction', which refers to the proportion of respondents who selected either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied', and 'overall dissatisfaction', which refers to the proportion of respondents who selected 'very dissatisfied' or 'dissatisfied'.

The term 'net satisfaction' is also used, which refers to the proportion of respondents who were overall satisfied minus the proportion of respondents who were overall dissatisfied. A positive net satisfaction demonstrates that a greater proportion of respondents were overall satisfied than were overall dissatisfied, whilst a negative net satisfaction demonstrates a greater proportion of respondents were overall dissatisfied than overall satisfied. The more positive or negative these values, the greater the difference between the proportion of respondent overall satisfaction and overall dissatisfaction. For the questions that measured levels of effectiveness (Q3, Q17 and Q19), rather than satisfaction, the responses are reported as net effectiveness.

For each survey question, z-scores were calculated to test whether the difference in overall satisfaction and overall dissatisfaction between the Year 1 and Year 2 surveys was statistically significant. Unless stated otherwise, all differences reported were not statistically significant.

For each survey question, respondents also had the opportunity to provide further detail to supplement their answer in an open textbox. These were analysed using thematic analysis to code responses, which were then organised into themes and used to supplement both survey and qualitative research findings.

## Limitations

There are limitations in both methods of research which should be considered alongside the findings of this report. The qualitative research represents only a very small proportion of local authorities, and whilst care has been taken to include authorities with a range of demographics, findings cannot be generalised to all authorities.

Whilst there was a relatively high response rate for the survey, it should be noted that there may be response bias with those who responded having particularly strong views and therefore being more motivated to take part.

Both methods of research are also reliant on participants' retrospective opinion. There is a risk that respondents do not remember experiences accurately or allow other contextual factors to impact their thoughts on the reformed canvass.

Whilst we have compared survey findings across years, it should be noted that this cannot be explicitly considered longitudinal data. Many authorities did not complete the survey each year, and for those that did it is plausible with staff turnover that the respondent differed each year. Samples for each year of the survey are therefore treated independently.

## Research Findings

### Net satisfaction change

The majority of questions in the survey have been asked across the three survey waves, which allows us to compare net satisfaction (as defined above) in relation to different aspects of the canvass, over time. Overall, respondents showed significant increases in net satisfaction for most questions in comparison to pre-reform; in many cases these were notably large. The only exception was for the two questions on Management Information and satisfaction with data and statistics during the annual canvass (Q.16 and Q.17), which saw a small decrease in net satisfaction from pre-reform, but also a considerable increase from Year 1.

The largest increase in net satisfaction between Year 1 (following the first year of canvass reform) and Year 2 (following the second year of canvass reform) was around Management Information (Q4), which suggests that whilst it is still not viewed as favourably as pre-reform, this is improving year on year. This was echoed in the qualitative data. The largest decreases in net satisfaction between Year 1 and Year 2 were for citizen satisfaction (Q15) and Electoral Service Team satisfaction (Q9); this may be due to more authorities undertaking a personal canvass, including door-knocking, in Year 2 due to easing of Covid restrictions, a process which was viewed very unfavourably in qualitative responses in terms of reaching citizens and in terms of value for money. However, it is important to note that within the qualitative research, respondents were overall positive about the second year of the reformed canvass (Q9).

**Table 1: Net satisfaction responses to each question in Year 2, and compared to Year 1 and Baseline**

Question	Year 2	Net Satisfaction Change (percentage points) From Year 1	Net Satisfaction Change (percentage points) From Baseline
<b>Q1</b> How satisfied were you with the level of discretion you and your team had to run a tailored canvass to suit your local area under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?	81.7%	-0.8pp	+67.1pp
<b>Q2</b> How satisfied were you that the second year of the reformed annual canvass process allowed your team to exercise innovation and improvement?	67.3%	-3.7pp	+58.3pp
<b>Q3</b> How effectively could you and your team target your time and resources under the second year of the reformed annual canvass requirements?	77.8%	+0.8pp	+32.1pp
<b>Q4</b> How satisfied were you with the processes for the national data match under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?	97.7%	+2.7pp	N/A
<b>Q5</b> How satisfied were you with the Route 1 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?	75.1%	-5.9pp	N/A
<b>Q6</b> How satisfied were you with the Route 2 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?	80.2%	+2.7pp	N/A
<b>Q7</b> In your opinion, how effective is the door knock as part of the canvass process?	-18.7%	N/A	N/A
<b>Q8</b> How satisfied were you with the Route 3 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?	59.5%	+4.0pp	N/A
<b>Q9</b> Overall, how satisfied were you and your team with the second year of the reformed annual canvass?	80.2%	-9.8pp	+60.8pp
<b>Q10</b> How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to safeguard the completeness of your electoral register?	52.1%	-5.4pp	+7.3pp
<b>Q11</b> How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to safeguard the accuracy of your electoral register?	52.9%	-4.1pp	+3.3pp
<b>Q12</b> How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to maintain the security and integrity of your electoral register (for	79.4%	-2.6pp	+16.9pp

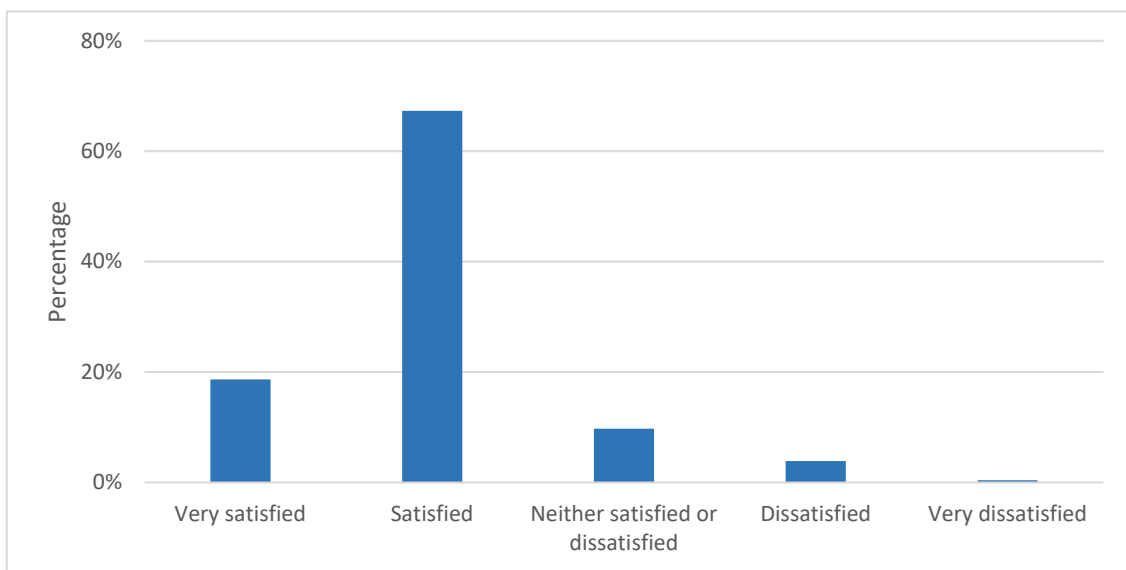
example security and integrity around collation of the information, and identifying fraudulent applications)?			
<b>Q13</b> How satisfied were you that the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes were simple and clear for citizens?	49.4%	-4.1pp	+58.0pp
<b>Q14</b> Please select the frequency with which you receive the following categories of correspondence from citizens about pre-reform annual canvass processes.	See Section C for a breakdown of this question.	N/A	N/A
<b>Q15</b> In your opinion, how satisfied do you think citizens were with the second year of the reformed annual canvass process?	33.1%	-14.4pp	+32.6pp
<b>Q16</b> How satisfied were you that the data and statistics during the canvass period allowed you to make informed decisions on how to conduct the second year of the reformed annual canvass in your area?	47.9%	+19.4pp	-1.7pp
<b>Q17</b> How effectively did you feel you could evaluate the effectiveness of the canvass under the current Management Information (second year of the reformed canvass)?	38.9%	+20.4pp	-9.4pp

## Section A: Electoral Services Experience

**Question 1: How satisfied were you with the level of discretion you and your team had to run a tailored canvass to suit your local area under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?**

For this question, the net satisfaction was 81.7%, representing an increase of 67.1 percentage points from baseline and a small decrease of 0.8 percentage points from Year 1. This decrease was due to fewer respondents reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied (86.0% in Year 2 compared to 87.0% in Year 1), as opposed to increased levels of overall dissatisfaction (4.5% in Year 2 compared to 4.3% in Year 1).

**Figure 1: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q1A**



Responsibilities for aspects, such as a tailored canvass, related to the reformed annual canvass vary. The Electoral Commission are responsible for producing guidance and the forms sent to electors, EROs are responsible for procuring their EMS', and DLUHC are responsible for running the DWP data matching process and for funding the EMS changes required as part of the canvass reform.

Survey respondents and qualitative participants felt the level of discretion had improved from pre-reform and they were able to make changes after reviewing the success of methods during Year 1. Respondents liked the flexibility to make changes such as the type and order of communication, as well as when to conduct different elements of the canvass. Qualitative participants also liked the fact the route split enabled them to focus their resources in areas where they were needed most.

However, both methods of research found some limitations in the level of discretion that could be applied. Like the first year of the reformed canvass, it was thought the EMS limited flexibility. Some examples included the ability to move properties between routes based on updated data or being able to tailor the canvass to specific areas within their authority. Several survey respondents stated they would like further discretion to be able to fully tailor the annual canvass to suit their local area and electorate, with certain processes limiting this. One

example of this is the door knock, which multiple respondents said was impractical for rural areas.

Other survey respondents felt the forms sent to electors, and the wording on them, were too prescribed and often not understood. However, in the qualitative research there was evidence of respondents using creativity across different methods of communication to overcome these challenges – for example, using different coloured forms to help electors differentiate between them.

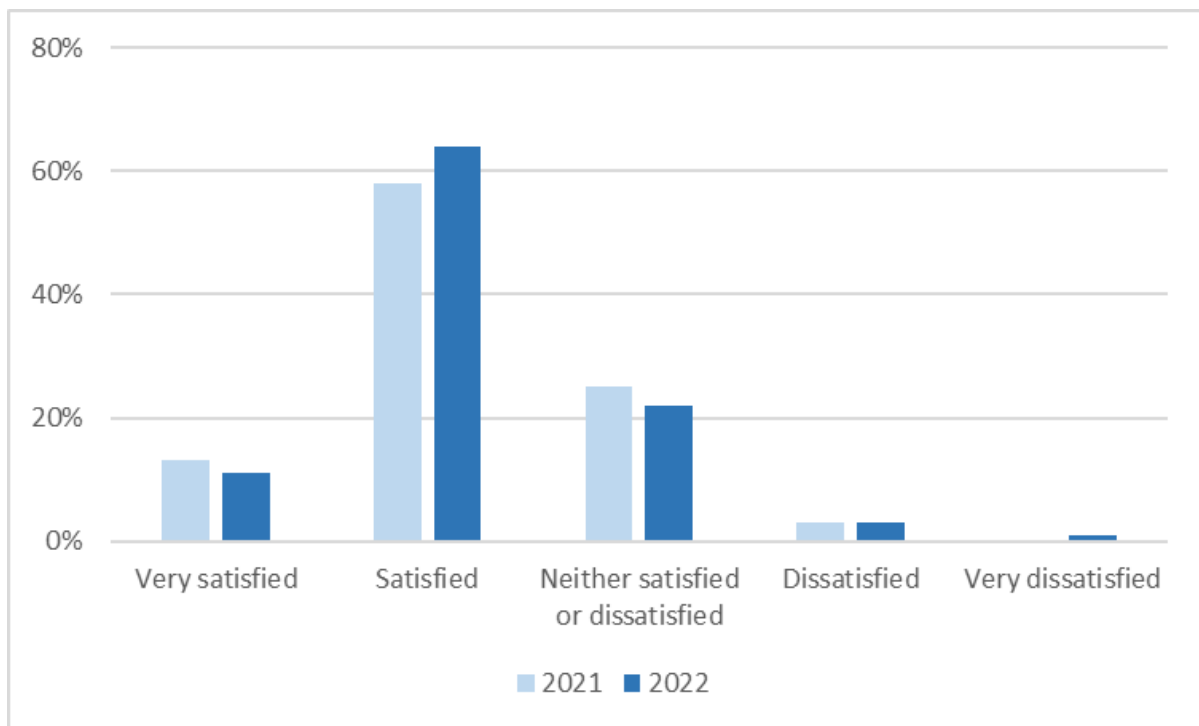
There was also limited evidence in the qualitative research of participants tailoring to specific areas within their authority. Some said it was too soon and they had not yet had enough experience with the reformed canvass to achieve this. Whilst many respondents planned to increasingly tailor to specific areas in their authorities, more work was required to plan this. There was also the concern that it risks them generalising the demographics of an area and missing electors who don't fit into such patterns.

*“As we get to know more, we will get to do more... subdivide other little groups and little pockets of areas...in a slightly different way due to the demographic of that area, or the general demographics of that area. Unfortunately, I think there is an element that... if we're doing it on areas, not everyone in that area fits that demographic.”*

#### **Question 2: How satisfied were you that the second year of the reformed annual canvass process allowed your team to exercise innovation and improvement?**

The net satisfaction score was +67.3%, representing an increase of 58.3 percentage points from pre-reform but a decrease of 3.7 percentage points from 2021. This stemmed from a decrease in the proportion of respondents who reported being satisfied or very satisfied (75% in 2021 compared to 70.8% in 2022), whilst there was no change in overall dissatisfaction (3.5% in 2021 and 2022).

**Figure 2: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q2**



Several survey respondents had used their findings and experience from the previous year to improve the latest canvass. Those who had used local data matching and e-comms in 2020 could make better use of them, whilst for others these were trialled successfully in 2021. Others explained that the reformed canvass made the process more manageable for small teams, allowing them to focus their costs and resources on improving areas such as communications and engagement strategies. In addition, pushing electors to respond electronically allowed for cost and time savings, as well as the ability to be more reactive to elector responses.

*“It’s fantastic to use e-comms. It gets people and they respond really quickly... and lots of the time, when you send that email communication, they have to come back with an email rather than a phone call whereas, when you send out paper, they often come back with a phone call, so it means we’re inundated with phone calls. And, when it’s a small team, that can be quite challenging.”*

The qualitative research focused on innovative communications. E-comms were used by many participants and survey respondents, and many teams looked to build on their success or explore new options available to them having had one run through of the reformed canvass. One rural authority saw the benefit of using it to reach more people over a large area.

*“This year we did send emails to anyone who had an email address... it’s good, plus it suits us given... our electors are spread out significantly [across] rural areas and remote areas.”*

However, some survey respondents noted that some electors may not have the means to respond to an email or text message, limiting those who could be reached by e-comms.



Some survey respondents felt they were still limited in their ability to innovate due to aspects of the legislation, including restrictions in the wording and design of some forms, as well as who could be contacted by e-comms. Other external factors included being short staffed, having elections, or Covid-19 restrictions. Qualitative participants suggested a lack of contact details limited their ability to use e-comms, but that they will look to expand the contact details they hold for electors, especially in certain groups, to take advantage of the new methods available to them in subsequent canvasses.

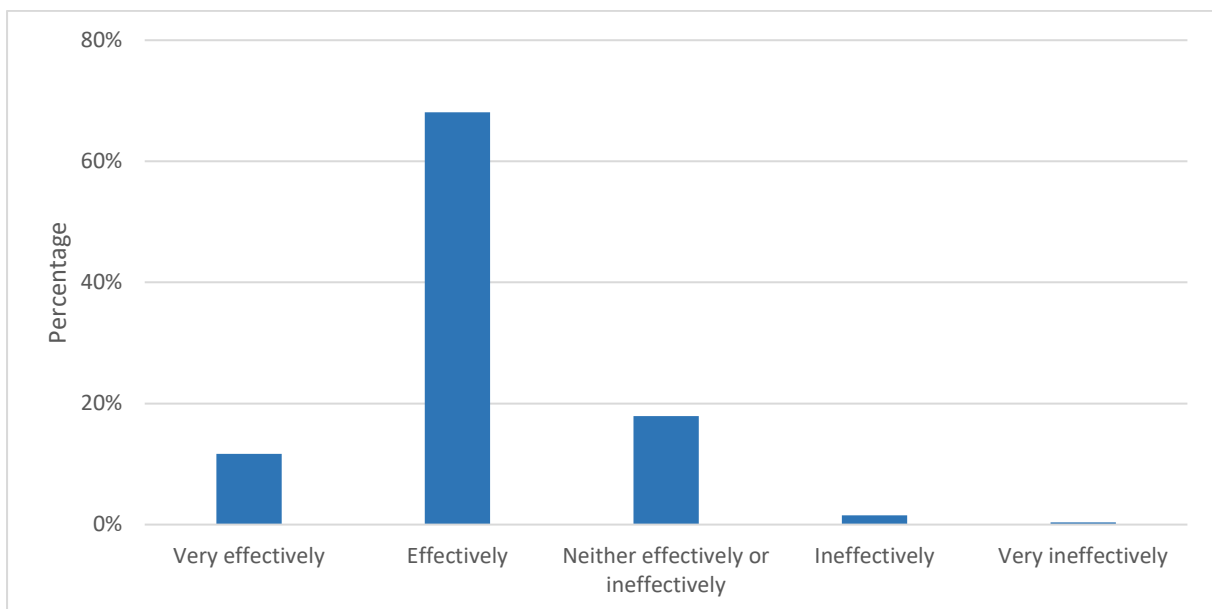
*“We probably don’t hold as many contact details as we’d like on the register. What we’ve discussed is whether we can use data held by other council departments to enhance that...”*

Finally, some qualitative participants felt the quality of e-comms responses was sometimes worse than traditional response methods. For example, one participant mentioned that electors cannot write notes on online responses as they can on the paper forms, they cannot include the same narratives that would provide administrators with useful information.

**Question 3: How effectively could you and your team target your time and resources under the second year of the reformed annual canvass requirements?**

The net effectiveness for question 3 was +77.8%, a similar figure to 2021 which was 77.0% and an increase of 32.1 percentage points from pre-reform. This included decreases in the proportion who responded ineffectively or very ineffectively (from 3.0% in 2021 to 1.9% in 2022).

**Figure 3: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q3**



Survey respondents felt the reduction in paper forms allowed more time to target resource on properties with likely changes or on under-registered groups. Others liked the ability to set their own timetable for the canvass which, along with prior experience, enabled them to plan the canvass and resourcing effectively. This was echoed by qualitative participants, who felt moving away from paper reduced costs and lowered the burden on their resources.

*“It was costing a fortune in printing and paper. I've saved about £15,000 in printing and postage alone over the last two years just because of a data match that takes you what, half an hour in a step?”*

Qualitative participants made cost savings due to needing fewer temporary staff and making better use of the core team. However, others found staff had to be redirected elsewhere to meet the growing demands in data manipulation and analysis. In addition, survey respondents noted that the timing still resulted in resourcing peaks, particularly as key parts of the canvass often coincide with school holidays and staff leave.

There were mixed views about how the reduced number of properties requiring a door knock in the reformed canvass has affected cost and resources. Some qualitative participants needed fewer canvassers, reducing hiring costs. Others had to change their payment systems to incentivise canvassers with fewer properties over the same size area, resulting in an increased cost per door knock. Overall, survey respondents suggested that the door knock process was expensive and resource intensive, with very low response rates.

The main concern from the qualitative research was that savings from canvass reform are at the detriment of register quality. Some participants thought more work outside of the canvass period would be needed to maintain completeness and accuracy and that costs over the entire year will not change.

*“I can tell you this year obviously our costs are less than it was in 2019 at this stage, what impact that's had on completeness and accuracy. Is that for the detriment?”*

Both methods of research considered resources relative to funding received. Several respondents found that cost savings resulting from the Canvass Reform came at a helpful time, as the funding to support the transition to Individual Elector Registration has now ended. Others have felt canvass resource is limited due to funding constraints.

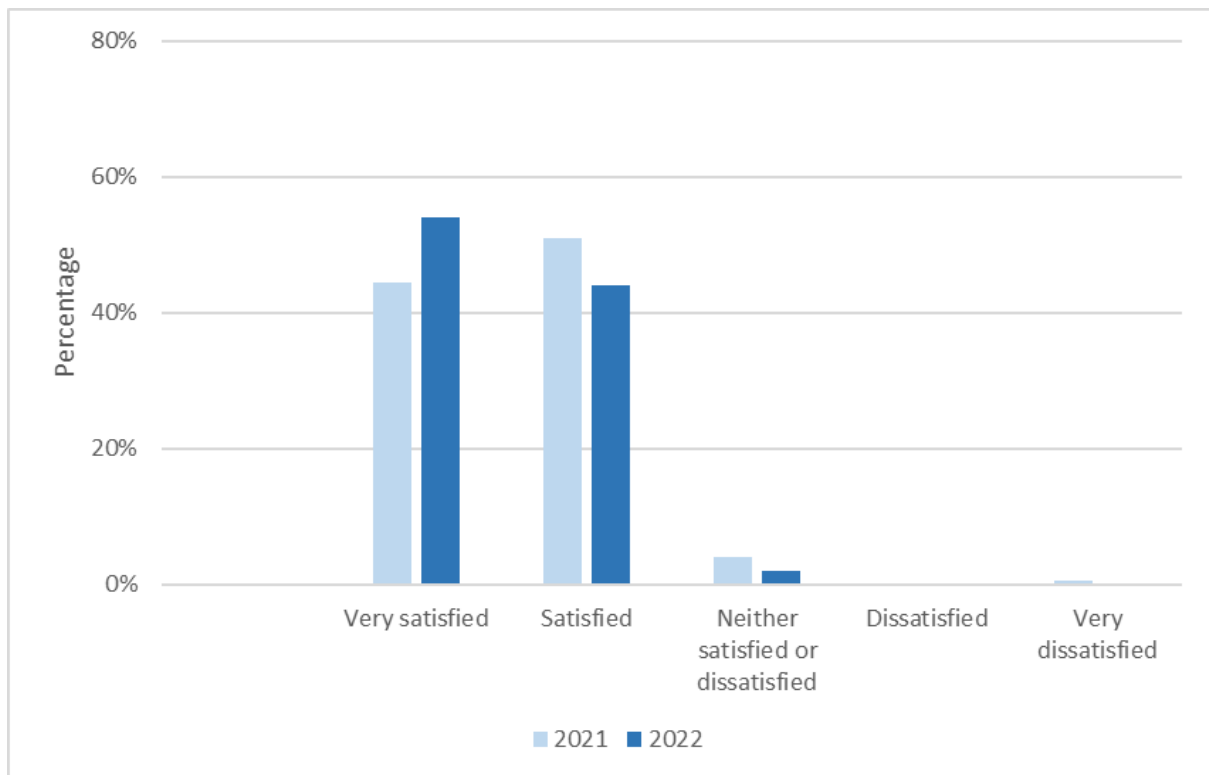
*“I think [Canvass Reform] obviously far reduced print costs and personal canvass costs. I think a large saving... But it's fair to say that it doesn't feel as though the costs have offset the loss of IER [funding]. I think it feels like we've lost budget with the withdrawal of the IER funding.”*

Some qualitative participants were unsure of the overall impact on costs and resources, particularly when operating through the pandemic. Participants commented that more time is needed to realistically assess how costs have changed, which was echoed by EROs who felt there will likely be some time before general savings are seen and these would be incremental. Other participants were more confident that further bedding in will lead to future savings.

#### **Question 4: How satisfied were you with the processes for the national data match under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?**

The net satisfaction for question 4 was very high at +97.7%, representing an increase of 2.7 percentage points from 2021. This was due to an increase of 2.6 percentage points in overall satisfaction from 2021 to 2022, and a decrease of 0.4 percentage points in overall dissatisfaction.

**Figure 4: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q4**



Respondents found the national data matching step quick, easy, and effective, which was echoed by most qualitative participants. Both methods of research found sending and receiving the data was faster than the previous year, with very few practical issues reported and DLUHC staff reported to be very helpful. Qualitative participants explained they avoided some issues by changing their timings and being more prepared for the data match than the previous year. By scheduling the national data match as early as possible, they allowed time for more local matching, checking for incorrect matches, and dealing with technical delays if they occurred.

Local matching was used variably among qualitative participants. Datasets were often selected for local matching based on perceived reliability and whether there were appropriate data sharing agreements in place to obtain them. A range of datasets were used across the sample, with the most popular being council tax data, due to how large and up to date it is. Some used or talked about the potential to use data to target specific groups, such as schools' data for attainers.

Many qualitative participants were keen to do more local matching in the future but would require further data sharing agreements or an evaluation of the most appropriate datasets. One challenge with this is the lack of flexibility in their EMS with the format of data and the time required to reformat datasets to be able to upload them.

The most important factor in the success of national and local data matching across both pieces of research was considered the quality of the data being used. Although many were confident with the data they were using, some had concerns about whether the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data was completely accurate, particularly if there were discrepancies between the national and local data match. Some survey respondents would

like to be able to do further national data matching later in the canvass to pick up new properties.

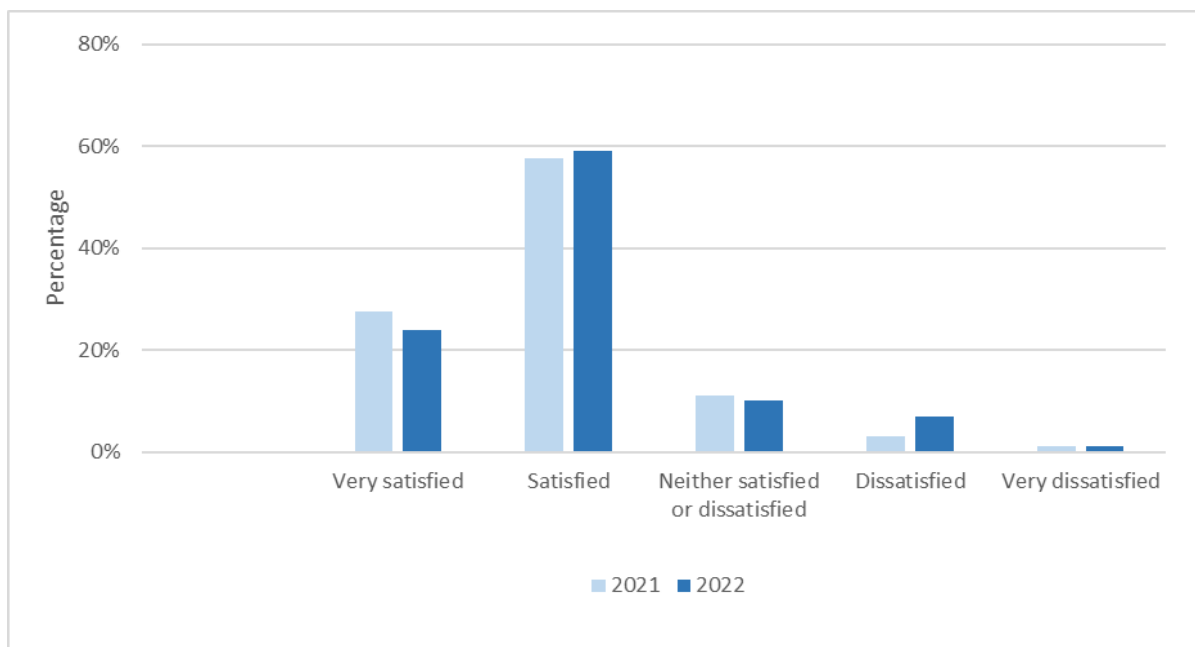
*“What if DWP's data is wrong? It doesn't matter because our EMS has made that elector green. But we have got a council tax file that's got different people there. That ignores that elector because it's matched DWP. So, we're saying the DWP data is the holy grail and that's the be all and end all...”*

Data from the Electoral Commission's report on the 2021 canvass supported the concern that there may be issues with data matching, highlighting that the data matching process and / or the lag between matching and the canvass may result in households being assigned to the wrong route - nearly one fifth of responses from Route 1 properties reported significant changes to electors' details.

**Question 5: How satisfied were you with the Route 1 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?**

The net satisfaction for question 5 was +75.1%, a decrease of 5.9 percentage points from 2021. The overall satisfaction decreased by 2.5 percentage points from 85.0% in 2021 to 82.5% in 2022, whilst the overall dissatisfaction increased by 3.4 percentage points from 4.0% in 2021 to 7.4% in 2022.

**Figure 5: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q5**



Across both areas of research, Route 1 was praised as being straightforward and easy. Qualitative participants stated it reduced the administrative burden, allowing them to focus on Route 2 properties. Many found the e-comms option in Route 1 useful because it gave them two points of contact and reduced the amount of paper forms further. Several survey respondents conducted more local data matching which enabled them to put more properties down Route 1, which was seen as beneficial.

However, a key concern in both research areas was the effectiveness of Route 1 at picking up changes to the register. Many participants believed that not requiring a response makes the process less meticulous if people do not read the form fully. This was considered a particular concern for missing attainers or those who had moved in with people who were already registered.

*“If we are dependent on people responding to it because there are changes, how accurate is that actually? How long would you leave it before you decided then we need to do a complete canvass and get everybody to respond just to see where we are. I think it's a really good tool, but I think it has potential for the accuracy to drop and wain a little bit over time.”*

Whilst some were concerned about Route 1 in 2020, there was little evidence of any negative impact. Since then, some participants have seen several Route 1 changes outside of the canvass, such as in response to HNLs or upcoming elections, suggesting people are not responding to the canvass when they need to.

*“I think because our HNLs have gone out and we've got such a large response within a week, to me, that would indicate that the route one hasn't worked. So why not just send a form out to route ones or not bother with it at all?”*

Many survey and qualitative participants thought it would take a General Election to properly test how much Route 1 is impacting the completeness and accuracy of their registers. One survey respondent suggested this could be mitigated through requiring active engagement every few years from Route 1, whilst others would like to have all Route 1 properties required to respond.

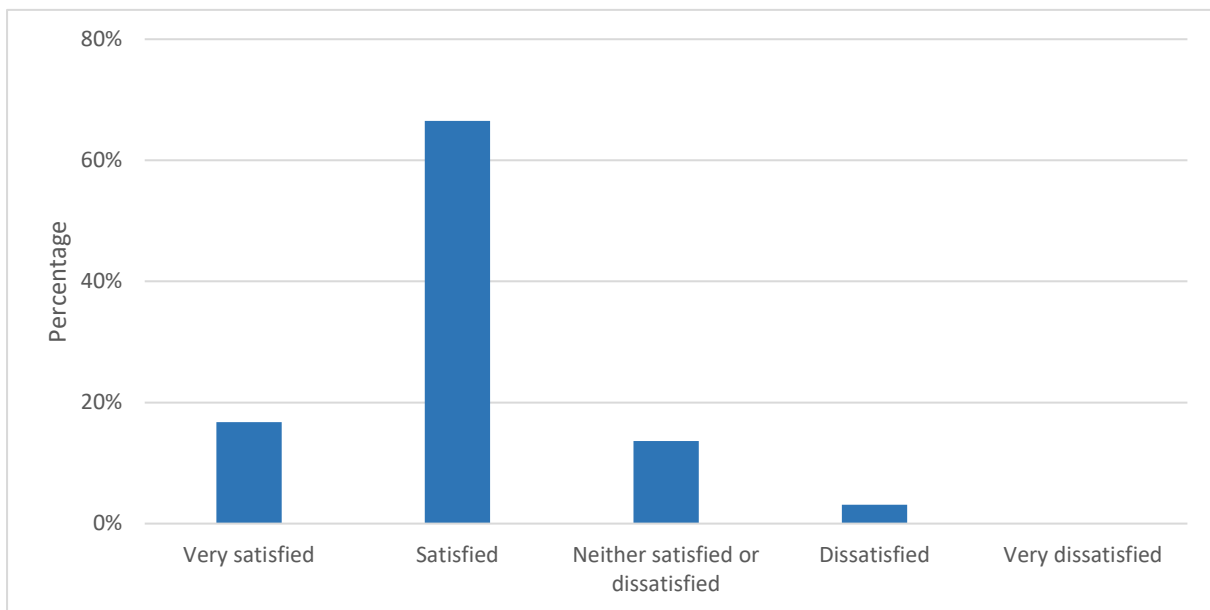
Across both pieces of research, Route 1 e-comms were viewed positively. Emails were thought to help mitigate the risk of missing changes and to reduce the number of paper forms that needed to be sent, although one survey respondent noted that many electors ignored the email. Some qualitative participants did not use emails to reduce the amount of unnecessary contact between them and the elector. Instead, they sent the Canvass Communication A (CCA), a paper communication used for contacting matched properties as part of the Route 1 canvass, to get Route 1 out of the way and focus resource elsewhere. Some qualitative participants found electors responding to CCAs unnecessarily as they are used to replying to the canvass form and sending it back, although this had improved from the previous year. When the CCA was returned, this resulted in additional manual work inputting information due to the lack of barcode.

*“The people that have been in properties for a long time, they have always done canvassing the old way so they're quite keen to respond to the letters that come back.”*

#### **Question 6: How satisfied were you with the Route 2 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?**

The net satisfaction for question 6 was +80.2%, an increase of 2.7 percentage points from 2021. In 2022 the proportion of respondents who were overall satisfied increased to 83.3%, compared to 82.0% in 2021. The proportion of those who were dissatisfied decreased from 4.5% in 2021 to 3.1% in 2022.

**Figure 6: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q6**



Qualitative participants found Route 2 similar to the traditional canvass they were used to before the reform, but only containing properties where changes were most likely. Participants therefore tended to focus most of their resources here but faced the most difficulties from electors, including many across both methods of research reporting low response rates. This was also seen in research from the Electoral Commission on the 2021 canvass, who reported that almost a third of households in Route 2 did not respond to the canvass despite being likely to have changes. Despite the challenges, some survey respondents found Route 2 effective.

Both survey respondents and qualitative participants would like to see further discretion around Route 2, particularly in relation to communication methods. Many would like to be able to email Route 2 properties upfront or design their own forms. Several survey respondents also mentioned they would like to be able to move properties between Route 1 and 2 based on updated data and information they receive.

*“I mean there’s more properties I’m sending paper forms to, isn’t there, so it is costing me more. And I think that is the one problem with route two, is that you’re required to send this paper form out before you’re allowed to send an email. And I think you’re missing a trick a little bit there because, although I want to make sure my register’s as accurate as possible, I obviously don’t want it to be really, really expensive.”*

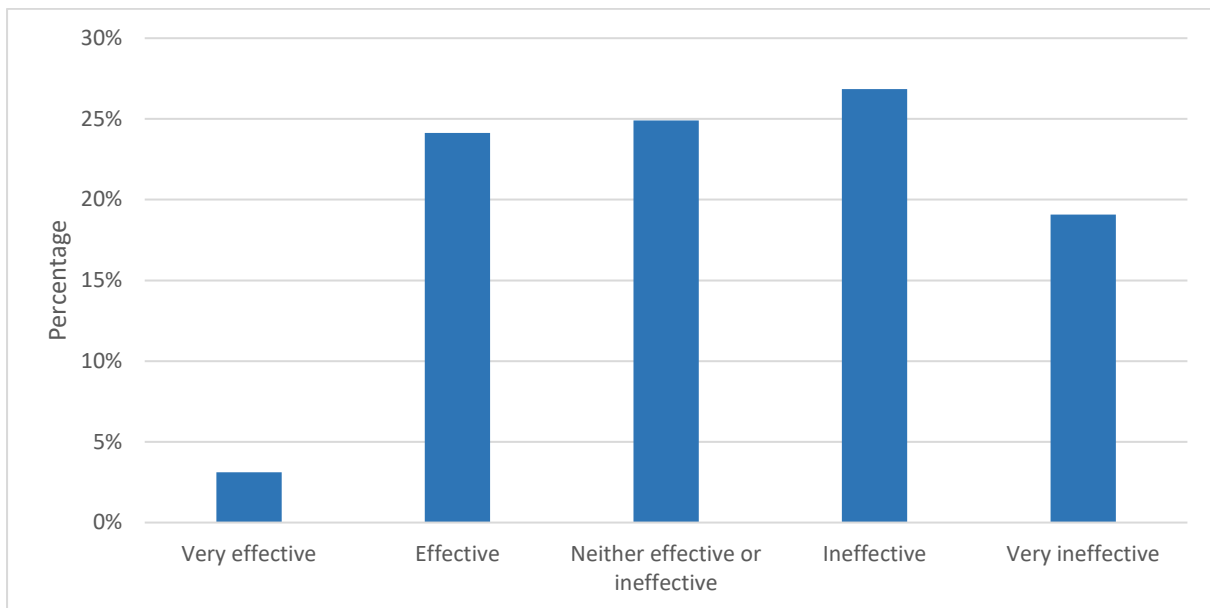
Both areas of research found evidence of tailoring the approach to Route 2 through adjusting the order of communications to improve response rates. Ongoing local evaluations of methods, i.e. monitoring of response rates and tailoring approaches as required, was seen as key to success.

**Question 7: In your opinion, how effective is the door knock as part of the canvass process?**

In the qualitative research, for many, the most challenging aspect of Route 2 was the door knock. Therefore, we added a question in the Year 2 survey to explore this area further. The

net effectiveness for question 7 was -18.7%. This resulted from 45.9% of respondents finding the process ineffective overall, whilst 27.2% found the process effective overall.

**Figure 7: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q7**



These results show that the sentiment was echoed by many authorities, although it should be noted that some survey respondents found it effective when there were poor responses to paper forms and for contacting the most difficult to reach residents. Some respondents noted it could be effective in certain areas, such as where there are new properties or a notable number of empty properties.

Overall, survey respondents found the door knock an expensive and resource intensive process for little benefit, with very low response rates. Respondents found those who do not want to engage will not open the door, or some may be increasingly wary of giving information to strangers. However, several noted that these had always been challenges.

Conducting the door knock with the new route split meant canvassers often had fewer properties that were further apart, particularly in rural areas. This was described as a problem across both methods of research, as it made the job less appealing to canvassers or limited the role to those with access to a car. Authorities have had to change their pay structures to as a result, although many still face challenges with recruitment. Respondents stated this has made the door knock less cost effective and more inefficient.

*“It’s the requirement to go and knock on the doors that is going to cause us significant difficulties simply because of the cost relation but also because of trying to find someone to do it. ‘I want you to go and knock on these doors... you’ve got an 80-mile round trip to knock on these 20 doors and I’m paying you £2 a form’. Nobody wants to do that.”*

Some authorities had started to use a phone canvass as an alternative to the door knock, however most participants did not have sufficient contact details to use the telephone canvass. For those qualitative participants who did, some got good response rates and found electors were happy to share information over the phone. Survey respondents noted that the phone canvass was a helpful and less costly alternative to the door knock. However, some qualitative

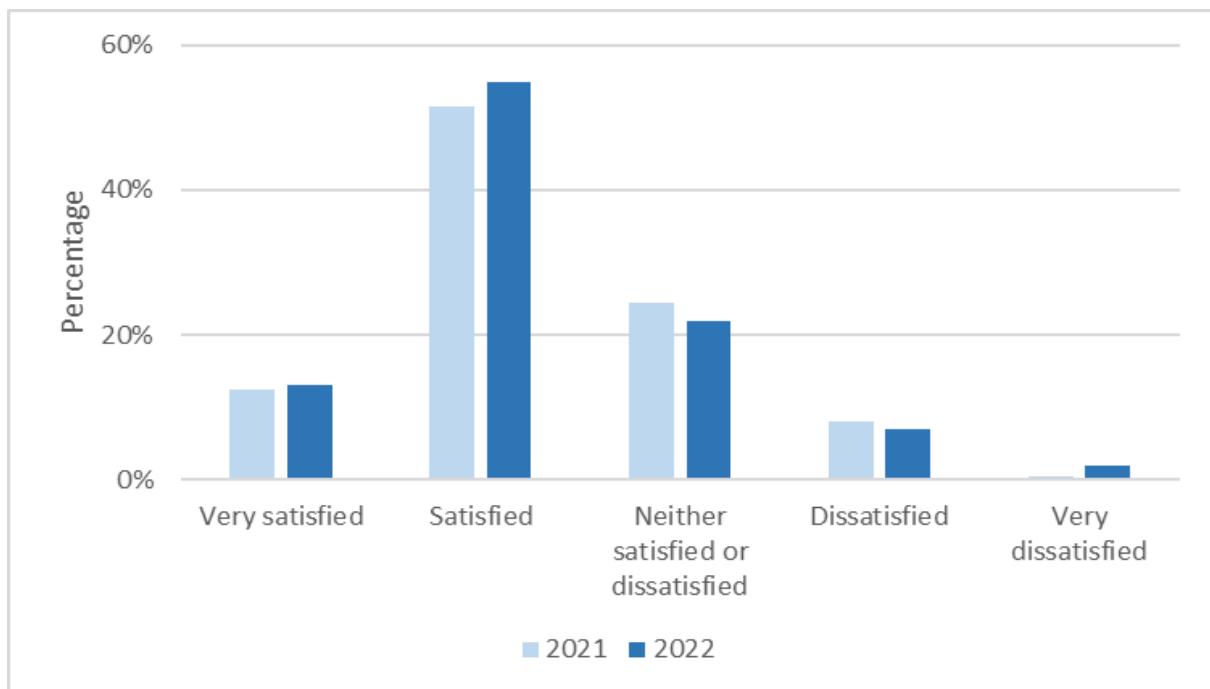
participants did not telephone canvass, either because they thought it would not suit the demographics of electorate or because obtaining enough accurate contact details, then getting hold of electors and asking them for personal information over the telephone was less effective than in-person contact.

*“With regards to the telephone canvass, people just wouldn’t entertain it. We did try that, and it just wouldn’t work. We had very, very few people that actually were willing to tell us information over the phone.”*

**Question 8: How satisfied were you with the Route 3 processes under the second year of the reformed annual canvass?**

The net satisfaction for question 8 was +59.5%, an increase of 4.0 percentage points from 2021. Overall satisfaction in 2022 was 67.7%, an increase from 64.0% in 2021. Overall dissatisfaction in 2022 was 8.2%, a small decrease from 8.5% in 2021.

**Figure 8: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q8**



Both methods of research found the extent to which Route 3 was used varied. Some survey respondents did not use it for their small number of properties. For those who did, some chose to do Route 3 properties outside of the system, either because this was how they had always done them or because the system is not set up in the way that they would like. The most common types of property in Route 3 were residential care homes and student accommodation. Some participants decided that Houses of Multiple Occupation [HMOs] were also put down Route 3.

*“We don’t really use any of the inbuilt functionality in the system for doing that because the way it’s set up doesn’t quite work for the way we do it. We tend to communicate directly with the care homes via email and phone in the first instance and try get responses that way... From what we can tell the EMS is geared up to - you would almost be doing route two on those properties if we used their built in [functionality] - it would generate a letter to each*



*property so, the university, there would be about 3,000 letters generated, which wouldn't really save us any work compared to Route 2."*

For those that used Route 3, the experience was mixed. Some found it easy and got good response rates, whilst others had to do a lot of chasing for little reward. Survey respondents noted that several Route 3 properties end up going down Route 2 eventually, adding an unnecessary additional step. In many cases, success was dependent on the SRO relationship for all types of Route 3 property. Those who had working relationships in place with the SROs of Route 3 properties had much less difficulty getting the data they needed.

Experiences with care homes varied greatly across both areas of research. Some have long standing relationships with managers which allows them to be sent residents' information quickly, others have difficulty getting them to cooperate and had to deal with data protection barriers for Individual Electoral Registration. The high level of staff and resident turnover continued to be a challenge for many, as well as Covid-19 making registration less of a priority. This meant the data was received late or in some cases not at all.

*"It's the care homes. It's just them getting round to doing it more than anything, because there's obviously a lot of changes in care homes. They tend to be quite late in sending them back... because of Covid, they've had obviously staffing issues, people departing from this world and... There's been such a lot of changes in the care homes."*

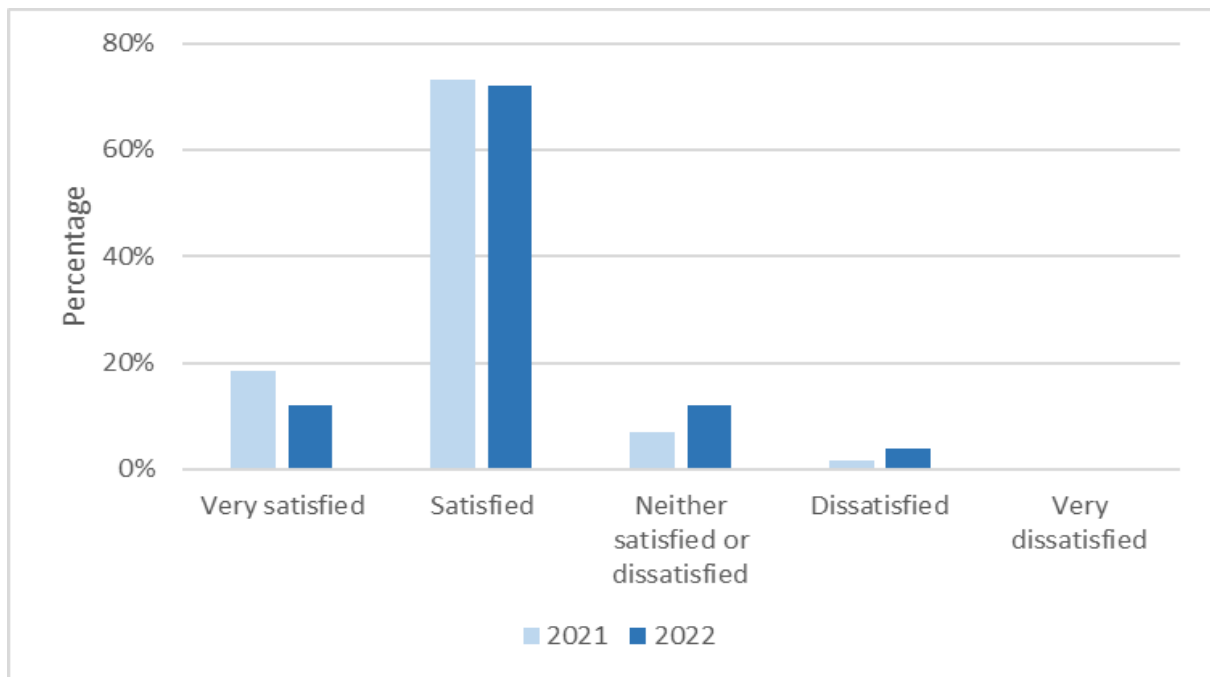
HMOs continued to be a challenge for participants across both methods of research. In many instances where HMOs were put down Route 3, participants reported that landlords did not like being contacted, especially those who are not local and have properties across the country. Some participants chose not to use Route 3 for HMOs because of this or had to eventually send properties down Route 2 despite efforts to use Route 3.

Feedback on student accommodation was mixed. Some get the details from an SRO and find it quick and easy, for others it is more difficult and time consuming or the quality of the data is poor. Many find low response rates and complaints from students about being hassled to register in two places. This is compounded by the fact that students move into their accommodation late into the canvass period, meaning local authorities are under pressure to canvass them before the December 1<sup>st</sup> publication date.

#### **Question 9: Overall, how satisfied were you and your team with the second year of the reformed annual canvass?**

The net satisfaction for question 9 was +80.2%, representing an increase of 60.8 percentage points from pre-reform but a decrease of 9.8 percentage points from 2021. There was a statistically significant decrease in overall satisfaction from 91.5% in 2021 to 84.0% in 2022, whilst overall dissatisfaction had an insignificant increase from 1.9% in 2021 to 3.4% in 2022.

**Figure 9: Percentage breakdown of satisfaction for Q9**



Qualitative participants reported that teams were happy with the changes: they felt that the reformed canvass and a more digital canvass is a better fit for modern society. Both methods of research found, as reflected in other sections, data matching and e-comms were viewed as positive additions, whilst many found the process more manageable and less costly. The increased flexibility and control were seen as beneficial, but discretion around areas such as the door knock and canvass timings to develop a canvass most suitable for their electorate would be helpful. These themes were echoed by the participating EROs. Some were pleasantly surprised by canvass reform and were happy to see that the success of the first year wasn't a fluke.

*"We didn't mind the change, we weren't stuck in the rut of, 'Oh, we've always done canvass that way', because actually we didn't feel the old canvass was really fit for purpose in the modern society anyway, without being able to email forms out, email the information out. I think that was definitely the win."*

There were still some areas of apprehension around how electors would react to the new communications being trialled. Operating the canvass during Covid was also a concern, particularly around conducting a safe door knock. Other areas of apprehension came from the difficulties they had faced in the first year of canvass reform. This included Route 3, which had continued to be time consuming and challenging, and using their EMS, which they were still learning and familiarising themselves with.

Many qualitative participants felt local knowledge is an important factor in conducting a successful canvass. This was particularly important to tailor the canvass to the local area and make informed decisions on how to approach the canvass, especially for hard-to-reach groups and unique scenarios, such as air bases, where existing relationships are required to successfully implement the canvass.

Less training was required by Electoral Service teams this year, aside from some targeted refresher sessions or preparing new staff members. Qualitative participants praised the

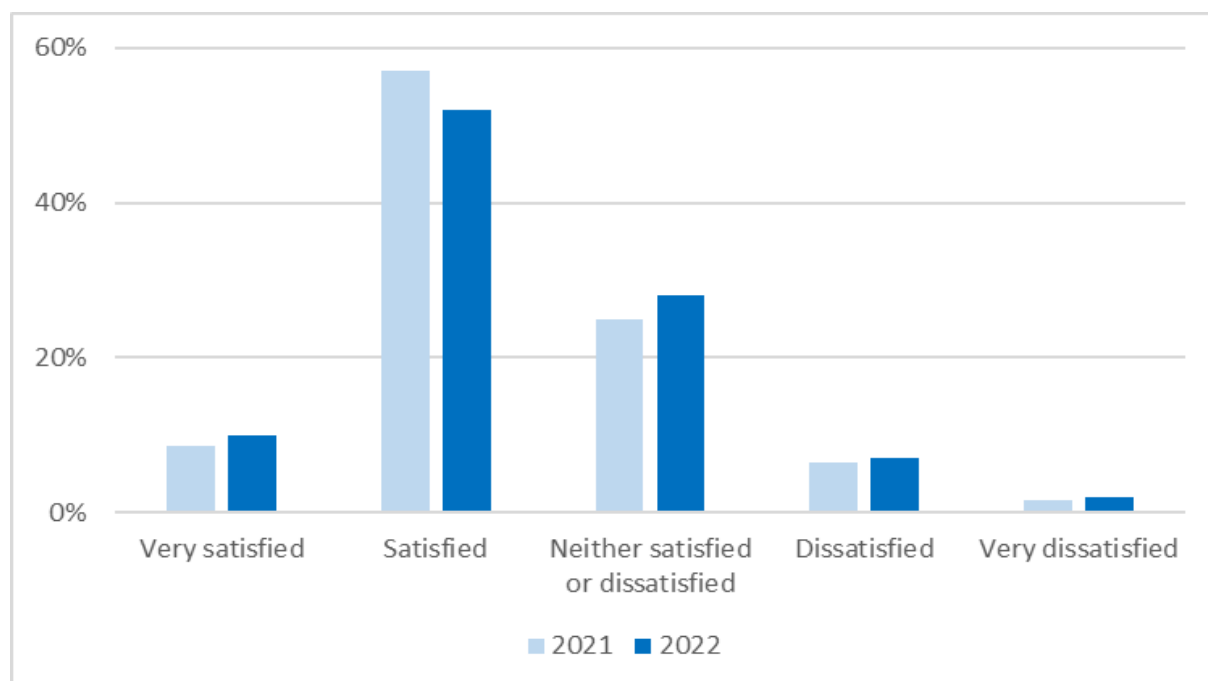
continued support from the Electoral Commission, AEA/SAA, and DLUHC officials as being helpful and extensive. However, some mentioned they would like to see more feedback on how other local authorities are performing and any guidance with what is and isn't working.

## Section B: Electoral Registers

### Question 10: How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to safeguard the completeness of your electoral register?

The net satisfaction for question 10 was +52.1%, representing an increase of 7.3 percentage points from 2020 and a decrease of 5.4 percentage points from 2021. The latter is explained by a decrease in overall satisfaction from 65.5% in 2021 to 61.5% in 2022 and an increase in dissatisfaction from 8.0% in 2021 to 9.3% in 2022.

**Figure 10: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q10**



Some survey respondents voiced concerns about the potential impact of canvass reform on completeness and accuracy; however, the majority of qualitative participants did not consider their registers to be any less complete or accurate than pre-reform.

With regards to completeness, a key theme from across both methods of research was concern about attainers not being added to the register, particularly those in Route 1 properties. Although attainers were considered to be a longstanding issue in terms of registration, some felt the reformed canvass has further contributed to this issue. This was mainly attributed to the reduced contact and removal of the requirement to respond with households in Route 1, so the responsible adult could forget to add an individual becoming eligible to vote and not report any changes. Some participants noted lowered registration levels this year, which they speculated may be due to missing attainers in Route 1. EROs in the focus groups also voiced their concerns about the risks in Route 1.

*"I think certainly we've got fewer young people going onto the register. Back in 2014, 2015 we had approaching 4,000 attainers on the register. On 1 December this year, we had 400. Although I suspect some of that may be perhaps more focus was put on attainers during the IER roll out and then it's gradually tapered off. So, I think there may be a change in approach within our authority that we could address. We suspect that Route 1 isn't picking up as many*

*young people. I suppose just a suspicion because we're not asking for a response if there's no change... I think if there could be a bit more emphasis on if anybody in the household has become 16 you must respond or call us."*

The Electoral Commission's research on the 2021 canvass also found that the number of registered attainers dropped by 28.7% relative to 2020. This continued the trend of decline in registered attainers which began following the introduction of individual electoral registration in 2014.

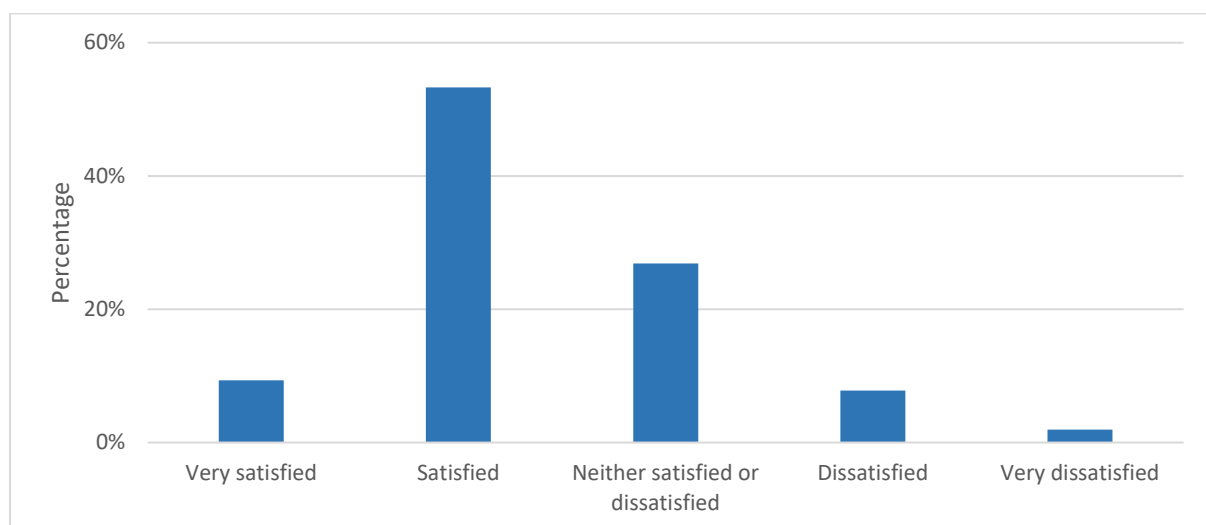
In addition, Individual Electoral Registration alongside the canvass was thought to be a risk to register completeness among survey respondents. Although, it is important to note that the process of Individual Electoral Registration has not changed with the canvass reform. Respondents spoke of how they tend to see a large number of pending electors who fail to complete their invitation to register, as they believe responding to canvass communications registers them, as indeed it used to before IER.

Many participants across different research areas agreed that elections were a good test of register completeness. For some survey respondents who had run elections since the introduction of canvass reform, they found their register had held up well with no increase in the number of unregistered people trying to vote. However, many stated that it could not truly be tested until a General Election. Qualitative participants agreed elections remain the biggest driver of registration for most electors, and this must be taken into consideration with the registration levels. Many stated that they require a General Election to clearly assess how Canvass Reform has impacted their registers, and that it is normal for registration to fluctuate in the periods between major national electoral events.

**Question 11: How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to safeguard the accuracy of your electoral register?**

The net satisfaction for question 11 was +52.9%, an increase of 3.3 percentage points from pre-reform and a decrease of 4.1 percentage points from 2021. There was a decrease in overall satisfaction from 64.5% in 2021 to 62.6% in 2022, and an increase in dissatisfaction from 7.5% in 2021 to 9.7% in 2022.

**Figure 11: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q11**



Route 1 was also a concern in terms of accuracy, with many respondents across both methods of research concerned that they couldn't tell accuracy when there was no need for a response. Some authorities sent Household Notification Letters [HNLs], which were returned with many changes and thought to be more effective than the canvass. One survey respondent noted that they had to work harder to maintain accuracy under canvass reform.

*"I think that there is a risk associated with just relying on the Canvass Communication A [CCA]. I think that's why we're all doing a lot of work in terms of data mining, just to make sure that the registers are staying up-to-date."*

Some participants from both the interviews (with administrators) and focus groups (with EROs) also reported their concerns for the accuracy of the national data match and how reliable the DWP data being used is. Both believed that success with data matching is reliant on the quality of the data and the ability of teams to question the results of the data match and look out for anomalies. However, survey respondents praised the data match as being a good way to maintain register accuracy.

*"There's a risk, isn't there? I think it's being aware of that and being rigorous in the approach and using a range of - back to data, isn't it, and the rigour and the quality of the data matching and the staff engaged in that work and their ability to question and look for anomalies."*

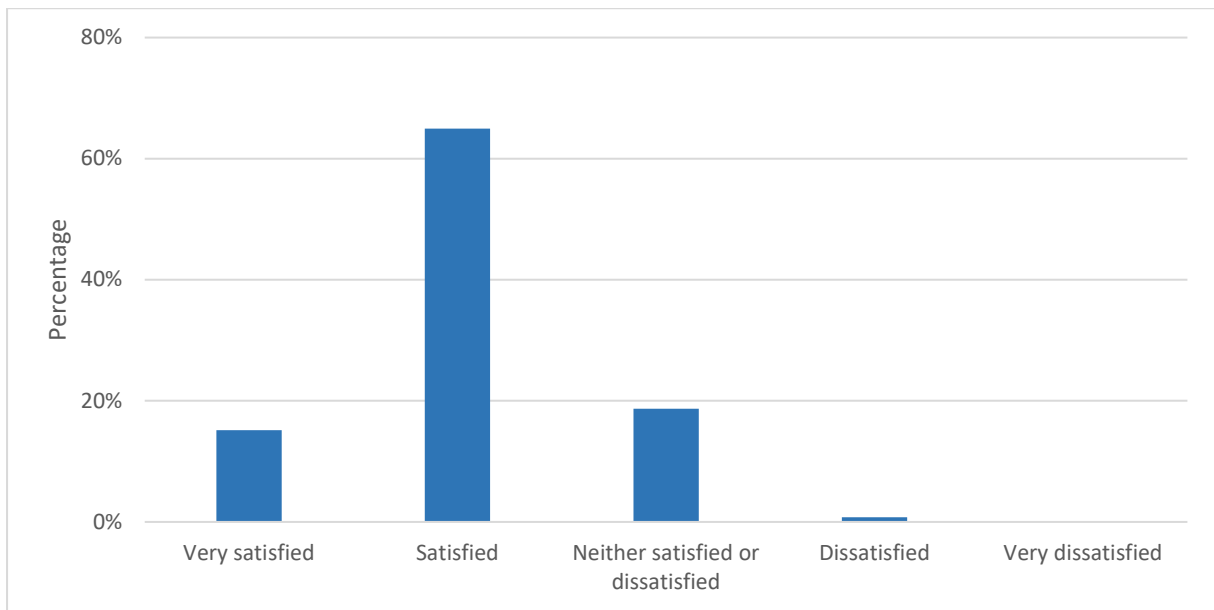
Survey respondents also reflected that the timing of the canvass did not help with accuracy. Many believed their canvass was accurate at the time of the canvass, but that would be out of date when elections came around particularly in high-churn areas. However, it is worth noting that the timing of the canvass is consistent with pre-reform timings.

Some survey respondents were positive about the impact of canvass reform on register accuracy, with one noting that the time saved on admin meant they could spend more time reviewing non-responding properties. A further respondent added that it was easier to maintain a year-round proactive approach due to the reduction in paperwork. Many respondents and qualitative participants echoed that regular, year-round work was required to ensure completeness and accuracy of the register. This is echoed in findings from the Electoral Commission on the 2021 canvass, which demonstrated that a large proportion (39%) of additions and deletions occur outside of the canvass period.

#### **Question 12: How satisfied were you with the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes to maintain the security and integrity of your electoral register?**

The net satisfaction for question 12 was +79.4%, representing an increase of 16.9 percentage points from pre-reform and a decrease of 2.6 percentage points from 2021. This resulted from a decrease in overall satisfaction from 82.0% in 2021 to 80.2% in 2022, and a slight increase in dissatisfaction from 0.0% in 2021 to 0.8% in 2022.

**Figure 12: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q12**



Generally, survey respondents were positive about the impact of canvass reform on security and integrity. Some respondents believed canvass reform had improved security and integrity, finding they were able to look in more detail at the smaller number of applications coming in as well as review non-responders using local data.

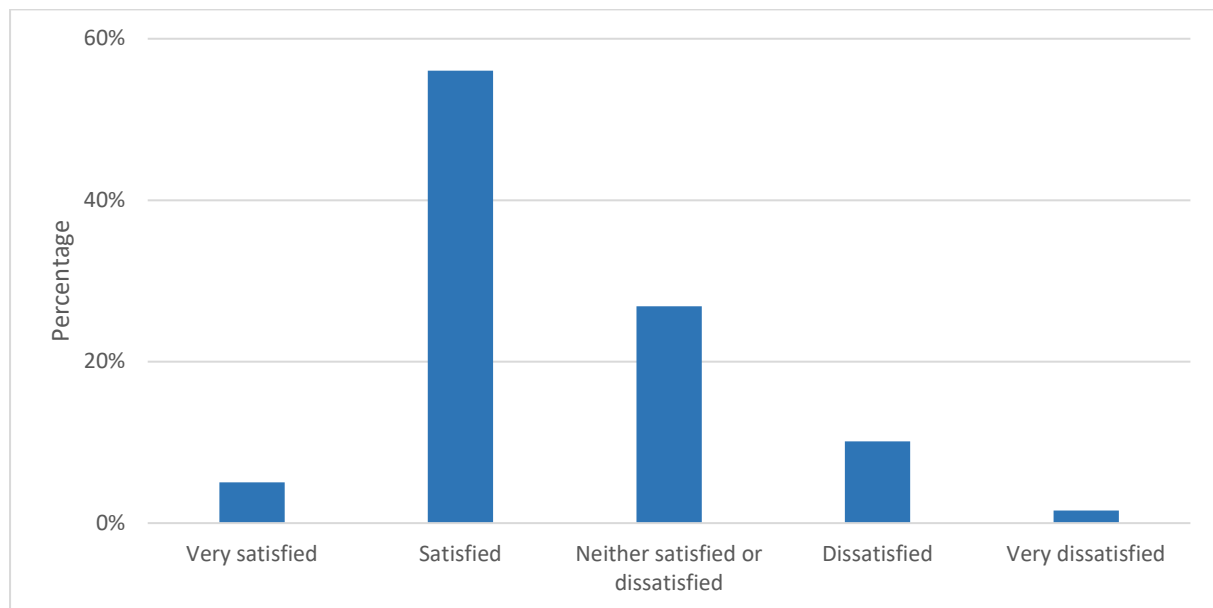
There continued to be some concerns around Route 1, with a small number of respondents stating that the lack of response could reduce the opportunities to identify any cases of fraud. In addition, a minority of respondents added that if DWP data is not up to date the data match step could have a negative impact on security and integrity.

## Section C: Elector Experience

### Question 13: How satisfied were you that the second year of the reformed annual canvass processes were simple and clear for citizens?

The net satisfaction for question 13 was +49.4%, an increase of 58.0 percentage points from pre-reform and a decrease of 4.1 percentage points from 2021. Overall satisfaction remained broadly similar, at 61.0% 2021 and 61.1% 2022, and an increase in overall dissatisfaction from 7.5% in 2021 to 11.7% in 2022.

**Figure 13: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q13**



Survey respondents mostly focused on the two-stage registration process that is required during the canvass period. Many respondents explained that electors believed responding to the canvass would automatically register them, and therefore ignored follow up communications inviting them to register. As a result, the canvass often results in many “pending electors”, referring to electors who have applied to vote and have been determined to be included on the register but are not yet on the register. However, this has not been particularly impacted by canvass reform and has rather been an ongoing issue since the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration. This was echoed by qualitative participants, who received many complaints from electors about why they cannot register with the canvass and why they had sent them a second form.

Some respondents felt that the separate routes were still confusing for electors, and several noted they had received questions from electors around why they received different communications than their friends or neighbours in a different route. The different response requirements were also thought to be a potential area of confusion for electors. Some respondents felt that people did not read the communications they were sent fully, and therefore may still reply to Route 1 unnecessarily or not reply to Route 2. However, some respondents had mitigated this through carefully reviewing their messaging on communications materials or using different coloured paper for different routes. Qualitative



participants, in particular, felt there were fewer unnecessarily returned Route 1 forms in 2022 than the previous year as a result of these mitigations and the new processes bedding in.

Many thought the process was simple and clear for citizens, and several respondents noted an improvement in understanding from the previous canvass. Respondents explained they had received fewer queries and complaints from electors in the 2021 canvass, and that people were more trusting of e-comms having seen them in the previous year.

Some survey respondents felt that there could be issues with certain elector groups in terms of understanding, for example those who don't want to engage or those who may not be as fluent or confident in English. Qualitative participants felt that in some ways the route split with canvass reform allowed them to focus more resources on hard to reach and under-registered groups. Route 1 was again considered a risk with the lack of response requirement by qualitative participants, stating that electors may not be clear about the need to respond if attainers need to be added.

#### **Question 14: Frequency of different categories of correspondence around the canvass process**

Survey participants were asked how often they received correspondence from citizens during the canvass period across a variety of categories, from none at all to 40+. An average score was taken for each year to compare correspondence rates across years (see Table 2 for the full results).

There were slight increases in the quantity of correspondence across most categories from 2020, although where applicable this was still less than received prior to canvass reform. By comparison, in the qualitative research many participants felt they had received less negative feedback from electors compared to the 2020 canvass.

The largest increase was comments relating to cost and waste of money during the process, potentially linking to some comments across the pieces of research where participants found electors did not understand why the canvass was conducted every year, or indeed think it necessary. Comments on the survey highlighted that this may be a particular problem in Wales, where electors receive a Welsh and English form. Qualitative participants however praised canvass reform as being better for electors who have lived in the same property for a long time. This was thought to have reduced complaints about having to do it every year and feeling hounded by the council.

**Table 2: Response frequencies over the whole canvass period for each option in Q14**

<b>Response Options</b>	<b>No forms of correspondence (*1)</b>	<b>1 – 9 forms of correspondence (*2)</b>	<b>10 – 24 Forms of correspondence (*3)</b>	<b>25 – 40 Forms of correspondence (*4)</b>	<b>40+ Forms of correspondence (*5)</b>	<b>Average 2020 score (Baseline)</b>	<b>Average 2021 score (Year 1)</b>	<b>Average 2022 score (Year 2)</b>
<b>Positive Polarity</b>								
Positive feedback on experience of the canvass process	125	78	33	6	15	2.14	1.86	<b>1.86</b>
Positive feedback relating to processes introduced by canvass reform	171	61	20	0	5	N/A	1.66	<b>1.47</b>
<b>Negative Polarity</b>								
General confusion and/or misunderstanding over the canvass process	26	57	67	38	69	3.88	3.09	<b>3.26</b>
Specific confusion over the two-stage registration process	23	42	52	45	95	4.26	3.37	<b>3.57</b>
Comments relating to cost/waste of money of the process	40	90	59	29	39	3.55	2.27	<b>2.75</b>
Comments relating to electors being referred to as British rather than English, Scottish or Welsh	23	97	55	35	47	3.62	2.83	<b>2.95</b>
Comments relating to whether emails relating to the canvass are genuine	47	49	48	51	62	N/A	2.92	<b>3.12</b>
Negative feedback relating to processes introduced by canvass reform	144	73	17	8	15	N/A	1.72	<b>1.74</b>

Other	226	7	6	4	14	1.79	1.21	<b>1.34</b>
-------	-----	---	---	---	----	------	------	-------------

Across both pieces of research, respondents still receive correspondence from electors concerned whether e-comms are genuine. However, some qualitative respondents felt that this had improved since their introduction in 2020 where electors were more familiar with this form of contact, and that this would continue to improve with further bedding in of the reformed canvass. Other participants and some survey respondents flagged they had mitigated concerns around e-comms through awareness raising more widely. Qualitative participants noted how Covid was likely to have affected the response to e-comms, as scams seemed to peak during 2020 and electors were therefore more concerned of the risk of clicking on links in emails.

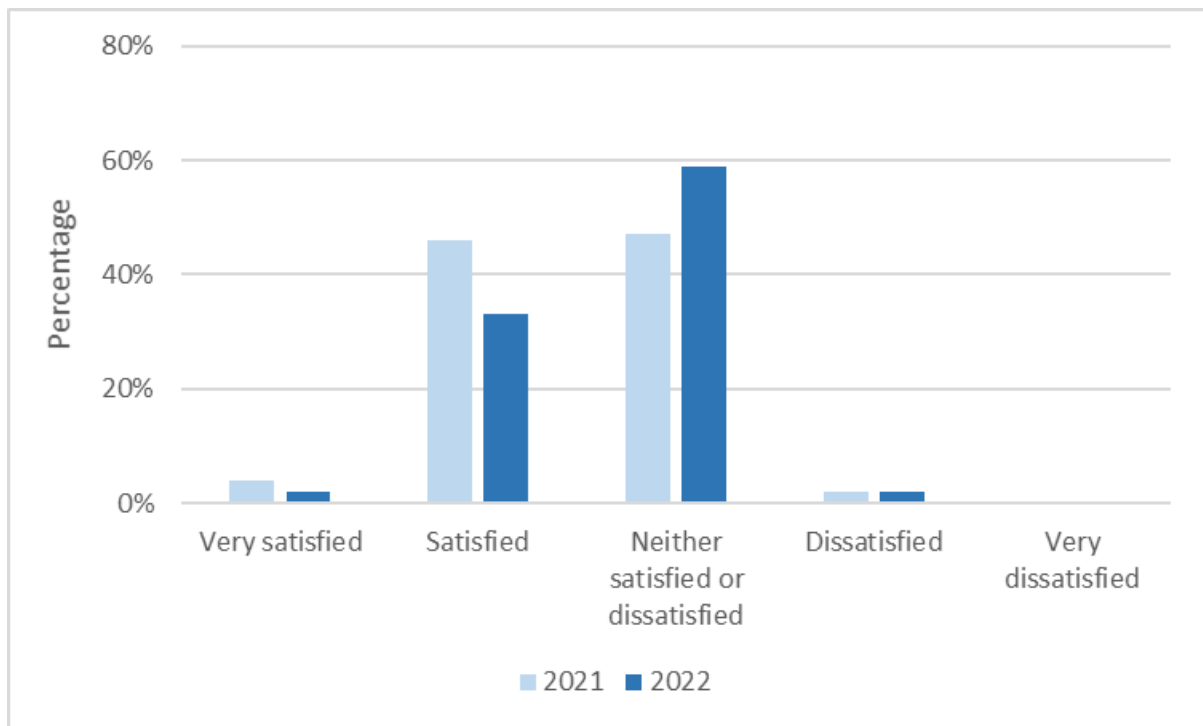
*“I think we find in e-comms that lots of people don't know if it is genuine... we've obviously come from COVID-19 where we're telling people, 'Be aware of online fraud' and then we're sending out email comms.”*

Qualitative participants explained there were also some complaints from electors about the paper forms. Some electors found the threat of fines on them antagonistic and the wording on them too complicated. Many participants had made changes as much as possible to their communications in response to the feedback they received.

**Question 15: In your opinion, how satisfied do you think citizens were with the second year of the reformed annual canvass process?**

The net satisfaction for question 15 was 33.1%, an increase of 32.6 percentage points from pre-reform but a decrease of 14.4 percentage points from 2021. This is explained by a statistically significant decrease in overall satisfaction from 50.5% in 2021 to 35.4% in 2022, and an insignificant increase in overall dissatisfaction from 2.0% in 2021 to 2.3% in 2022. It is also worth noting that 59% reported they were 'neither satisfied or dissatisfied', an increase of 12 percentage points from 2021.

**Figure 14: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q15**



Qualitative participants reported they received less negative feedback from electors than the previous year. They reported that most people seemed to be unaware of the change and this was echoed by survey respondents. Some thought that for those who were aware, many preferred the new canvass – particularly if in Route 1. Some survey respondents considered that despite not having direct evidence, they believed electors were satisfied as they do not tend to communicate when they are happy with a process.

*“We’ve been told by electors that we’ve spoken to that they prefer this way. Previously probably the number one phone call we’d get during canvass was, ‘Why do I have to do this every year?’ [Canvass Reform] probably matches the expectations of the elector a bit better... They’ll say, “We pay our council tax so why don’t you know that we’re registered to vote here?” We’re able to give a slightly better answer now. We can use that council tax data to at least get the first step done.”*

However, some survey respondents felt that the canvass still added to general dissatisfaction among electors due to being bombarded with information about elections and voting. Several thought an even more streamlined canvass and registration process would be beneficial to reduce dissatisfaction, as well as address problems with the two-stage registration process.

Qualitative participants were asked about the impact of canvass reform on under-registered groups. Generally, they believed most groups hadn’t been impacted as most under-registered groups would tend to be found in Route 2 and so treated similarly to the pre-reform canvass, although Route 1 was considered a potential risk for attainments.

EROs and administrators felt that a general lack of engagement and other factors unrelated to canvass reform were greater drivers of under-registration and would continue to be going forward. However, some participants felt that the reduced time for Route 1 properties meant they could focus more time and resource on under-registered groups and would like to build

on this going forward. Several would like to do more work on identifying under-registered groups and improving registration levels among them.

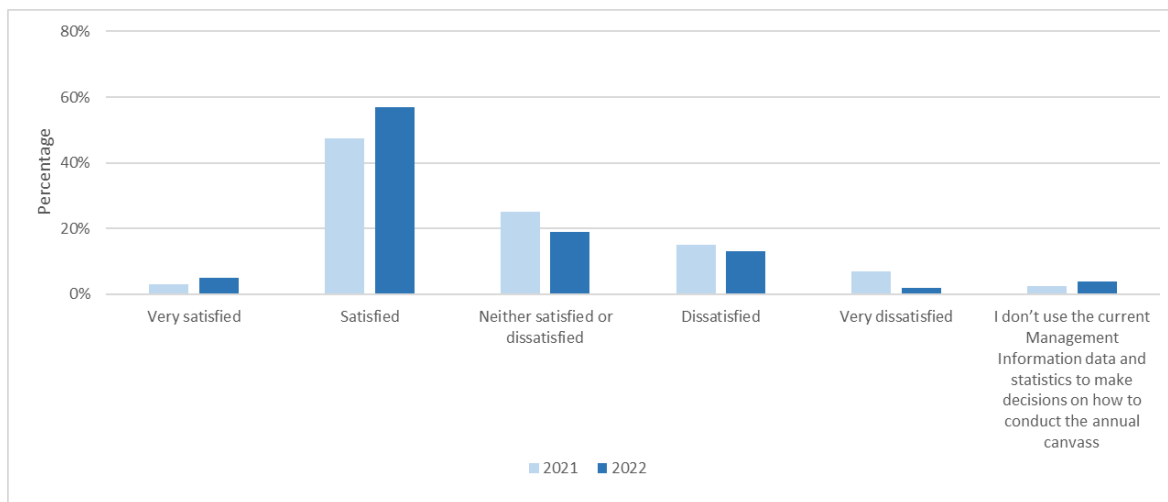
Participants and EROs commented that new communications options gave them more avenues to reach under-registered groups, with e-comms being seen as positive for engaging younger electors. However, some participants were concerned that e-comms was less effective with older people and one participant felt it was less engaging for young attainners as well. Generally, it was thought using a variety of modes is the most effective strategy to cover as many bases as possible. Despite the limitations of e-comms, having new communications methods was seen as a positive change overall for the elector experience.

## Section D: Management Information and EMS

### Question 16: How satisfied were you that the data and statistics during the canvass period allowed you to make informed decisions on how to conduct the second year of the reformed annual canvass in your area?

The net satisfaction for question 16 was +47.9%. This was an increase of 19.4 percentage points from 2021. The change from 2021 stemmed from a statistically significant increase in overall satisfaction from 50.5% in 2021 to 62.6% in 2022 and a statistically significant decrease in overall dissatisfaction from 22.0% in 2021 to 14.8% in 2022. However, it is worth noting that the net satisfaction for question 16 decreased by 1.1 percentage points from the 2020 baseline.

**Figure 15: Percentage breakdown of responses by satisfaction level for Q16**



The increase in net satisfaction was supported by several survey respondents commenting that the reports, data, and statistics available to them from their EMS for informing their decisions had improved. Four of the 12 qualitative participants using one EMS supplier said there were improvements in the accuracy and number of reports available to them this year compared to the year before.

*“The canvass workflow process in our EMS allowed filtering to enable quick views of canvass progress... enabling planning for such things as number of canvassers required.”*

However, participants across both methods of research felt there were still areas for further improvement. Many had issues with the amount of information available and the detail provided with the reporting options, specifically with a more granular breakdown of the different routes and communications methods. They felt the workflow area was good, but more report options need to be provided. Others found they were unable to extract the data they needed. Respondents across both areas of research sometimes used manual alternatives outside of the system to manage their canvass to overcome this.

*“So, I think there is a bit of investment needs to be done with regards to reporting or bespoke reporting. Because we're all doing the same legal process. But the beauty of this Canvass Reform is it allows you to do it in a slightly different way. But a lot of us are then driven by how the systems want us to do it.”*

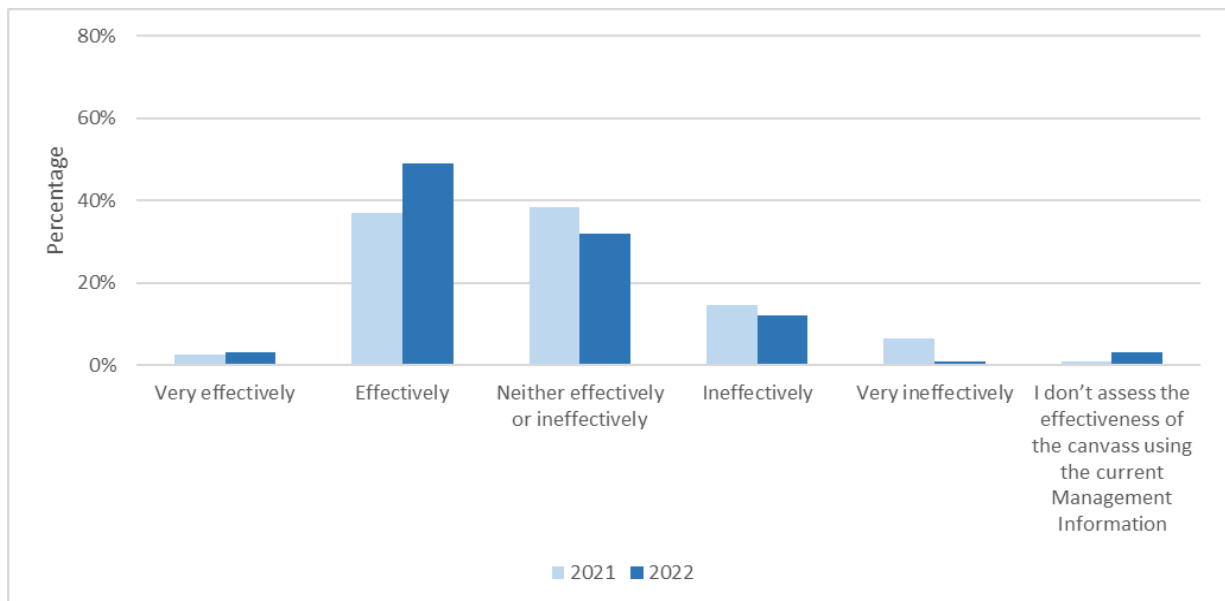
The extent to which data and statistics were used was mixed. Some respondents found them useful for informing their canvass activity and others used them only for performance indicators or reporting to managers and the Electoral Commission. Some who used reports praised them as being helpful for steering the canvass and giving them confidence in their approach, with one qualitative participant stating they would struggle without the custom reporting tool.

Some participants experienced bugs in their EMS which caused delays, affected usability, and required them to use work arounds to get past the issue. Another mentioned finding two different reports using the same data provided different results where they should be the same. We found no link between these bugs and inconsistencies and any particular EMS provider.

**Question 17: How effectively did you feel you could evaluate the effectiveness of the canvass under the current Management Information (second year of the reformed canvass)?**

The net satisfaction for question 17 was +39.7%. This was an increase of 20.4 percentage points from 2021, but a decrease of 9.4 percentage points from pre-reform. The change in net satisfaction from 2021 to 2022 was due to a statistically significant increase in the proportion reporting ‘effectively’ or ‘very effectively’ from 29.5% to 51.8%, and a statistically significant decrease in those reporting ‘ineffectively’ or ‘very ineffectively’ from 21.0% to 12.8%.

**Figure 16: Percentage breakdown of responses by effectiveness level for Q17**



Respondents had similar views as for Question 16, with many feeling that Management Information had improved since 2020. Respondents felt this was due to new and improved reports within the EMS, but also a better understanding of the reformed canvass process and how to use these reports to evaluate. Some survey respondents used Management Information to evaluate aspects such as low-response areas to target next year and effectiveness of e-comms. However, participants from both research strands reported similar issues, with a lack of reports and data accuracy limiting the utility of MI. They would like EMS to continue to improve reporting options to fill gaps that currently exist and provide more confidence that they provide accurate and useful information.

Although there were some who felt they could calculate the cost-effectiveness of the different routes and communications methods as they would have liked, survey respondents also commented on the difficulty with using data and statistics to evaluate their canvass because of unknowns that cannot be picked up in the EMS systems.

*“We can only evaluate the effectiveness of the responses we receive, and no statistics can reveal changes which may have occurred in non-responding R1's and R2's. Therefore, the full picture remains unclear.”*

Some survey respondents felt unprepared to judge the effectiveness of their canvass without more data and experience of the reformed canvass, as well as a General Election to test the registers' completeness and accuracy.

*“We feel we don't have enough years' worth of data to properly evaluate the effectiveness. And the data will likely be skewed by the Covid impact.”*

## **Section E: 2021 In Context**

Due to Covid restrictions easing, several qualitative participants and EROs considered 2021 as the first real canvass under the reform. The lack of in-person contact with electors in 2020 meant participants were less familiar with how the process would usually work. Some therefore took a more cautious approach to the 2021 canvass, using similar methods to the previous year given their relative success in 2020. However, others had adapted their approach, which was also the case for several survey respondents who built on their learnings from 2020.

Despite the easing of restrictions, the majority of participants felt Covid still had some effect on the 2021 canvass. Experienced canvassers were hesitant to knock on doors and handle forms during Covid, so hiring canvassers was harder than usual and more training was required for those who were hired. Survey respondents also felt that residents were hesitant to open the door to canvassers because of Covid so response rates were lower.

In addition to Covid-19, administrators and EROs found other contextual factors impacted the 2021 canvass. Two EROs who participated in the focus groups experienced the merging of authorities, which meant they had to bring multiple teams together whilst implementing the canvass. Whilst this did impact the timeframe available to conduct the canvass, these EROs still felt it was successful and that this was in part due to canvass reform.

Other authorities had elections for the first time since Canvass Reform in 2021. For survey respondents with May elections, this impacted the time to plan the canvass and thus the ability to innovate. Others had by-elections during the canvass period, which resulted in adjusting plans to accommodate this.



## Section F: Moving Forward

Moving forward, participants across both methods of the research would like to see further refinement of the new canvass processes, whilst ensuring electoral service teams can use their expertise to further tailor the canvass to their needs.

One area commonly reported as needing improvement was the EMS. Participants wanted to see more development of the reporting options and more granular detail to inform their approach and evaluate their canvass. They wanted more discretion over how they manage their canvass using their EMS, as currently many electoral service teams find they are limited by its functionality. An example of this is the inability to manually move properties across routes.

Participants also felt the experience of electoral service teams may change moving forward, with skills required of them becoming more technical and data based. They felt this shift may change the recruitment strategy moving forward to ensure the team has the necessary specialist skills that come with more data being incorporated into their processes. Although participants reported teams had adapted well in the first two years, they appreciated the increasing need for team members with knowledge and skills in data and analysis.

Participants were keen to experiment with different ways of conducting the canvass in future years. Some were looking to make only minimal changes, as they felt they had the most effective and cost-efficient approach available to them. However, they were still open to reviewing their process to see if any improvements were possible. Some commented on using the experiences of other local authorities as a guide, especially for the new communications options and canvass processes. However, one said there would need to be issues with the accuracy of their register for them to justify a change.

*“There's a fair chance that we'll do something similar to what we did this year, but we'll tweak it slightly depending on that sort of wash up we'll have in the coming months. It works for us, canvass reform, so we'll not be looking to change too much unless there's particular areas like the local data-matching, we'll pick up on that.”*

Many participants had ideas to improve their canvass, the most common being expanding the amount of data held and used for data matching and communications. Many wanted to expand their local data matching by obtaining different datasets and analysing the data match to be more confident that properties are going down the correct route. They also wanted to collect more contact details to make better use of e-comms, although noted this would take significant time and resource.

## Conclusion

The second year of operation of the reformed canvass was mostly positive across both methods of research, with EROs being particularly pleased with the overall process. The data match and e-comms, along with the resulting reduction in paper forms to handle, was seen as particularly beneficial. The increased flexibility and control were viewed as beneficial, although administrators would like to see even more discretion to make decisions on what would best suit their electorate. In particular, further discretion around elements such as the door knock and timing of the canvass would be welcomed.

All areas of research found that the door knock posed significant challenges under canvass reform, which was particularly noticeable in 2021 where more authorities were able to canvass with the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. The two-stage registration process required with the annual canvass continued to be an area of confusion for electors, although this was also an issue pre-reform.

The most common area for concern, as was found after the 2020 canvass, was that the canvass reform may result in a less complete and accurate register. Route 1 was considered a particular risk factor for missing changes, which were justified for some having seen several changes coming from Route 1 properties when sending a Household Notification Letter outside of the canvass process. Others still felt their concerns would not be evident until a UK General Election.