

Committee: Public Relations and Economic Development Sub (Policy & Resources) Committee – For decision	Date: 5 February 2019
Subject: Voting System for Co-opted Members on PRED	Public
Report of: The Town Clerk & Chief Executive	For Decision
Report author: Emma Cunnington, Town Clerk's	

Summary

At a meeting of the Public Relations and Economic Development Sub-Committee in May 2018, a Member requested for consideration to be given to alternative voting systems in the election of co-opted Members for the Sub-Committee.

This report sets out the current voting system used (First Past the Post), as well as information, advantages and disadvantages of two alternative options: Alternative Voting (AV) and Single Transferrable Vote (STV).

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Consider alternative voting systems such as Alternative Voting (AV) or Single Transferrable Vote (STV) as well as the existing system of First Past the Post (FPTP) for the election of co-opted Members to the Public Relations and Economic Development Sub-Committee, and make recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Main Report

Background

1. At the Public Relations and Economic Development (PRED) Sub Committee on 29 May 2018, a Member requested consideration to be given to the voting system for co-opted Members.
2. Such appointments are currently decided through the use of the First Past the Post (FPTP) voting system, whereby the successful candidate is the one who receives the largest number of votes. FPTP is what is known as a plurality system, i.e. the winning candidate needs win only the largest number of votes cast but does not require an absolute majority.
3. It was suggested by some Members that this voting method was, perhaps, not the ideal means by which to elect co-optees, and with it proposed that a preferential voting system might be more suitable. As a consequence, the Town Clerk was

asked to examine potential alternative systems for Members' consideration ahead of the next election of co-opted Members in May 2019.

Current Position

First Past the Post (current system)

4. This system is that which is currently employed by the sub-committee to elect co-optees and is what is known as a "plurality" or "first-past-the-post" system. The main advantages of such a voting system are that the voting process is straightforward and there is a high degree of familiarity with it, and that the count is straightforward and is undertaken relatively swiftly after the vote, requiring no specialist equipment.
5. However, a disadvantage is that where there are multiple candidates standing for a single vacancy and the vote is split, a winner can be returned who is not necessarily the preferred option of the full sub-committee. For example:

There are four candidates, persons A, B, C, and D competing for one vacancy on a Committee. Persons A and B are both popular and effective individuals who are well-regarded by the full sub-committee. Meanwhile, candidate C enjoys strong support from a proportion of the sub-committee – around 40% - but is viewed as divisive or unsuitable by the remaining 60%. Person D does not enjoy significant support and is likely to receive few votes.

The majority of the sub-committee, who are not supportive of Person C, have their vote split by A and B, whilst all of C's supporters back him. As a result, C is returned to the dissatisfaction of the majority, despite the fact that both A and B are widely popular and the full sub-committee would have been content with either of them being appointed.

Options

6. The Policy and Resources Committee gave consideration to altering voting methods for elections to Grand Committees and Outside Bodies during 2015, focusing on Alternative Vote (AV) systems and the Single Transferable Vote system. Ultimately, it was decided to adopt AV for elections where there were multiple candidates standing for a single vacancy, but retain First Past The Post where there were multiple vacancies. The Court adopted this position in early 2016 and voting arrangements have worked well since that time. Below is a summary of the two systems explored:

Alternative Vote (or Instant Run-off Voting)

7. The Alternative Vote system (or Instant Run-off Voting) is a method which allows for ranked or preferential voting, whereby Members rank the candidates in the order in which they would like to see them returned. The voter puts a '1' by their first choice, a '2' by their second choice, and so on, until they no longer wish to express any further preferences or run out of candidates. This process is currently

employed by the Court of Common Council (see Standing Order No.10) for electing to single vacancies on committees or outside bodies. *(N.B. – where there are multiple vacancies, the Court retains the use of an FPTP system).*

8. Candidates are elected outright if they gain the support of half of those voting. However, under AV, if no candidate reaches the 50% threshold, then the candidate who received the fewest first preference votes is eliminated from the contest and their votes are redistributed according to the second (or next available) preference marked on the ballot paper. This process continues until one candidate receives 50% of the vote. The obvious advantage of this process is that the winning candidate is the consensus choice and will be the preference of the majority of those voting.
9. The AV system is widely used, including in the House of Lords (for electing Hereditary Peers), the House of Commons (for electing Select Committee Chairmen), for Australian State Government and House of Representative elections, and for the Presidential elections in Ireland and India.
10. However, it is primarily employed where there are multiple candidates for single vacancies. When there are multiple vacancies, the method becomes slightly more complicated, which is why the Policy and Resources Committee opted against its implementation in 2015. A breakdown of the process for multiple vacancies, including an example, is attached at Appendix A.

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

11. Single Transferrable Vote (STV) is a widely implemented electoral system currently used for national and local elections in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Australia and Malta, as well as for local elections in Scotland and New Zealand.
12. Under STV, the voting process is the same as for the AV system. The method allows for ranked or preferential voting, whereby Members number against the candidates the order in which would like to see them returned. The voters put a '1' by their first choice, a '2' by their second choice, and so on, until they no longer wish to express any further preferences or run out of candidates.
13. An example ballot paper for an STV election to fill three vacancies on a Committee is shown below:

Appointment of 3 Members to the XX Committee

Instead of using a cross, number the candidates in the order of your preference.

Put the number 1 next to the name of the candidate who is your first preference, 2 next to your second preference, 3 next to your third preference, 4 next to your fourth preference, and so on.

You can mark as many or as few preferences as you like.

CANDIDATE A	4
CANDIDATE B	2
CANDIDATE C	1
CANDIDATE D	
CANDIDATE E	3
CANDIDATE F	5

14. Under both AV and STV, only one round of voting is usually required. Voters rank candidates in order of preference and those candidates returned are the preferred option of the majority. Under AV, if the number of candidates to reach the majority threshold does not equal the number of vacancies then the candidate who received the fewest first preference votes is eliminated from the contest and their votes are redistributed according to the second (or next available) preference marked on the ballot paper.
15. However, under an STV system, candidates do not necessarily require a majority of votes to be elected. Elected candidates must achieve a known share of first preference votes, or 'quota' which is determined by the size of the electorate and the number of vacancies to be filled. Surplus votes for popular candidates who have achieved over and beyond the required quota are transferred in accordance with the voter's second preference and not "wasted" – i.e. votes on certain preferred or less-preferred candidates are transferred to other candidates, which is helpful where there are multiple vacancies in ensuring that candidates favoured by the majority are returned.

16. The quota is set by a formula based on the number of votes cast and the number of vacancies. Different formulae can be used but the most common is:

$$\text{votes needed to win} = \left(\frac{\text{valid votes cast}}{\text{seats to fill} + 1} \right) + 1$$

17. The counting process under STV differs to that of the Alternative Vote system. Votes are counted as follows:

- Only first preference votes are tallied in the first instance and a candidate who has reached or exceeded the quota via first preference votes is declared elected.
- If a candidate has more first preference votes than the quota, their surplus first preference votes are transferred to other candidates, i.e. votes that would have gone to the preferred candidate go to the next preference.
- If no other candidate still meets the quota, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and their votes are transferred, again according to the preference indicated.
- If the next available preference is for a candidate that has already been eliminated, then the vote is awarded to the next preference after that (i.e. third or fourth preference, and so on).
- This process repeats until either a preferred candidate is found for every vacancy or there are as many vacancies as remaining candidates.

18. The most commonly used method of transferring surplus first preference votes is by random transfer, where a number of votes corresponding to the candidate's surplus are transferred to their next choices. Counters redistribute the last ballots the elected candidate received, the first ballots the candidate received, or choose another method such as a fully random draw. Variations of the random transfer or surplus votes are currently used for some elections in Australia and the Republic of Ireland.

19. It is important to note that changing the order of the ballot papers could change the outcome of the election.

Proposal

20. It is proposed that for the purpose of electing four co-opted Members onto the Public Relations and Economic Development Sub Committee, the voting system should remain as FPTP to enable the votes to be counted simply and the results to be announced quickly. This would also be in line with the Court of Common Council's position adopted in early 2016 to use AV for elections where there were multiple candidates standing for a single vacancy, but retain First Past The Post where there were multiple vacancies.

Conclusion

21. This report explains the current system for the election of the Members to Committees and sets out some alternatives for your consideration.

Appendices

- Appendix A: The use of AV for elections to multiple vacancies

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Appendix A

The use of AV for elections to multiple vacancies

1. The same process as electing to single vacancies is applied to voting for multiple vacancies. Members vote according to their preference, just as with voting for a single vacancy. If there are three vacancies, then just as with the present system you vote for three candidates – marking them 1, 2 and 3 as appropriate.
2. The only difference is that Members have the option to express a preference for candidates beyond the three they choose to vote for: the voter is simply expressing a preference for their “next choice” in the event that one of their preferred three candidates is unsuccessful.
3. The example below demonstrates the system in practice, using an election to a Grand Committee at the annual April meeting of the Court as an example.
4. In this example, there are 3 vacancies on a particular Committee and 7 Members standing. 101 Members are in attendance at the vote, all casting valid ballots. Candidates are elected if they receive the backing of 50% of voters, so in this case a candidate needs 51 votes to be returned.
5. Members vote according to their preference, just as with voting for a single vacancy, as shown in the example below. The 1, 2 and 3 are – to all intents and purposes – the same as marking an “X” if the vote was run under the current system. However, marking a “4” means here that if one of your favoured three candidates gets eliminated early on, this vote will transfer to your next preferred candidate and therefore can still influence the result.

Committee – 3 vacancies

Adams, T.	3
Bastin, C.	2
Campbell, K.	4
Drake, T.	-
Eastham, G.	5
Furnell, J.	-
George, C.	1

6. In this instance, the voter’s favoured candidate is George. However, the voter realises that George is unpopular and is unlikely to be elected. Under the current system, this vote would effectively be “wasted” and the voter may opt to vote for somebody they prefer less but who is more likely to be returned. However, under AV, the voter knows that - if George is as unpopular as expected and is eliminated in the first round - then their vote will effectively be transferred to their fourth-choice

candidate. This, therefore, removes the present inclination to vote for just one candidate, so as to avoid potentially diluting the value of your votes.

7. Accordingly, the voter decides that, should George or one of his other two preferred candidates fail to be returned, he would favour Campbell above all other candidates. He therefore marks a “4” next to her name, to indicate she is his next choice.
8. In assessing the final three candidates, the voter decides they do not wish for Drake or Furnell to be returned in any circumstance; however, all things being equal, they feel that Eastham could do a good job so make him their fifth preference, whilst declining to indicate a preference for the other two candidates. This means that, no matter what, his ballot paper will not contribute any votes to either Drake or Furnell’s candidatures.
9. The papers are collected up in the normal fashion and first, second and third preference votes for each candidate counted. As shown below, Bastin and Campbell have gained the support of half of voters from first, second and third preferences and are duly elected.
10. One vacancy therefore remains. The candidate with the fewest votes (George) is eliminated accordingly; the ballot papers where George received a first, second or third preference vote are consulted, and his 12 “votes” reallocated according to who was indicated as the voters’ fourth preference.

Candidate	VOTES AFTER:			
	1 st Round	2 nd Round	3 rd Round	4 th Round
<i>Adams</i>	19	19	■	■
<i>Bastin</i>	80	■	■	■
<i>Campbell</i>	75	■	■	■
<i>Drake</i>	41	43	48	62
<i>Eastham</i>	32	35	39	■
<i>Furnell</i>	36	38	40	49
<i>George</i>	12	■	■	■

■ = Candidate Eliminated
 ■ = Candidate Elected

11. We can see that a number of voters have declined to express a preference for more than three candidates. The seven voters who did express a fourth choice now have their vote reallocated (as shown in the table). In the case of our voter, he named Campbell as his fourth choice – but Campbell has already been elected. Accordingly, the voter’s vote for George is now transferred to his next available preference – Eastham.
12. The second round of counting now over, and with no other candidate having received the support of half of the Court, again the candidate with the fewest votes (Adams) is eliminated and their votes reallocated according to the preferences indicated.

13. Following the reallocation of votes, again no candidate has reached the threshold to be returned, so the candidate with the fewest votes (Eastham) is eliminated and their votes reallocated according to the next preference indicated.
14. Drake consequently reaches the required number of votes and is elected to the third vacancy.

What if there is a tie?

15. AV does not entirely remove the possibility of re-balloting being required where multiple vacancies are being contested. It is possible - as with the current system - that two Members might receive an equality of votes for a vacancy after all other candidates have been eliminated and there are no further votes to reallocate. In this instance, the candidate with the highest number of first preference votes is declared the winner, providing a natural "tie-breaker." Should this still present a tie, then a straightforward run-off would be required at the next meeting, as is currently the case. However, with up to 125 Members voting and expressing various preferences, it is unlikely that this would be a common occurrence (indeed, AV renders a draw less likely than under the current system).
16. It is important to note that there would be far fewer Members voting at a sub-committee election, however.
17. It is also possible (although highly unlikely) that more candidates reach the required threshold than there are vacancies for. Consider the table at paragraph 10: imagine in the final round of counting, both candidates pass the 51 votes mark. In this instance, the candidate with the highest total would still be returned. Another unlikely possibility is that, after the first round of counting, five of the candidates receive 51 votes, with the remaining 48 votes split between the other two candidates. In this instance, we would again deem those with the highest number of votes to be returned, with first preference votes used as a tie-breaker if required.