

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Policy & Resources	24 September 2015
Subject: Procedure for conducting ballots at the Court of Common Council	Public
Report of: Town Clerk	For Decision
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Summary</u></p> <p>At its June meeting, your Committee considered a report setting out some potential alternative arrangements for conducting ballots at the Court of Common Council. Your Committee was supportive of considering the implementation of an Alternative Vote (AV) system and sought further information as to how this might be employed. This report sets this information out and seeks to provide clarity as to how such voting would be managed.</p> <p>The use of AV is a relatively straightforward concept, although it is difficult to articulate its use when electing to multiple vacancies in a written format to those unfamiliar with the system.</p> <p>Recommendation: That consideration be given to the introduction of an alternative vote system at the Court of Common Council for elections to Committees.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. At the 30 May 2015 meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, reference was made to the results of the various ballots for places on Committees undertaken at the 23 April meeting of the Court of Common Council.
2. It was suggested that alternative voting arrangements should be explored, with a view to achieving a fairer and more open democratic process and one that would ensure that those elected had a significant proportion of support from the Court as well.
3. The Town Clerk was consequently asked to examine potential alternative systems for Members' consideration and a report was produced for the June meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee. Members considered the information set out and consequently requested further clarification as to how the Alternative Vote (AV) system might be implemented.

Alternative Vote (or Instant Run-off Voting)

4. As your Committee previously noted, this method allows for ranked or preferential voting, where Members number against the candidates 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.
5. Candidates are elected outright if they gain the support of half of those voting. If the number of candidates reaching the 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. This process continues until sufficient candidates are returned.

6. This 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, the London Mayoral elections, and for the Presidential elections in Ireland and India. As set out in the previous report, the broad advantages and disadvantages are as follows:

Advantages:

- By encouraging candidates to seek first, as well as lower-preference votes, the impact of negative campaigning or tactical voting is significantly diminished.
- Tactical voting is also less prevalent as voters are confident their “first-choice” vote isn’t wasted. This also means that voters are less likely to vote for simply one candidate (where there are multiple vacancies), for fear of risking their other votes for alternative candidates knock their preferred candidate out.
- Elected Members would be confident they were the preferred choice of the majority of the Court.
- It is highly unlikely additional rounds of voting would be required, meaning that a result could always be declared following the Court (in the normal fashion).

Disadvantages:

- Reallocating lower preference votes can, potentially, throw up a “lowest common denominator” winner without much positive support (i.e. first preference votes) of their own.
7. The Alternative Vote system is similar in practice to that currently used during the election of Committee Chairmen where there are more than two candidates, but in a more efficient manner.
 8. Presently, where there are more than two candidates standing a ballot takes place and, if one of the candidates gains 50% of the vote they win and are elected. If nobody reaches that threshold, then the candidate with fewest votes is eliminated and another ballot takes place between the two remaining candidates to determine the winner. 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. AV simply allows for this “second round of voting” to take place automatically, without the need to re-ballot.

Current System Example: Smith, Jones and Evans stand for Chairman. You vote for Smith. The votes are counted, nobody gets 50% of the vote, but Smith turns out to be the least popular and is eliminated. Members are re-balloted; this time you vote for Evans, who you prefer to Jones. In practice, you have expressed a preference - Smith as “first preference”, Evans as “second preference”.

Under AV: The AV system allows you to indicate this preference on your initial ballot paper, by marking Smith as 1 and Evans as 2, thereby obviating the need for Members to complete ballot papers again. Officers conducting the count will simply reallocate all votes for Smith (after his elimination) to whichever candidate the voter has indicated on their ballot paper as their second preference.

Multiple Vacancies

11. The same process 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.
12. The only difference is that Members have the option to express a preference for candidates beyond the three they choose to vote for. Just as with the election for Chairmen/Deputy Chairmen set out in paragraph 9, the voter is simply expressing a preference for their “next choice” in the event that one of their preferred three candidates is unsuccessful.
13. The example below demonstrates the system in practice:
14. In this example, there are 3 vacancies on a 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.
15. 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

16. 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.

17. Accordingly, the voter decides that, should George or one of his other two preferred candidates fail to be returned, he would favour Ms Campbell above all other candidates. He therefore marks a “4” next to her name, to indicate she is his next choice.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. 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.

	VOTES AFTER:			
Candidate	1st Round	2nd Round	3rd Round	4th 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

21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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.

24. Drake consequently reaches the required number of votes and is elected to the third vacancy.

What if there is a tie?

25. 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).
26. It is also possible (although highly unlikely) that more candidates reach the required threshold than there are vacancies for. Consider the table at paragraph 20: 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.

Implementation

27. As with any new process, there is some small risk of confusion at the point of implementation. AV is not used in the United Kingdom for General or Local Elections and it is therefore likely that a number of Members may be unfamiliar with the voting process.
28. The risk of any confusion would be mitigated to an extent by the provision of detailed voting instructions on the ballot paper itself. Members would also be reminded of the revised voting method before each ballot while the new system "beds in".

Implications

28. Any changes to the voting system would require amendments to Standing Orders. This would be, subject to Members agreement, handled in the usual way and would require the approval of the Court of Common Council.

Conclusion

29. This report explains how the Alternative Vote system could be utilised for the election of the Members to Committees. Members are invited to consider whether they would wish to pursue its implementation for ballots held at the Court of Common Council.

Gregory Moore

Senior Committee & Member Services Officer
Town Clerk's Department
T: 020 7332 1399

E: gregory.moore@cityoflondon.gov.uk