

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Policy & Resources	10 December 2015
Subject: Procedure for conducting ballots at the Court of Common Council: Single Transferable Vote (STV)	Public
Report of: Town Clerk	For Decision

Summary

At its September meeting, your Committee considered a report concerning the implementation of an Alternative Vote (AV) system for elections to Committees conducted by the Court of Common Council.

Your Committee was supportive of the introduction of AV for elections to single vacancies, but felt that it was perhaps overly complicated for use when electing to multiple vacancies. It was consequently asked that the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system be explored.

This paper provides an explanation of how STV works and sets out a recommended method for usage, with examples to demonstrate how the system would work in practice.

Recommendation

That consideration be given to the introduction of the Single Transferable Vote system at the Court of Common Council for elections where there are multiple vacancies on Committees.

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. The Town Clerk was consequently asked to examine potential alternative systems for Members' consideration.
3. At your Committee meeting in September 2015, Members endorsed the use of the Alternative Vote (AV) system for ballots where there is a single vacancy. However, it was felt that the system was not appropriate for use in ballots where there were multiple vacancies. Members consequently requested that the Single Transferrable Vote (STV) system be explored for use when balloting for multiple vacancies.

4. This paper provides a brief explanation of the STV system and explains how it would be applied for ballots for multiple vacancies.

Single Transferable Vote: How it Works

5. 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.
6. 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 they 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.
7. 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

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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:

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

11. 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.

How Surplus and Second Preference votes are allocated

12. 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 of surplus votes are currently used for some elections in Australia and the Republic of Ireland.

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

Implementation

14. As with any new process, there is some small risk of confusion at the point of implementation. STV is not used in England for General or Local Elections and it is therefore likely that a number of Members may be unfamiliar with the voting process.
15. 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

16. This report explains how the STV 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.

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