

Report – Policy and Resources Committee

Procedure for Elections to Single Vacancies

To be presented on Thursday, 14th January 2016

*To the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Commons of
the City of London in Common Council assembled.*

SUMMARY

Following the various ballots for places on Committees undertaken at the 23 April meeting of the Court of Common Council, the suggestion was made at a meeting of your Policy and Resources Committee that alternative voting arrangements should be explored. This was 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 full Court.

Your Policy and Resources Committee has since considered a number of potential systems and is minded that the introduction of an Alternative Vote (AV) system for electing to single vacancies on committees would increase the fairness of the process. This report provides an explanation as to the practicalities and advantages of an AV electoral method and details how such a system would work.

RECOMMENDATION

That the implementation of an Alternative Vote system be agreed for Court of Common Council elections to single vacancies, with the requisite amendments to Standing Orders approved as set out at Appendix 2.

MAIN REPORT

Current System

1. The existing process is set out in Standing Order No.10, as follows:
 - 10.4 *When one vacancy has to be filled the following requirements shall apply:-*
 - a) *if there are fewer than four candidates, the successful candidate shall require a majority of the votes cast;*
 - b) *if there are four or more candidates, the successful candidate shall require 40% of the votes cast;*
 - c) *if, in the circumstances described in both (a) and (b) above, no candidate secures the proportion of votes required, the two candidates with the highest number of votes shall proceed to a second ballot.*
2. This system is what is known as a “plurality” system and is a variant of a “first-past-the-post” method. 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. The variant used for Court

elections has an additional advantage in that candidates require a minimum of 40% of votes cast to be returned.

3. 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 Court. For example:

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

The majority of the Court, who are not supportive of Member 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 Court would have been content with either of them being appointed.

4. Another drawback is that, whilst the 40% threshold for where there are more than four or more candidates means that successful candidates can claim at least the support of a large minority of the Court, in practice due to the vote being split a second round of voting is often required before one candidate reaches 40%. This delays the appointment process by at least a month, until the next meeting of the Court.

Alternative Vote System

5. The Alternative Vote method provides a solution to these issues. It works by allowing 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 (rather than marking an "X" at present).
6. Just as with the present system, 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.
7. The Alternative Vote system is therefore very 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 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, as second preferences are expressed on the same ballot paper, so the appointment process would never be delayed to the next month.
10. Accordingly, not only is the electoral process made quicker, but it is also ensured that any candidate elected is the clear majority or consensus choice of the Court.
11. 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.
12. In practice, the move to an AV system represents only a minor change from the way in which elections are currently conducted. For instance:

Current System Example: *Smith, Jones and Evans stand for a vacancy to the Standards Committee. You vote for Smith. The votes are counted and no one candidate receives 50% of the vote. However, Smith turns out to be the least popular and is eliminated. Members are re-balloted at the next meeting of the Court; this time you vote for Evans, whom you find preferable 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 at the next meeting. 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.*

Implementation

13. An example ballot paper is provided at Appendix 1.
14. Any change to the electoral process would require associated amendments to Standing Orders. These are set out at Appendix 2.
15. Your Policy and Resources Committee considered a number of potential voting systems which might be used for elections to both multiple and single vacancies, taking into account their various advantages and disadvantages. Whilst it was felt that the Alternative Vote represented a straightforward improvement in respect of single vacancies, your Committee considered that the possible alternative arrangements for voting associated with multiple vacancies on committees were potentially too complex. It was therefore concluded that no changes should be made in respect of the current system in place for multiple vacancies at this time.

Conclusion

16. This report explains how the Alternative Vote system could be utilised for the election of Members to single vacancies on committees. Members are **recommended** to agree its implementation for ballots held at the Court of Common Council where there are single vacancies.

All of which we submit to the judgement of this Honourable Court.

DATED this 19th day of November 2015.

SIGNED on behalf of the Committee.

Mark Boleat
Chairman, Policy and Resources Committee

APPENDIX 1

Appointment of ONE Member to the XX Committee

Instead of using a cross (X), please 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 desired.

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

Revised Standing Order 10.4

- 10.4 *When one vacancy has to be filled, voters shall mark numbers against candidates' names on ballot papers in order of preference.*
- a) the successful candidate shall require a majority of the votes cast.*
 - b) If no candidate is in receipt of 50% of first preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first preference votes will be eliminated and their votes reallocated according to the second preference indicated on their ballot papers.*
 - c) This process continues until one candidate has obtained 50% of the votes cast.*