



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Date:	Friday, 12th December, 2008
Subject:	Extension of Current Council Term – Appointments Procedures
Reporting Officer:	Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (extension 6325)
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Purpose of Report

To consider the impact of the two year extension of the current Council term on the arrangements for the nomination of Members to outside bodies, the appointment of Committee membership and the appointment of Chairmen/Deputy Chairmen posts and to agree appropriate protocols for these appointments during the additional two years of the Council term.

Relevant Background Information

The Minister with responsibility for Local Government has agreed, in order to accommodate the Review of Public Administration process and the transfer of additional powers to Local Councils, to extend the current Council term until 2011 at which time elections will be held to the eleven new Local Authorities. Accordingly, it will be necessary to consider the impact of the additional two years on the Council's arrangements for appointments to outside bodies and the protocols relating to the appointment of Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Committees.

Decisions Required

Nominations and Appointments to Outside Bodies

The Council, at its Annual Meeting held on 26th May, 2005, in accordance with its policy in this regard, nominated Members to represent the Council on a number of outside bodies. These nominations were made for the period to end on the date of the Local Government Elections to be held in 2009. These appointments were made on the basis of proportionality using the d'Hondt system to generate a hierarchy of choices based on Party Group strengths at that time.

There were more than ninety appointments made by the Party Groups and agreed by the Council in 2005. I would suggest that to review these appointments for the additional two years of the Council term would have little benefit and would merely cause unnecessary disruption and confusion for the outside bodies concerned. Accordingly, I would recommend that the Committee amend the decision of the Council of 26th May, 2005 to reflect that the period of appointment of Members will be until the date of the next Local Government Elections, anticipated to be held in May, 2011.

Committee Appointments to Outside Bodies

From time to time Committees have made appointments of Members to outside bodies and these are also often stipulated to be for the period to end on the date of the Local Government Elections to be held in June, 2009. It seems reasonable that any decisions of Committee couched in these terms should also be accepted now as extending to the revised date of the Elections in 2011.

Appointment of Committees and Chairmen/Deputy Chairmen

In accordance with the requirements of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 and the provisions made in Standing Orders, the Council agrees Committee membership and appoints Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Committees at the annual meeting each year. These appointments are made on the basis of proportionality and are reviewed annually.

There is no need, during the two additional years, to review or amend the mechanisms used for the making of appointments to Committees or for the appointment of Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Committees. The principles of proportionality will apply and decisions will be reached on the basis of Party strengths. However, there is an issue in relation to the appointment of Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen which will require consideration:-

Standing Order 42 states that:

“No political group shall hold the same post for more than two years in a four year term and groups must make their selections on the basis of this principle provided that a group shall not be required to select a post of Deputy Chairman if a post of Chairman is available and provided that a group may select the same post if no other post is available to it.”

Since the Council term has been extended to six years, subject to formal confirmation, this restriction of no more than two year appointments will have to be set aside so that the principles of proportionality can be applied.

A supplemental arrangement to deal with the additional two years will be necessary. I would suggest that it would be fair and equitable for the Council to agree by resolution that during 2009/10 and 2010/11 each Party Group would be limited to the holding of a post for no more than one year of the additional two years of this Council term. This would effectively permit an unrestricted choice for each Party Group in relation to the posts of Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen for 2009/2010. However, subject to there being an alternative choice available, a Party Group could not hold the same posts in 2010/2011. This arrangement will apply only in the special circumstances of the current extension to the Council term and thereafter the conditions of Standing Order 42 (f) would apply at all times.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

the decision of the Council of 26th May, 2005 in relation to the nomination and appointment of Members to outside bodies be amended to extend the period of appointment of such Members until the date of the next Local Government Elections anticipated to be held in May, 2011;

any remaining decisions made by the Committees to appoint Members to outside bodies in which it has been stipulated that the appointments should end on the date of the Local Government Elections to be held in June, 2009 be amended in a like manner; and

in relation to the appointment of Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Committees during the additional years of this Council term from June, 2009 until May, 2011, the conditions of Standing Order 42 (f) be set aside by resolution of Council and that the Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen appointed under the proportionality arrangements be permitted to hold their posts for no more than one year of the additional two years of the extended Council term.

Resource Implications

None

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