



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
Subject:	Introduction of Proportionality to the Appointment of Lord Mayors and Deputy Lord Mayors
Date:	22 nd October, 2010
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Relevant Background Information

The Committee, at its meeting on 20th August, agreed that a report be submitted for its consideration concerning the possible extension of the d'Hondt system of proportionality to the offices of Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor.

The Council has for a number of years accepted the principle of proportionality for the allocation of places on Committees and on outside bodies and for the allocation of Chairmanships and Deputy Chairmanships of Committees and these arrangements are included in the Council's Standing Orders. However, the election of the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Lord Mayor is not currently included in the proportionality arrangements and it could be argued that it would be in keeping with the principle of proportionality to extend the scheme to cover the Civic Dignitaries. If the Committee were minded to include these positions within the proportionality arrangements, then it would be necessary to do so at the beginning of a Council Term. Elections to the new Council are expected to be held in May, 2011.

Key Issues

Unlike the appointment of Members to Committees and outside bodies, or the allocation of Chairmanships and Deputy Chairmanships of Committees, the election of the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Lord Mayor is subject to statutory regulation. Section 11 (1) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 makes it a requirement for these positions to be "elected" annually by the Council and, in order to fulfil this requirement, it is necessary for the election of the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Lord Mayor to appear as separate items on the summons for the Annual Council Meeting. The introduction of proportionality to the process cannot override this legal obligation.

The Committee would, however, be entitled to establish a protocol as to how the election of the Civic Dignitaries should be administered. After the Local Government Elections, officers meet with the Party Group Leaders to decide on the allocation of Committee places, the appointment of Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of Committees and the appointment of Members to outside bodies. At the moment, these appointments are dealt with in separate “pools” and the d’Hondt system is used to allocate the order of choices to Party Groups, based upon their strength within the Council. Should the Committee so wish, the identification of the Party Groups entitled to nominate Members to fill the positions of Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor on an annual basis for the full 4-year term could be determined as a separate “pool” at the same meeting of Party Group leaders. This would give 8 places (4 Lord Mayors and 4 Deputy Lord Mayors) over the 4-year term.

As pointed out earlier, the Member allocated to each position each year would still require to be formally “elected” at the Annual Council meeting and the protocol cannot prevent a Member of Council from nominating a different Member at the Annual meeting. In such circumstances, a vote would have to be taken at the Annual meeting to decide upon the appointments.

It would seem not to be appropriate to include the High Sheriff position within these arrangements as this is not an appointment made by the Council. Although custom in practice determines that the Council submits one name only for consideration to the Secretary of State, this is decided annually by the Council and he/she would be entitled to reject that nominee and require the Council to submit alternatives. It is the Secretary of State and not the Council who then makes the appointment. For these reasons the process for the appointment of the High Sheriff is different from that for the Lord Mayor and the Deputy Lord Mayor and it is considered that this nomination should continue to be decided annually by the Council.

There are, essentially, two decisions which the Committee is required to consider:

1. Does the Committee wish to establish a protocol to extend the proportionality arrangements to cover the identification of the Party Groups which will be entitled to nominate Members to fill the offices of the Civic Dignitaries? Members should note however that a formal vote on this would be required at Council if more than one nomination for the positions was received.
2. If so, does the Committee wish the position of High Sheriff to be excluded from these arrangements?

Resource Implications

None.

Decisions

1. The Committee is requested to decide if it wishes to agree to the extension of the proportionality arrangements to include the identification of those Party Groups which will be entitled to nominate Members to fill the offices of Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor on an annual basis for the full 4-year term. If so, the Committee

is requested further to agree that these appointments be considered as a separate "pool" which will be allocated at the meeting of Party Group Leaders immediately following the Local Government Elections every 4 years.

2. Does the Committee wish the position of High Sheriff to be excluded from these arrangements? Members should note that whatever decision is taken, the Local Government Act requires a formal vote on the election of Lord Mayor or Deputy Lord Mayor if more than one nomination is received.

Decision Tracking

Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager

May, 2011.