



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Introduction of Proportionality to the Appointment of Lord Mayors and Deputy Lord Mayors</b>
<b>Date:</b>	22 <sup>nd</sup> October, 2010
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext 6314)
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**Relevant Background Information**

The Committee, at its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

The adoption of proportionality to the allocation of the Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor positions would have several administrative advantages. Under current arrangements, we do not know who the Lord Mayor or the Deputy Lord Mayor will be until the Annual Council meeting each year. The incoming Lord Mayor is expected to immediately start carrying out the functions of the post, including chairing the remainder of the Annual Council Meeting and to start acting as First Citizen immediately thereafter without any specific training having been provided. If the Council adopts the system of proportionality for these appointments, it will be known which Party Grouping will be likely to hold the Civic Offices each year for the full 4-year term (subject to confirmation at each Annual Council Meeting). This will enable the Party Groups to give proper consideration as to which of their Members should be nominated to hold the positions when it is their turn and officers can establish a proper induction programme for incoming Civic Dignitaries so they can "hit the ground running" at the Annual Council Meeting.

As former Lord Mayors will know, the position of Lord Mayor is very busy and requires a full-time commitment from the person holding the Office. If we know in advance which Party will be entitled to nominate each year, then this will allow the Political Groupings to ensure that they take into account the burden of the job before deciding upon their nominees.

It will also allow officers to meet with the incoming nominee for the position of Lord Mayor well in advance of the commencement of their Term and agree on such things as the date of their inauguration dinner, the key themes for their year in Office and the charities they may wish to support, should their nomination be accepted at the Annual Council Meeting.

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

1. Does the Committee wish 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?; and
2. If so, does the Committee wish the position of High Sheriff to be excluded from these arrangements?

<b>Resource Implications</b>
None.

<b>Recommendations</b>
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.

<b>Decision Tracking</b>
Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager  May, 2011.