

**VOTING SYSTEM FOR 2004 ELECTIONS
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING: 5 SEPTEMBER 2002**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Further to the report of the City Manager which has been circulated, there were two additional issues which were not addressed in that report, and one of which was indicated would be the subject of a further report.

Those two additional issues are:

- (a) Further comment on an issue raised at the Review of Membership Seminar held on Friday 19 July 2002; and
- (b) An analysis of the outcome of the STV public consultation process.

2. COMMENTS ARISING OUT OF REVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP SEMINAR

At the 19 July 2002 seminar there was discussion regarding future membership size of the Council and the electoral basis for the Council.

Mr Alan McRobie, who had led the STV seminar on 5 July 2002, also attended the 19 August 2002 seminar and was requested to provide comment on the issue of the optimum number of members per ward if STV is used as the voting system.

Mr McRobie's comments are:

"What size does a ward need to be to function at optimum capacity?"

In determining what constitutes the optimum ward size, consideration needs to be given to what is seen as the most appropriate level of representation. At present, the representational ratio (excluding the Mayor) in Christchurch City is approximately one Councillor for every 13,176 persons. If Community Board members are included the ratio reduces to one elected representative for every 5,270 people. Any reduction in the number of Councillors will inevitably increase this current ratio.

There is no magic figure that can be identified as providing 'the most appropriate level of representation.' This depends on a host of factors, the most important of which would appear to be the representational role that Councillors and community board members ascribe for themselves, the view that electors have of the role and responsibilities of their elected representatives, and any distinction that is made between the twin roles of governance and representation. Elected representatives almost certainly have different perceptions of the relative significance of these roles and responsibilities. Any decision on the future size of the Council and community boards will need to address these issues before reaching a decision.

The present 2-member wards plus 3-member community board representation for each ward appears to have served Christchurch well over the past 12 years. However, as was shown in the 1999 representational study, these ward boundaries did not necessarily reflect identifiable communities of interest (or what the report described as 'community areas').

If the Single Transferable Voting system is adopted, a major reconsideration of representation and ward boundaries would be required. It is generally recognised that under an STV system an uneven number of elected representatives for each discrete geographical unit is likely to provide more proportional representation around the Council and community board tables than where there are an even number of representatives elected. Under STV the minimum number of representatives to be elected from each ward is generally accepted to be three, with a probable maximum of nine (above this figure the number of candidates contesting an election is likely to be too many for electors to cope satisfactorily without being 'put off'). Ideally, in a city the size of Christchurch, and with coherent political groupings contesting elections, the optimum range of representatives for each ward would appear to be between five and nine."

3. OUTCOME OF STV CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Council received 600 responses to the City Scene article inviting submissions on the voting system used in 2004, and a telephone survey of 400 randomly-selected electors was carried out on the Council's behalf by the National Research Bureau.

The survey results set out below have been prepared by the Senior Research Adviser, David Price, in the Monitoring and Research Team.

3.1 City Scene Self Completed Survey

A survey form was included in the Christchurch City Scene with an article on the option of changing voting systems at the next election. Respondents could either fill in the form by hand and freepost it to the Council, complete it on the internet or they could ring the Council and complete the questionnaire over the phone. The majority of people chose to complete the survey by hand.

The City Scene survey had a self selected sample. That is, only people who had read the City Scene, or found the information on the internet, could have filled out the survey. Secondly only those people who had a strong feeling either for STV or for no change were likely to respond. Results from this survey only represent the opinions of those people who completed the survey.

3.2 Random Telephone Survey

The Council contracted the National Research Bureau to conduct a telephone survey of city residents who were eligible to vote. A sample of around 1,000 people were selected at random and asked if they had heard of Single Transferable Voting (STV). The 40 per cent of people (401) who had heard of STV were then asked a series of further questions on their preference of voting system to be used at the next local government elections. It was decided only to ask the people who had heard of STV their opinions on the voting methods as it would have taken too much time to provide an explanation of what STV is over the telephone.

The telephone survey provides results that reflect the views of the voting population of Christchurch who have heard of STV. It also gives results for those people who did not feel strongly enough about the issue to go to the effort of responding to the City Scene questionnaire. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 5 per cent (at 95 per cent confidence).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Preferred Voting System

Table 1 shows the respondents preference for the different voting options from both surveys. Both surveys show that STV was preferred to FPP. The telephone survey also identified a group of respondents (25 per cent) who had no feeling on either voting system.

The telephone survey also showed that the greater the understanding of STV the more likely the respondent will be in favour of changing to STV.

Preference	NRB Telephone Survey (Per cent)	City Scene Questionnaire Form (Per Cent)
Single Transferable Vote (STV)	45	67
First Past the Post (FPP)	25	32
No Feeling Either Way	25	-
Don't Know	5	1
Total	100	100

The City Scene survey found the main reasons why people preferred STV was because it will be fairer, more representative and will actually give a result that the people voted for. While the main reasons why people were in favour of FPP generally related to a lack of understanding and distrust of how STV works, the complexity of STV, and that it is difficult to know enough about all of the candidates to be able to rank them effectively.

4.2 Should the Council hold a Referendum?

Two thirds of those surveyed by telephone thought they would like a referendum on which voting method to use. However, when they were told the cost of holding a referendum would be at least \$300,000 those in favour dropped to 39 per cent. Table 2 shows the results for whether people were in favour of a referendum, considering it would cost \$300,000.

Table 2: Should The Council Hold A Referendum Considering The Cost - \$300,000		
Preference	NRB Telephone Survey (Per cent)	City Scene Questionnaire Form (Per Cent)
Yes	39	34
No	54	58
Don't Know	7	8
Total	100	100

The main reasons given for holding a referendum were that it was more democratic for people to decide, rather than the Council; and the most popular voting system would be selected. In addition, there was a high number of comments that if a referendum was to occur there would need to be better information and education about STV and the importance of the referendum.

The main reasons for not supporting a referendum were, the cost of holding a referendum was too expensive and a waste of money, especially given a lack of understanding of STV combined with apathy would result in a low response rate.

4.3 Should The System of Voting be Consistent with District Health Board?

Considering the District Health Boards will be using STV at the 2004 elections, both surveys asked whether the same system should be used for all voting. The majority of people in both surveys thought the same system should be used (Table 3).

Table 3: Should Same System Voting Be Used For All Voting		
Preference	NRB Telephone Survey (Per cent)	City Scene Questionnaire Form (Per Cent)
Yes	72	64
No	15	31
Don't Know	13	5
Total	100	100

The main reasons given for using the same system were that it would be less complicated and avoid any confusion if the method of voting was consistent. While those who disagreed thought that the same system might not suit both the District Health Board and the Local Bodies, and that they wanted to stick to the current FPP system.

5. SUMMARY

Both surveys show there is support for a change from 'First Past the Post' to 'Single Transferable Voting' in Christchurch. This was also supported by the results which showed overwhelming support for all voting at the next local government elections to use the same system.

It was generally believed that the cost of holding a referendum of the voting system to be used at the next elections was not a good use of Council money.