

Election of Legislative Council

Written by Stuart McKenzie

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There has been much controversy but little resolution as to how the upper chamber of Tynwald should be elected. However, one clear objective is apparent in that it must be publicly elected in the future – the electoral college route being deemed as anachronistic.

Keys members are jealous of their primary legislative role and are reluctant to sanction any election procedure which lessens their primacy. Council members on the whole do not want constituencies as they feel that they might then become bogged down by local problems.

It might be thought that reform of the Council election procedure and indeed reform of the Tynwald constitution and procedures as a whole is unlikely to succeed with so many vested interests. The plethora of possibilities mitigates against progress. Thirty two seats with separation into two houses after the election? Island wide constituency for Council? Eight four seat constituencies with highest (lowest?) votes taking a Council position? etc etc.

In my opinion there is a straightforward solution to this problem which recognises both the status quo and the desire for popular election and it simply builds on existing procedures.

Any candidate for the Keys has to be proposed, seconded and have a number of assentors to demonstrate that they are serious and have at least nominal support. Their 'paper' is rigorously validated by the Returning Officer before the nomination is accepted and they can move forward to the ballot paper.

What I propose is that any candidate for Council must be proposed, seconded and have a number of assentors from within the Keys before their name can go forward to a public election. The number of assentors would have to be debated and agreed in Tynwald but my feeling is that it should be at least two, making four in all as support for a candidate. Keys members should be able to support more than one candidate but not more than the number of vacancies available on the Council at any election.

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The status quo should be maintained without change. The Council is, and should remain as, a revising chamber. The Keys primacy would remain inviolate. The essential change would be that candidates would need not only public support but also that of a proportion of the Keys members with whom they would have to work.

I leave the question of whether Council members should represent an area or the whole island to others, but my only caveat is that any proposition should avoid a concentration of personnel from any one area of the island.