

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE - 25 FEBRUARY 2015

COUNCIL REQUEST TO CONSIDER DEMOGRAPHY OF COUNCIL

Report by County Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

1. In December 2014, Council received a report from the Independent Remuneration Panel on councillors' allowances. During the debate on that item, Council endorsed the Panel's view that overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation required solutions other than simply revised allowances.
2. Council has therefore asked the Audit & Governance Committee to give consideration to this issue. This is with a view to the Committee setting up a working group of interested members to report back to the Committee on potential options that the Council may to encouraging greater diversity of representation.

Background

3. The Independent Remuneration Panel's report to Council in December 2014 mentioned in its final paragraph that "allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation". This was informed by the view that remuneration is only one factor in the encouragement of wider representation. Others factors may, for example, relate to opportunities for engagement in terms of the timing of formal meetings and of access to information. The focus is, however, on what the Council as an organisation might usefully achieve, as opposed to contributory solutions that may lie with political parties or other such bodies.
4. A key context for this issue is the national **Census of Local Authority Councillors** 2013. This annual survey, under the auspices of the Local Government Association, provides a robust benchmark for understanding the demography of councillor representation. The survey would provide an essential resource for the working group. It can be found online here: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGCL01/LGCL01.pdf>

Councillor profile – nationally and locally

5. The 2013 Census contains much information. Participation in the Census is voluntary and many of our County Councillors have regularly contributed over time. The profile in Oxfordshire is also a national one; and therefore so too are the factors which may encourage a wider representation.
6. For the present purposes, however, the 2013 Census does contain useful contextual information on:

- Age profile of councillors
 - Gender
 - Ethnicity
 - Hours spent on councillor business
 - Employment status
7. The County Council has not routinely collected this range of information about its County Councillors and so direct comparison is only possible as regards age and gender.

Headline information

8. Age profile: The Council effectively matches the national average for councillors aged 25-29 and for those in their 30s, 40s and 50s. The Council has a lower than average number of members in their early sixties. The County Council has a higher than average proportion of councillors aged 65 and above (52.2% as opposed to the average of 43.8%).
9. Gender: The Council largely matches the national average for the gender profile of its councillors. 66.6% being male and 33.3% female (compared to 67.3% and 31.7% nationally).
10. Ethnicity: Nationally, 96% of councillors are 'white'. The Council does not record ethnicity of councillors.
11. Hours spent on councillor business: Nationally, councillors spent on average 20.8 hours per week on the full range of councillor (non-party group) business. The Council has not undertaken a survey of its members' time commitments since 2010.
12. Employment status: Nationally, 19.2% of councillors were in full-time paid employment; 9.5% in part time paid employment; 16% were self-employed; 46.6% were retired and 3% were looking after a home/family, with 5.5% not working; 0.3% were in full-time education. The majority of employed councillors were from the private sector (65.4%).

Way forward

13. The Committee is invited to set up a working group of members to review the potential obstacles to wider democratic representation within Oxfordshire County Council. The Group would no doubt wish to review the Council's meeting arrangements, and the facilities and other support arrangements for councillors as well as any issues or conclusions arising from the 2013 Census of councillors.
14. The Committee may consider the following terms of reference for the Group to be appropriate:

- Membership: A cross-party group of members of the Committee
- Remit: To suggest options to the Audit & Governance Committee of ways in which the County Council might encourage wider democratic representation of the Council
- Sources: Local and national information, including the 2013 Census.
- Timescale: Three months

RECOMMENDATION

15. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**

- (a) appoint a cross-party working group of members of the Committee to review how the County Council may encourage wider democratic representation to the Council;**
- (b) agree the terms of reference at paragraph 13;**
- (c) ask the Monitoring Officer to provide support to the working group.**

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Background papers: Nil

February 2015.