

Divisions affected – All

COUNCIL

12 DECEMBER 2023

REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the review of political balance of committees to reflect the establishment of the new Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the increase in membership of the Pension Fund Committee and changes to the membership of political groups.
2. To appoint members to the committees of the Council listed at Annex 1. A fully populated list with nominations from the political groups for the vacant seats will be circulated ahead of the meeting.
3. To remove the Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee from the list of Council committees as future scrutiny of Horton Hospital will be incorporated within the activities of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background

4. The last review of political balance took place at the Annual Council Meeting on 16 May 2023.
5. A review now needs to be undertaken to reflect the establishment of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the appointment of two more county councillors on the Pension Fund Committee and changes in the membership of the political groups.
6. Without this review, the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance and Labour and Cooperative Party Group will be over-represented which means that there are insufficient seats for the Conservative Independent Alliance. Any seats left over are then distributed to the non-aligned Independent members who do not form a political group.
7. Seats are allocated to political groups in accordance with the groups' proportionate strength on the Council as a whole.

8. Political proportionality calculations reflect the current political representation on the Council: 23 Liberal Democrat Green Alliance, 22 Conservative Independent Alliance and 14 Labour and Co-operative Party Group. Four councillors sit outside the political groups as non-aligned Independent members.
9. The following rules, in priority order, apply for political proportionality:
 - (i) Where a group has an overall majority on the Council, that group is entitled to a majority of the seats on each committee and sub-committee. For this purpose only, the calculation must include seats occupied by voting co-optees on a scrutiny committee or sub-committee concerned with education.
 - (ii) Each political group is entitled to its proportion of the total number of seats on all the committees added together, according to the ratio of the number of members of the group to the number of members of the Council.
 - (iii) Subject to (i) and (ii) above, each group is entitled to its proportion of the number of seats on each individual committee.
 - (iv) For sub-committees and some other bodies, a group is entitled to its proportion of the number of seats regardless of the total number of seats involved (but still subject to the majority rule in (i) above).
10. As the Council no longer has a majority administration, (i) is not applicable but (ii), (iii) and (iv) do need to be applied to the allocation of seats.

Implications of the revised proportionality

11. The total number of committee places is 98. Of those, the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance is entitled to 36 seats, the Conservative Independent Alliance to 34 seats and the Labour and Co-operative Party to 22 seats. There are four non-aligned Independent councillors and six seats are available to them after the seats have been allocated to the political groups.
12. Compared with the committee representation agreed at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2023, the number of committee places allocated to the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance has reduced by one seat, the Conservative Independent Alliance has increased by one seat, the Labour and Cooperative Party Group has reduced by three seats and, therefore, the number of seats available for non-aligned Independent members has increased from 3 to 6.
13. The political proportionality calculations are shown at Annex 2 with notional entitlements shown alongside the number of seats allocated to each political group and the non-aligned Independent councillors.

Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

14. This committee was set up to support a funding bid to the Government for a new hospital. The bid was unsuccessful and scrutiny activities relating to Horton Hospital will be taken forward by the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Legal Implications

15. The rules on political balance are contained in Sections 15, 16 and 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 ('the Act') and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990. The applicable rules from Section 15(5) of the Act are summarised in paragraph 9 of the report and these have been applied to the calculations in the annexes. Other legal considerations are contained in the main body of this report.

Comments checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Financial Implications

16. There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Anita Bradley

Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex 1 – Committee membership

Annex 2 – Calculations

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