

Divisions affected – All

COUNCIL

9 JULY 2024

REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Council is RECOMMENDED
 - a) To note the review of political balance of committees to reflect the election of a new councillor, Peter Stevens, at the Sutton Courtenay and Marcham by-election on 20 June 2024 and the resignation of two members, Cllr Kevin Bulmer and Cllr Jane Murphy, from the Conservative Independent Alliance.
 - b) 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.

Background

2. Seats are allocated to political groups in accordance with the groups' proportionate strength on the Council as a whole. Any seats left over are distributed to any non-aligned Independent members who are not members of a political group.
3. 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.
 - (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).

4. As the Council does not have a majority administration, (i) is not applicable but (ii), (iii) and (iv) do need to be applied to the allocation of seats.
5. Ahead of the Annual Meeting of the Council on 21 May 2024, Cllr Richard Webber resigned as a councillor and three members joined a new political group: The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire (TIVOO).
6. The committee representation agreed at the Annual Meeting of Council reflected the political proportionately of the Council at that time – 22 Liberal Democrat Green Alliance: 22 Conservative Independent Alliance: 14 Labour & Cooperative Party Group: 3 The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire. There was one seat remaining for Cllr Hannah Barfield as a non-aligned Independent councillor: Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
7. With 22 members in the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance and Conservative Independent Alliance at the time of the Annual Meeting of Council, the theoretical entitlements to seats on committees for both political groups was the same (34.42). Thirty-five seats were allocated to the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance and 34 seats were allocated to the Conservative Independent Alliance. The additional seat was on the Planning and Regulation Committee on the basis that the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance held this seat before Cllr Webber resigned.

Review of political balance

8. Since the Annual Council Meeting on 21 May 2024, Cllr Peter Stevens was elected at a by-election on 20 June 2024 as the new member for the Sutton Courtenay and Marcham Division. Cllr Stevens stood as a Liberal Democrat and has joined the Liberal Democrat Green Alliance.
9. Councillors Kevin Bulmer and Jane Murphy have left the Conservative Independent Alliance and become non-aligned Independent members.
10. The political balance calculation is now based on the following political group sizes:

23	Liberal Democrat Green Alliance
20	Conservative Independent Alliance
14	Labour & Cooperative Party
3	The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire
3	Non-aligned Independent
11. The revised political proportionality calculations are shown in Annex 2 and are summarised as follows:

- i) Conservative Independent Alliance lose three seats – People Scrutiny, Place Scrutiny and the Charlotte Coxe Trust Committee.
- ii) Liberal Democrat Green Alliance representation is unchanged – this includes the seat on Planning and Regulation Committee referred to in paragraph 7.
- iii) Labour and Cooperative Party Group representation is unchanged
- iv) The Independent Voice of Oxfordshire representation is unchanged
- v) There are four seats unallocated that are available to non-aligned Independents – People Scrutiny, Place Scrutiny, Horton HOSC and the Charlotte Coxe Trust Committee.

Other appointments

12. Annex 1 also includes a list of other bodies that have historically been appointed to at the Annual Meeting of Council. Current membership is shown along with vacant positions.

Legal implications

13. 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 paragraphs 3 and 4 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: Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Financial implications

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

Comments checked by: Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services, ian.dyson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Anita Bradley

Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex 1 – Committee membership and other appointments

Annex 2 – Political proportionality calculations

Contact officer: Simon Harper, Head of Governance,
simon.harper@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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