

**COUNCIL
26 SEPTEMBER 2024**

REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE – CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader

**Responsible Director -
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Council of the outcome of a review to the political balance of the Authority resulting from a change to the membership of a political group.

Summary

2. Since the last review of the political balance of the Council in July 2024 there has been a change to the political make-up of the Council, following Councillor Coe's resignation from the Liberal Democrats Group to sit as an Independent Member.
3. Political Groups are allocated seats on the committees in accordance with political balance rules, which are set out in the report.
4. As a result of the change to the political balance the Council is now required to review the allocation of seats to political groups.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Council :-
 - (a) Notes the change to the political balance of the Council.
 - (b) Agrees to the re-allocation of three additional seats to an Independent Members:
 - (i) One seat on the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Coe) (with a reduction of one seat on this Committee from the Liberal Democrats Group).
 - (ii) One seat on the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee (Councillor Coe) (with a reduction of one seat on this Committee from the Liberal Democrats Group).
 - (ii) One seat on the Climate Change Working Group (with a reduction of one seat on this Committee from the Liberal Democrats Group).

Reason

6. To reflect the changed political balance of the Council and to comply with legislation.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

Council Report, 18 July 2024 – Review of Political Balance

Shirley Wright Extension 5998

Council Plan	The report contributes to the Council Plan in a number of ways through the involvement of Members in the work of those Committees
Addressing inequalities	The appointment of Councillors, will enable any inequality issues to be considered through the involvement of Councillors in the work of those Committees
Tackling Climate Change	The appointment of Councillors will enable any carbon impact issues to be considered through the involvement of Councillors in the work of those Committees
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council’s Efficiency Programme.
Health and Wellbeing	The appointment of Councillors to the various Committees will enable the health and well-being of the people of the Borough to be highlighted through the work, policies and decisions of those Committees
S17 Crime and Disorder	The report contributes to the prevention of crime and disorder, in a number of ways, through the involvement of Councillors in the work of those Committees.
Wards Affected	This report does not immediately affect any wards within the Borough.
Groups Affected	This report does not have any direct impact on the various community groups, however, the work of the Committee may have an affect on those groups.
Budget and Policy Framework	The appointment of Councillors will enable any Budget and Policy Framework issues to be considered when making decisions.
Key Decision	This is a non-Executive decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. The Council must allocate seats on committees to political groups in accordance with political balance rules. The rules for the allocation of seats are set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.
8. Section 15(5) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 sets out the principles as follows :-
 - (a) not all the seats on the body are allocated to the same political group;
 - (b) that the majority of the seats on the body is allocated to a particular political group if the number of persons belonging to that group is a majority in full council;
 - (c) subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, that the number of seats on the ordinary committees of a relevant authority which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the total of all the seats on the ordinary committees of that authority as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority; and
 - (d) subject to paragraphs (a) to (c) above, that the number of the seats on the body which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the number of all the seats on that body as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority.

Political Balance

9. The Committees to which the political balance rules apply are sometimes referred to as Counting Committees. The process for allocation is to count up the aggregate number of seats across all the counting committees and then work out then overall number of seats to be allocated to particular groups according to their strength and also to Independent Members. Individual Committees are then considered by overall size and the number of seats is calculated by reference to the percentage representation individual groups/independent Members. Seats are then allocated to individual committees.
10. Allocating seats in a proportionate way on individual committee to reflect the group/political distribution of members as a whole is more problematic the smaller committees become in size but also by the greater number of differing groups. This will mean that it may not be possible to reflect the political balance on every committee, particularly for members of smaller groups, but balance will be sought as far as is reasonably practicable.

11. In respect of this Council, the number of Counting seats available is 104 as follows :-

Table 1

Counting Committees	Seats
Human Resources Committee	11
Members Standards Hearing Committee	5
Audit Committee	6
LEA Governors Committee	4
Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee	10
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	10
Adults Scrutiny Committee	10
Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee	10
Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee	10
Planning Committee	14
Licensing Committee	14
TOTAL	104

12. Using 104 as the total number of seats across the counting committees and, following the resignation of Councillor Coe as a member of the Liberal Democrats Group, the total number of seats each Group is entitled to is shown in the table below.

Table 2

GROUP	NO. OF MEMBERS	%	% OF SEATS	SEATS ALLOCATED (ROUNDED)
Conservatives	13	26	27.04	27
Labour	24	48	49.92	50
Green	7	14	14.56	15
Liberal Democrats	2	4	4.16	4
Independent (non-aligned)	4	8	8.32	8

13. The 104 seats are currently (as agreed by Annual Council in May 2024, and as amended following July 2024 changes) allocated as follows :-

Table 3

COMMITTEE	LAB	CON	GREENS	LIB DEM	IND (Non-aligned)	TOTAL
Human Resources Committee	5	3	1	1	1	11
Members Standards Hearing Committee	2	1	1		1	5
Audit Committee	3	2	1			6
LEA Governors Committee	2	1	1			4
Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee	5	3	1	1		10
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	5	2	1	1	1	10
Adults Scrutiny Committee	5	2	2		1	10
Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee	5	3	1	1		10
Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee	5	2	2		1	10
Planning Committee	7	4	2	1		14
Licensing Committee	6	4	2	1	1	14
TOTAL	50	27	15	6	6	104

Revised Composition

14. As Members will see from table 2 and 3 above, that the Liberal Democrats Group are currently overrepresented by two seats and these two seats need to be re-allocated to an Independent Member to ensure the overall political balance of the Council is maintained.

Review

15. In reviewing the political make up of Committees, it is suggested that the two Independent seats should be allocated as follows:
- (a) One on the Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee, and
 - (b) One on the Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee
16. In both cases the Liberal Democrats Group will have one seat less on each of these committees.
17. The revised table of committees is as follows:

Table 4

COMMITTEE	LAB	CON	GREENS	LIB DEM	IND (Non-aligned)	TOTAL
Human Resources Committee	5	3	1	1	1	11
Members Standards Hearing Committee	2	1	1		1	5
Audit Committee	3	2	1			6
LEA Governors Committee	2	1	1			4
Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee	5	3	1	0	1	10
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	5	2	1	1	1	10
Adults Scrutiny Committee	5	2	2		1	10
Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee	5	3	1	0	1	10
Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee	5	2	2		1	10
Planning Committee	7	4	2	1		14
Licensing Committee	6	4	2	1	1	14
TOTAL	50	27	15	4	8	104

Working Groups

18. The Council has established two Working Groups, the Climate Change Working Group and the Council Decision-Making and Scrutiny Working Group and whilst these are not formal Committees, the terms of reference for these groups do require the allocation of seats to be calculated in accordance with the political balance calculation.
19. Table 4 sets out the current political balance of these Working Groups.

Table 4

GROUP NAME	NO OF SEATS	LAB	CONS	GREENS	LIB DEMS	IND (NON-ALIGNED)
Climate Change Working Group	5	2	1	1	1	0
Council Decision Making and the Scrutiny Process	10	5	3	1	1	0

20. Having reviewed the political balance on the Working Groups – in totality (15 seats) the Liberal Democrats should lose one seat and a seat reallocated to an Independent member. The suggestion is that on the Climate Change Working Group that the Liberal Democrats seat is re allocated to an Independent member.

Outcome of Consultation

21. No formal consultation has taken place on the report other than with the relevant Group Leaders