

**COUNCIL
28 NOVEMBER 2024**

REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE – CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Stephen Harker, Leader

**Responsible Director -
Executive Director – Resources and Governance**

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 and the recalculation of the percentage number of seats each political party/non-aligned Independents are entitled to.

Summary

2. Since the last review of the political balance of the Council in September 2024 there has been a change to the political make-up of the Council, following Councillor Robinson no longer being a Member of the Green Group on the Council.
3. Councillor Robinson will remain on the Council as an Independent Member.
4. Political Groups are allocated seats on the committees in accordance with political balance rules, which are set out in the report.
5. 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

6. It is recommended that Council :-
 - (a) Notes the change to the political balance of the Council.
 - (b) Agrees that the Green Group will lose one seat from the following Committees:
 - (i) Adults Scrutiny Committee
 - (ii) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee, and
 - (iii) LEA Governors Committee.
 - (c) Agrees that Councillor Robinson will cease to be a member of Planning Committee and Licensing Committee;

- (d) Agrees that Councillor Coe ceases to be a member of the Climate Change Working Group;
- (e) Agrees that Councillor Robinson will be appointed to the LEA Governors Committee and the Climate Change Working Group;
- (f) Notes that the Adults Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee will have one seat each that is unallocated at this time

Reason

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

Elizabeth Davison
Executive Director – Resources and Governance

Background Papers

Council Report, September 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

8. 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.
9. 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

10. 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 the overall number of seats to be allocated to particular political 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 political groups/ seats to be allocated to independent Members.
11. Seats are then allocated to individual committees. This is first done to fill the seats due to members of political groups and then to independent members.
12. Allocating seats in a proportionate way on individual committees 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 political 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. This is recognised by S.15(4) of the Local Government and

Housing Act which states that the duty to allocate committee representation to political groups is 'so far as is reasonably practicable.'

13. In respect of this Council, the number of Counting seats available is 119 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
Climate Change Working Group	5
Council Decision Making and the Scrutiny Process	10
TOTAL	119

14. Using 119 as the total number of seats across the counting committees. Seats can be allocated to members of a recognised group as a proportion of the total number of councillors. The Independent members are not in a recognised political Group, so the seat allocation is made on an individual rather than group basis.

15. Following Councillor Robinson ceasing to be a member of the Green Group, the total number of seats allocated to each Group, and to individual Independent members is shown in the table below.

Table 2

GROUP	NO. OF MEMBERS	%	% OF SEATS	SEATS ALLOCATED (ROUNDED)
Labour	24	48	57.12	57
Conservatives	13	26	30.94	31
Green	6	12	14.28	14
Liberal Democrats	2	4	4.76	5
Independent (non-aligned)	1	2	2.38	2
Independent (non-aligned)	1	2	2.38	2
Independent (non-aligned)	1	2	2.38	2
Independent (non-aligned)	1	2	2.38	2
Independent (non-aligned)	1	2	2.38	2

16. The 119 seats are currently, as amended following September 2024 changes, allocated as follows :-

Table 3

COMMITTEE	LAB	CON	GREENS	LIB DEM	IND (x 4 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
Climate Change Working Party	2	1	1	0	1	5
Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Process	5	3	1	1	0	10
TOTAL	57	31	17	5	9	119

Revised Political balance

17. As Members will see from table 2 and 3 above, the Green Group are currently overrepresented by three seats.
18. In a situation where there has been a reduction of members of a political group, consideration will first be given to any committee where the members of the political group that have reduced in numbers now appears to be most overrepresented.
19. As matters currently stand, the Green group have 2 seats on Adults Scrutiny Committee and 2 seats on Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee. Both these committees have a membership of 10, the revised entitlement of the Green Group on a Committee of 10 is 1.20 seats.
20. The other committee where there is now over representation is the LEA Governors Committee. This committee has a membership of 4 and the revised entitlement of the

Green Group on a Committee of 4 is to 0.48 of a seat – ie no seat.

21. The suggestion is therefore is that the seats currently allocated to the Green Group on the following Committee's should be reduced by one seat on each of these Committees :-
 - (a) Adults Scrutiny Committee
 - (b) Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee, and
 - (c) LEA Governors Committee.

Change to the allocation to non-aligned Independent Members

22. One seat on the LEA Governors Committees should be allocated to a non-aligned Independents. The suggestion being that Councillor Robinson is given this seat.
23. As Cllr Robinson is no longer a member of the Green Group he will cease to be a member of Planning Committee and the Green Group will need to appoint to a Green Group vacancy on Planning Committee.
24. As Cllr Robinson is no longer a member of the Green Group he will cease to be a member of Licensing Committee and the Green Group will need to appoint to a Green Group vacancy on Licensing Committee.
25. Cllr Coe is a member of Communities and Local Services Scrutiny Committee and Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee and the Climate Change Working Group. As a non aligned Independent member he is entitled to 2 seats.
26. The suggestion is that Cllr Coe ceases to be a member of the Climate Change Working Group and that this seat is reallocated to Cllr Robinson. This will give Councillor Robinson 2 seats

Revised Committees

27. Members will see from the table 4 below, that as a result of these changes the number of 'allocated' seats on the Counting Committees has fallen to 117 as opposed to the total of 119.
28. However, the distribution of the seats given to political groups on counting committees accords with the principles of political balance so far as is reasonably practicable and is in line with the allocated percentages in table 2 above.
29. Allocating the remaining two seats to the political groups would depart from this and allocation the remaining seats between the Independent members would give members not in a political group disproportionately more seats than they are entitled to.
30. it is therefore suggested that the two seats one on the Adults Scrutiny Committee and one on the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee should remain unallocated at this time.
31. The revised table of committees is as follows:

Table 4

COMMITTEE	LAB	CON	GREENS	LIB DEM	IND (X 5 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	1		1	9 (1 seat unallocated)
Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee	5	3	1	0	1	10
Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee	5	2	1		1	9 (1 seat unallocated)
Planning Committee	7	4	2	1		14
Licensing Committee	6	4	2	1	1	14
Climate Change Working Group	2	1	1		1	5
Council Decision Making and Scrutiny Working Group	5	3	1	1		10
TOTAL	57	31	14	5	10	119 (2 unallocated)

Outcome of Consultation

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