

COUNCIL, 4 March 2020

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

SUBJECT: ALLOCATION OF SEATS ON THE COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

- 1 On 26 February 2020, Councillor Bob Perry ceased to be a member of the Conservative Group and became an Independent Member on the Council.
- 2 This report seeks to address the change in the make-up of the Council by re-visiting the allocation of seats on Committees in accordance with the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990. As a consequence of Councillor Perry becoming an Independent Member, the Conservative Group loses one seat from its allocation. The total number of seats on committees have been increased by one and, in accordance with political balance rules, those seats are allocated to the Independent Residents' Group (Joint Venture Working Party) and the Upminster and Cranham Residents Associations' Group (Joint Venture Working Party).
- 3 A brief summary of the legal requirements on political balance and their impact on the present makeup of the Council is set out at Appendix 1. Greater detail is provided in Annex B.
- 4 There is a report elsewhere on the agenda addressing vacancies arising in respect of Chairman and Vice-Chairman positions on some committees.
- 4 There are no additional financial implications or risks arising from this report.
- 5 There are no legal, human resources or equalities and social inclusion implications or risks attached to this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council agrees to the seat allocation for political balance as set out in Annex A.

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Council, 4 March 2020

**Andrew Blake-Herbert
Chief Executive**

Background Papers List
None

APPENDIX 1

POLITICAL BALANCE PRINCIPLES

The Council has a duty to make only such decisions as give effect, **so far as reasonably practicable**, to certain principles set out in the relevant legislation. The relevant principles are, in order of priority:

1. Not all of the seats on any Committee may be allocated to only one Group (note - the Cabinet is not a Committee).
2. The majority of seats on each Committee must be allocated to the Group having a majority of Members of the Council.
3. The total share of all the seats available for all Committees allocated to each political Group and to Members not in a Group must be proportionate to that Group's/Members' share of the total Council membership.
4. So far as can be done without conflicting with the other principles, the total number of seats on each Committee allocated to a political Group or to Members not in a Group must be proportionate to that Group's/those Members' share of total Council membership.

In practice, Committees are balanced against the overall total of Committee places and then, so far as that overall total allows, each Committee is balanced on its own. With the distribution of seats on the Council, it is inevitable (a) Groups/Members will not all be able to be represented on every Committee and (b) that one Group's representation on some Committees will be at the expense of another's.

The minimum number of councillors in a group for it to exist is two.

The Council may make arrangements different from those prescribed **provided that no Member of the Council votes against** those different arrangements.

To make such a decision each member of the Council must at least be sent an agenda indicating that the approval of alternative arrangements is to be considered. The supplementary agenda for this Council meeting meets this requirement. To accommodate this requirement this report should be treated as giving due notice so that there is no impediment to such a proposal being made.

Council, 4 March 2020

Once the allocation of seats to Groups in accordance with the statutory procedure is undertaken, the Council is under a duty to make appointments to the Committee so as to give effect to the wishes expressed by that Group about who is to be appointed to their allocated seats.

The “wishes of the Group” may be communicated to the Proper Officer and will be implemented forthwith. Changes may be effected at any time by notice to the Proper Officer and will be notified to all Members in the next available edition of the weekly Calendar Brief.

It should be noted that the Constitution provides that the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees are appointed by Council and any change in membership affecting a Chairman or Vice-Chairman will therefore require consideration by Council.

RECOMMENDED SEAT ALLOCATION

Having regard to the principles of political balance and of seat allocation referred to in Appendix 1, the following allocation of seats is recommended on the basis that, taking all factors into account, it shows a “reasonably practicable” allocation of seats and is therefore the default position.

		CON	RES	URCG	LAB	IRG	NHRG
Governance	12	6	2	1	1	1	1
Licensing	11	5	2	1	1	1	1
Planning	8	4	1	1	1	1	0
Strat. Planning	8	4	1	1	1	1	0
Adjudication	8	4	1	1	1	1	0
Highways	8	4	1	1	0	1	1
Pensions	7	3	1	1	1	0	1
Audit	6	3	1	1	0	0	1
Children's	9	5	1	1	1	1	0
Crime	6	3	0	1	1	1	0
Towns	9	4	2	1	1	1	0
Environment	6	3	0	0	1	1	1
Health	6	3	1	0	0	1	1
Individuals	7	3	1	1	1	1	0
Board (Value)	16	8	2	2	1	2	0
JV WP	9	3	1	2	1	2	0
Seats allocated	136	65	18	16	13	16	7

- Committee seats are allocated, and each Committee is balanced, as “reasonably practicably” as possible

POLITICAL BALANCE PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 In allocating seats on Committees to the Groups, the Council has a duty to make only such decisions as give effect, **so far as reasonably practicable**, to certain principles set out in the relevant legislation. The relevant principles are, in order of priority:
 1. Not all of the seats on any Committee may be allocated to only one Group (note - the Cabinet is not a Committee).
 2. The majority of seats on each Committee must be allocated to the Group having a majority of Members of the Council.
 3. The total share of all the seats available for all of the Council main Committees allocated to each political Group must be proportionate to that Group's share of the total Council membership.
 4. So far as can be done without conflicting with the other principles, the total number of seats on each Committee allocated to a political Group must be proportionate to that Group's share of total Council membership.
- 1.2 Moreover, in determining entitlements to seats, any members who are not in a Group are disregarded, as they are not entitled to a seat on any Committee; but the proportions on which entitlements are calculated must relate to the total number of Councillors.
- 1.3 **In practice, Committees are balanced against the overall total of Committee places and then, so far as that overall total allows, each Committee is balanced on its own.** With the distribution of seats on the Council and recent changes in political make-up, it is inevitable (a) that the smaller Groups will not be able to be represented on every Committee, (b) that one Group's representation on some Committees will be at the expense of another's and (c) that, with calculations made as accurately as possible, one or more Groups may have actual seat numbers that differ from their entitlements.
- 1.4 The Council may make arrangements different from those prescribed **provided that no Member of the Council votes against** those different arrangements.
- 1.5 To make such a decision each member of the Council must at least be sent an agenda indicating that the approval of alternative arrangements is to be considered. The supplementary agenda for this Council meeting meets this requirement. To accommodate this requirement this report should be treated as giving due notice so that there is no impediment to such a proposal being made.
- 1.6 Once the allocation of seats to Groups in accordance with the statutory procedure is undertaken, the Council is under a duty to make appointments to

each Committee so as to give effect to the wishes expressed by that Group about who is to be appointed to their allocated seats.

- 1.7 The “wishes of the Group” may be communicated to the Chief Executive (or the Head of Democratic Services (on his behalf) by notice in writing by the Group Leader (or on his/her behalf by a recognised deputy) and will be implemented forthwith. Changes may be effected at any time by notice to the Chief Executive (or Head of Democratic Services) and will be notified to all Members in the next available edition of the weekly Calendar Brief.
- 1.8 It should be noted that the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of Committees were appointed by Council and any change in membership affecting a Chairman or Vice-Chairman would therefore require consideration by Council, and be dealt with by formal motion where necessary.
- 1.9 The Health and Wellbeing Board, while a Council Committee, is an executive Committee with separate statutory rules on membership. As with the Cabinet therefore, the Health and Wellbeing Board is not included in this seat allocation process.

PRINCIPLES FOR ALLOCATION OF SEATS ON COMMITTEES

- 2.1 The principles of seat allocation follow the requirements of the political balance principles, using a formula that takes account of the respective sizes of the Groups and the number of seats on Committees available for distribution among the Groups.

Basic allocation of seats

- 3.1 The Regulations specify that the minimum size of a Group is two Members. As seats are allocated on the basis of Groups, Members who do not belong to a Group do not have a right to be allocated any Committee seat.
- 3.2 The seat entitlements of the Groups are determined by a formula using the percentage of seats held by each Group, operating through a sequence of stages as follows:

- **First**, the percentage of each Group’s membership of the Council is calculated.
- **Next**, that percentage is then applied to the number of seats available on each Committee to determine each Group’s potential entitlement to seats on that Committee (rounded to the nearest whole number following the mathematical convention that numbers below 0.5 are rounded down, and those 0.5 or more are rounded up).

In some cases, a Group may be entitled to a seat even though, rounded down, its potential entitlement appears nil (i.e. less than 0.5), as there is a specific number of seats available on each Committee and no Group may have more seats on any Committee than its entitlement.

Those figures are then applied to the total number of seats available on each Committee, the seats being allocated in order, highest entitlement first, until all seats have been allocated.

- **Finally**, fine adjustment is required to ensure that, so far as reasonably practicable, the total of seats allocated reflects the overall proportion of Council membership held by each Group and the numerical strength of its entitlement to seats on particular Committees. For that purpose, at this stage the seat allocation of particular Committees will be adjusted from the ideally-balanced number reached in earlier stages of the process. This can result in a group being allocated more seats than appears to be its strict entitlement: this is the inevitable result of tensions within the political balance rules, which require different balancing arrangements as between the overall number of seats available, and the number of seats on each Committee.

Specific allocations

- 4.1 For the allocation of seats on specific Committees, several permutations are possible. Although the Council's Constitution does specify particular numbers of seats to each Committee, it is expressed as being "or such other number as the Council may agree", so there is discretion as to Committee sizes.
- 4.2 Once the number of seats available on each Committee has been determined, the allocation of seats to the individual Groups would then need to be adjusted between the Groups to achieve, so far as possible and practicable, an allocation that gives each Group its proportionate share of seats overall while ensuring that each Committee is proportionately balanced. In practice, it will be impossible to achieve both aims without enlarging Committee memberships to an unworkable size, so a degree of compromise is required.