



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Council – Wednesday 28 October 2020
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 10
Subject	Review of Political Balance
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor James Mills, Leader of the Council Email: james.mills@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Keith Butler, Head of Democratic Services Tel: 01993 861521 Email: keith.butler@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To review the allocation of seats on the Committees of the Council to the political groups and non-aligned members, as a consequence of changes in the membership of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups and the reduction in the number of non-aligned members from two to one.
Annexes	None
Recommendations	<p>(a) That the seats on the Committees of the Council be allocated to the political groups and the non-aligned member in accordance with the rules relating to political balance, and as indicated in the Table under paragraph 2.2, subject to the Council deciding (i) on which of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees the Conservative Group will have eight rather than nine seats; and (ii) on which of the two Overview and Scrutiny Committees where the Conservative Group has nine seats the Labour and Co-operative Party Group will have three seats and the Liberal Democrats two, and vice versa;</p> <p>(b) That as a consequence of the revised political balance figures, Councillor Richard Langridge be appointed to serve on the Development Control Committee; and</p> <p>(c) That it be noted that other changes in the membership of any Committees consequent to the above decisions shall be made in accordance with the wishes of the political groups, and notified to all members of the Council.</p>
Corporate priorities	N/A
Key Decision	N/A
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	None

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. In August 2020 Councillor Jake Acock ceased to be a member of the Liberal Democrat political group on the Council, and (i) notification was received that Councillor Acock was to be a member of the Conservative Group; and (ii) a request made for a consequential review of the allocation of the seats on Committees to the political groups and non-aligned members.
- 1.2. Subsequently, notification was received that Councillor Marilyn Davies was to be a member of the Conservative Group, having previously sat as an Independent.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. At the annual meeting of the Council in May 2019 the seats on the Council's Committees were allocated to the respective political groups and the non-aligned members in accordance with the statutory requirements, and as shown in the table below. It should be noted that this table takes account of adjustments which were required at that time, to ensure that the overall allocation to each political group was arithmetically correct:

Committee	Seats	Con	Lib Dem	Lab & Co-op	Ind	(Total)
(Total seats entitlement)	94	54	19	17	4	94
Audit & General Purposes	17	10	3	3	1	17
Development Control	24	14	5	4	1	24
Urgency	11	6	2	2	1	11
Econ & Soc O & S	14	8	3	3	0	14
Environment O & S	14	8	3	3	0	14
Fin & Man O & S	14	8	3	2	1	14
Resulting Total	94	54	19	17	4	94

- 2.2. Applying the revised figures of 30 Conservative Group members, nine Liberal Democrat Group members, nine Labour and Co-operative Party Group members and one Independent (non-aligned) member leads to the following arithmetical position, under which each of the three political groups is allocated one seat more than its overall entitlement:

Committee	Seats	Con	Lib Dem	Lab & Co-op	Ind	(Total)
(Total seats entitlement)	94	58	17	17	2	94
Audit & General Purposes	17	10	3	3	1	17
Development Control	24	15	4	4	1	25
Urgency	11	7	2	2	0	11
Econ & Soc O & S	14	9	3	3	0	15
Environment O & S	14	9	3	3	0	15
Fin & Man O & S	14	9	3	3	0	15
Resulting Total	94	59	18	18	2	97
Required Adjustment		-1	-1	-1		(-3)

- 2.3. The calculations shown in the table under paragraph 2.2 above reflect the fact that with two political groups each with nine members it is not possible to distinguish between them, and show that each of the three political groups needs to have one seat fewer or one of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, i.e.
- The Conservative Group to have eight seats instead of nine on one of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees
 - The Labour and Co-operative and Liberal Democrat Groups each to have two seats rather than three on (a different) one of the remaining two Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- 2.4. It is for Council to decide the allocation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee seats to implement the requirements set out above.
- 2.5. The changes in allocations will lead to a number of adjustments in Committee Memberships, which will be implemented in accordance with the wishes of each of the political groups, as notified by their Leaders, and these will be notified to all members of the Council as soon as possible. The changes can be summarised as follows:
- **Development Control Committee:** The Conservative Group to have 15 seats instead of the current 14; the Liberal Democrat Group to have one seat fewer; and Councillor Richard Langridge to be appointed to serve on the Committee as the remaining independent/non-aligned Councillor. Where a Councillor is appointed to serve on this Committee he or she will automatically sit on either the Lowlands or Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee, in accordance with the ward which they represent
 - **Urgency Committee:** The Conservative Group to have seven seats instead of the current six; no seat for an independent/non-aligned member (which doesn't require a decision as Councillor Marilyn Davies is automatically removed from the Committee)
 - **Overview and Scrutiny Committees:** As explained above – the Conservative Group to have an extra seat on two of the Committees; and the remaining political groups each to have three seats on two of the Committees and two on the other. Councillor Richard Langridge will no longer have a seat on the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a consequence of the adjustments in the balance of the Committee
- 2.6. Consultation is taking place with the political groups and it is hoped that their respective wishes will be reported to the Council at the meeting. It is also relevant to note that should the Leader of the Council elected earlier at this meeting make changes to the membership of Cabinet, there may be other consequential changes to Committee memberships.
- 2.7. It is important to note that whilst the political groups may express a preference as to where the precise adjustments are made, the decisions are for Council to make provided, of course, that its decisions reflect the statutory requirements referred to above.
- 2.8. Notwithstanding the fact that the rules of political balance do not apply to the Licensing Committee, the Council has previously decided that the best way to allocate the seats was in accordance with the principles of political balance. Currently, the Committee comprises seven Conservative councillors, with two from each of the political groups, and those allocations remain proportionate.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1. This report has no financial implications.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The report takes account of the statutory requirements as contained in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Committees and Political Groups Regulations 1990.

5. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

5.1. Subject to any advice as to the statutory position which may be required to be given at the meeting, council is able to vary the allocations of seats to the political groups and the Independent members.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1. None