

Committee: Full Council

Agenda Item

Date: 16 May 2017

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Title: Political Balance on the Council

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Item for decision

Summary

- 1 This report considers the political composition of the Council and recommends that seats on the main committees be allocated to the three political groups as detailed in the report.

Recommendation

That the Council reviews its political composition to achieve political balance and approves the allocation seats on its committees as detailed in the report.

Financial Implications

None

Background Papers

None

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Political parties to consult within their groups to determine their views on the recommendation
Community Safety	n/a
Equalities	n/a
Health and Safety	n/a
Human Rights/Legal Implications	To comply with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In the event that members decide an allocation of seats which does not accord with the principles of political balance set out above this can only be achieved if no members attending the meeting dissent.
Sustainability	n/a
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

- 2 A review of political balance was carried out at the Council meeting on 4 April. This followed changes to the Council's composition at the Elsenham and Henham by-election in February and took account of the vacancy created in Newport ward, since filled at the election held last week. A further review must now take place to determine the entitlement of political groups on the Council to committee seats to apply in 2017/18.
- 3 The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires local authorities to review the representation of the different political groups at the Annual Meeting or as soon as practicable thereafter. It further requires them to allocate the seats on their committees to political groups represented in accordance, so far as reasonably practicable, with the following four principles of proportionality:-
 - (a) that not all seats on the body concerned 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 of the authority's membership;
 - (c) subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, that the number of seats on the ordinary committees of an 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;
 - (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 seats on that body as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority.

Current Situation

- 4 The number of seats on ordinary committees of the Council (excluding Standards) are as follows:-

Committee	No of seats
Planning	10
Licensing and Environmental Health	10
Scrutiny	10
Governance, Audit and Performance	10
Total	40

- 5 The current political composition of the Council is as set out below:

Group	Members	Percentage
Conservative	24	61.54%
Residents	11	28.21%

for Uttlesford		
Liberal Democrats	4	10.26%
	39	100%

- 6 Based on 40 committee places, the number of seats available to each group is as follows

Group	Percentage	Calculated seats	No. of seats
Conservative	61.54%	24.62	25
Residents for Uttlesford	28.21%	11.28	11
Liberal Democrats	10.26%	4.10	4
	100%	40	40

- 7 The effect of the allocation of committee places indicated above will mean that three committees will have an allocation of 6/3/1 with the remaining committee allocated to the groups on the basis of a 7/2/1 membership. The Leader has indicated that he wishes to take up his group's additional seat on the Scrutiny Committee and will therefore propose that the Council moves to 41 committee places. Based on 41 committee places, the number of seats available to each group is as follows:

Group	Percentage	Calculated seats	No. of seats
Conservative	61.54%	25.23	25
Residents for Uttlesford	28.21%	11.57	12
Liberal Democrats	10.26%	4.21	4
	100%	41	41

Allocation of Seats – Committees

(i) Licensing Committee

- 8 The Council is not obliged to take the Licensing Committee into account for the purposes of the calculation because it was not established under the Local Government Act 1972. However, it is usual to offer the ten places to be allocated on the same basis of proportionality, and the Licensing Committee has therefore been included in the calculation of the number of seats.

(ii) Standards Committee

- 10 The Localism Act 2011 set out changes to the standards regime. There is no longer a statutory obligation to appoint a Standards Committee. However it was agreed in 2012 that the Council would not be an appropriate forum for dealing with individual allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct and a Standards Committee was appointed to undertake this function.

- 11 In the absence of a separate statutory power, a Standards Committee is required to be appointed under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and is subject to the rules of political balance.
- 12 Since the Localism Act changes, the Standards Committee has had an equality of representation between all political groups. The Council's Constitution recognises that the rules of political balance contained in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 apply but acknowledges that a politically balanced Standards Committee would be undesirable. It provides that, subject to no member present voting against the proposal, each political group on the Council would have at least one member on the Standards Committee. Article 9 of the Constitution provides for each political group to have at least one member on the committee and for up to three nominations from each political group. The Council appointed a Standards Committee of 9 members at the last annual meeting and it is suggested that this should continue, unless fewer than three members are nominated by any one group.
- 13 If this committee was included within the calculations the result would be as set out below:

A total of 50 seats would be available and the number of seats allocated to each group would be:-

Group	Percentage	Total Seats
Conservative	61.54%	(30.77) 31
Residents for Uttlesford	28.21%	(14.11) 14
Liberal Democrats	10.26%	(5.13) 5

Proposal for allocation of seats

- 14 Based on the principles outlined in this report, and the entitlement of each of the political groups to the committee places set out in paragraph 7, the allocation of the 50 seats (including the Standards and Licensing Committees) would be as follows:-

Committees	Seats available	Conservative	Residents for Uttlesford	Liberal Democrats
Planning	10	6	3	1
Licensing and Environmental Health	10	6	3	1
Scrutiny	11	7	3	1
Governance, Audit and Performance	10	6	3	1

Standards	9	3	3	3
Total allocation of seats	50	28	15	7

Risk Analysis

There are no risks associated with this report.