

NOT CONFIDENTIAL – For public release

Council
26 July 2022

Report of the Director of Corporate and Customer Services

MEMBERSHIP OF POLITICAL GROUPS, POLITICAL BALANCE AND ENTITLEMENT TO SEATS ON COMMITTEES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To report on the updated membership of political groups on the Council, the change to the political balance of the authority following Councillor Gamble's decision to become a member of the Independent Group and the revised entitlement of political groups to seats on committees for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the operation of five political groups on the Council and the detail of their designated Leaders be noted:
 - (a) Conservative Group and Cllrs Bright, Elliott and Salt – Councillor Garry Purdy
 - (b) Green and Independent Group – Councillor Neil Buttle
 - (c) Independent Group – Councillor Colin Swindell
 - (d) Labour Group – Councillor Mike Ratcliffe
 - (e) Liberal Democrat Group – Councillor Steve Flitter
2. That the Council notes, and agrees, the entitlement of the membership of the political groups and that such entitlements have been reflected in the allocations to Committees.
3. That nominations be received for the revised committee seat entitlements and for the Scrutiny Committee from all political groups.

WARDS AFFECTED

District-wide

STRATEGIC LINK

The strategic leadership provided by Councillors in discharging the functions of the Council through committees and other bodies is critical to the delivery of all priorities in the Corporate Plan.

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Proper Officer is required to notify the Council of any change in the political balance of the authority or the operation of new political groups under the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990. Since the last

Council meeting, the two new councillors have been elected to serve on the District Council and have joined existing political groups.

- 1.2 On 23 May 2022, Councillor Gamble informed the Proper Officer that she had become a member of the Independent Group, having previously been a member of the Green and Independent Group. The effect of this result means there are now 3 Members in the Independent Group (previously 2) and 4 Members in the Green and Independent Group (previously 5). The Conservatives and Councillors Bright, Elliott & Salt Group continue to hold the majority of seats on the Council.
- 1.3 Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 places on local authorities the duty to allocate seats to political groups and sets out the principles to be followed when determining such allocation. The main principles, which must be satisfied sequentially, include
 - (a) That the number of seats on ordinary Committees/Bodies ... 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 Members of that group to the membership of the Authority (i.e. the allocation of the total number of seats available must mirror the political composition of the council).
 - (b) That the number of seats on the Body (Committee, etc.), 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 (i.e. the allocation of seats on individual committees must mirror the political composition of the council).
- 1.4 Local authorities are able to depart from the statutory provisions where there is unanimous agreement to do so.

2 POLITICAL GROUPS

- 2.1 The Proper Officer has received formal notifications, under the provisions of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, of changes in the membership of the Council's political groups. On 23 May 2022, Councillor Gamble became a member of the Independent Group, which increased in size to 3 Members whilst the Green and Independent Group reduced in size to 4 Members.
- 2.2 The Conservatives and Councillors Bright, Elliott & Salt Group continue to hold the majority of seats on the Council and is in overall control of the authority. The political balance of the Council is now:

Name of Group	Designated Leader	Number of Members
Conservative and Councillors Bright, Elliott & Salt	Councillor Purdy	22
Green and Independent	Councillor Buttle	4
Independent	Councillor Swindell	3
Labour	Councillor Ratcliffe	3
Liberal Democrat	Councillor Flitter	7

3 ENTITLEMENT TO SEATS

3.1 The allocation process must be applied 'so far as is reasonably practicable' to achieve a balanced outcome. The allocation of seats to the five political groups is determined by the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of Members in a political group}}{\text{Total Number of Members of the Council (39)}} \times \text{Number of Seats to be allocated (108)}$$

3.2 For the 86 seats available in applying principle (a) in paragraph 1.3, this gives:

Political Group	Seat Entitlement
Conservatives and Councillors Bright, Elliott & Salt	61
Green and Independent	11
Independent	8
Labour	8
Liberal Democrats	19

3.3 Application of principle (b) in paragraph 1.3 of this report, relating to the number of seats on individual committees, gives the following:

	Membership	Conservative Group and Cllrs Bright, Elliott & Salt	Green and Independent Group	Independent Group	Labour Group	Liberal Democrat Group
		22	4	3	3	7
Committee						
Governance and Resources	17	10	2	1	1	3
Community and Environment	17	10	2	1	1	3
Planning	13	7	1	1	1	2
Scrutiny	12	7	1	1	1	2
Licensing and Appeals	15	8	2	1	1	3
Joint Consultative	9	5	1	1	1	2*
Joint ICT	3	2	0	0	0	1
Constitution Working Group	11	6	1	1	1	2
Local Plan	11	6	1	1	1	2
TOTALS	108	61	11	8	8	20**

3.4 The table above does not achieve balance in accordance with principle (a) of paragraph 1.3 of this report. However, balance can be achieved by removing a seat from the Liberal Democrat Group on the Joint Consultative Committee. This would reduce the total number of seats for the Liberal Democrat Group to 19, which reflects that group's overall entitlement. Such an approach would also ensure that a majority for the Conservatives and Councillors Bright, Elliot & Salt Group on the Joint Consultative Committee, which ensures that the overall balance of the Council is reflected on that committee. The Planning Committee, whilst having 13 places, will be

made up of 12 Members in practice to achieve balance. To reduce the Planning Committee to 12 places would affect the overall calculation and balance could not be achieved.

- 3.5 The proposed seat allocation has been the subject of consultation with political group leaders, with no objections received at the time of the publication of the report.
- 3.6 In order for the seat allocation set out at paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 to be adopted, the Council will need to vote unanimously to approve a departure from the requirements of principles (a) and (b). Where the Council fails to adopt a new seat entitlement, the previously agreed seat entitlement will continue to operate until such a time as the Council can agree a new entitlement.
- 3.7 Political Group leaders are invited to provide the Proper Officer with details of proposed appointments or changes to committee memberships in view of this report. In the event that the revised seat entitlement is agreed, the appointments should be approved as part of this report. Details of nominations will be circulated separately at the meeting.

4 ASSESSMENT

4.1 Legal

The legislative requirements in respect of political balance and entitlement to seats are set out earlier in this report. The recommended approach will reduce the legal risk to the authority and on this basis, the legal risks associated with this report are considered to be low.

4.2 Financial

The recommendations of this report do not have any impact on the cost of the existing members' allowance scheme. The financial risk is therefore assessed as low.

5 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 In preparing this report, the relevance of the following factors has also been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equalities, environmental, climate change, health, human rights, personnel and property.

6 CONTACT INFORMATION

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7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

8 ATTACHMENTS

None