

Council report



Report of Head of Legal and Democratic

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To: COUNCIL

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Review of membership of the Planning Committee and the political balance on committees

Recommendations

That Council:

1. reduces the size of the planning committee from 11 members to nine members;
2. allocates seats to each political group in accordance with paragraphs 8 - 11 of this report;
3. allocates one of the Conservative Group seats on the Planning Committee to the Liberal Democrat Group to ensure the overall political balance;
4. appoints councillors and substitutes to sit on the planning committee as set out in the schedule circulated at the meeting;
5. authorises the head of legal and democratic to make appointments to any vacant committee or panel seat and substitute positions in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group leader.

Purpose of report

1. The leaders of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Groups have agreed that the democracy and governance of the council and the efficiency of its decision making in planning, would best be served by a reduction in the size of the planning committee by two. This reflects the frequency and complexity of the work of the Planning Committee and the need to have regularly available, well trained and experienced councillors on that committee, and also a properly trained and regularly available pool of substitutes.
2. This report invites Council to review the size of the Planning Committee and the resultant political balance and consider proposed changes to the make-up and membership of that committee.

Background

3. The Council is required by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to appoint committees, review the political balance and to appoint councillors to the committees annually, which it did at its annual meeting in May.
4. In summary, the Council has a duty to ensure the following principles are adhered to:
 - (i) not all seats are allocated to the same political group
 - (ii) a majority group should get the majority of seats on each committee
 - (iii) the seats allocated to groups on a committee reflect the membership of the Council as a whole
 - (iv) the allocation of the total number of seats on all committees reflects the membership as a whole.
5. The council has a very heavy workload of planning committees, meeting as frequently as three times per month. In addition, there are a number of site visits and a large amount of related information to be read and understood. It is accepted that not all members are able to meet this requirement and so it is suggested that the committee is reduced in numbers by two. This would allow for a smaller group of dedicated councillors to regularly attend the Planning Committee and also for a pool of committed and well trained substitutes to be available should those members not be available for every meeting.
6. In order to make the best use of councillor availability and area of interest, it is proposed that one of the Conservative Group seats is allocated to the Liberal Democrat Group and to maintain overall political balance.

Strategic Objectives

7. This report supports the council's corporate plan in that it ensures the council manages its business effectively. It is also in line with the council's requirement to review the political complexion of committees and other bodies, having regard to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Composition of committees

8. The ordinary committees and panels that are required to be politically balanced both individually, and overall, are set out below.
9. This reflects Includes reduction in planning committee from 11 to nine members.

Committee	Members	Comments
Vale Scrutiny Committee	9	
Joint Scrutiny Committee	5	10 in total with South Oxfordshire District Council
Joint Audit and Governance Committee	4	8 in total with South Oxfordshire District Council
Planning Committee	9	Reduction from 11
General Licensing Committee	12	
Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee	6	
Appeals Panel	3	
Joint Staff Committee	3	6 in total with South Oxfordshire District Council
Five Councils' Partnership Scrutiny Committee	2	
Totals	53	

10. The revised political balance calculation and the entitlements to seats on committees are set out in the tables below. Fractional entitlements of less than one half are rounded down and entitlements of one half or more are rounded up

Total Seat Allocations by Political Group

Group	Group members	Total of council	Total number of committee seats
Conservative	29	76.32%	40
Liberal Democrat	9	23.68%	13
TOTAL	38	100%	53

Overall Committee Allocations (figures as present in brackets, where different)

Committee	Total number of seats	Conservative	Liberal Democrat
Scrutiny	9	7	2
Planning	9 (11)	7 (9)	2 (3)
General Licensing Committee	12	9	3
Appeals Panel	3	2	1
Joint Scrutiny	5	4	1
Joint Audit and Governance	4	3	1
Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee	6	5	1
Joint Staff Committee	3	2	1
Five Councils' Partnership Scrutiny Committee	2	2	0
Total	53	41 (-1)	12 (+1)

* The Liberal Democrat Group need to gain an additional seat, and the Conservative Group need to lose a seat in order to ensure that the political balance is correct overall. The Council is asked to consider allocating one of the Conservative Group seats on the Planning Committee to the Liberal Democrat Group to achieve this.

Substitutes

11. Each political group is entitled to the same number of preferred substitutes as the number of ordinary seats it holds on a committee or panel, and up to a maximum of three preferred substitutes where it has fewer than three members on a committee or panel. All substitutes for regulatory committees must have met the relevant training requirement, regardless of whether they are preferred or other substitutes.

Eligibility to Sit on Committees and Panels.

12. Any member of the council may be appointed to any committee with the following exceptions and caveats:
- No member of Cabinet may sit on any Scrutiny Committee;
 - No member of Cabinet may sit on the Joint Audit and Governance Committee;
 - No member of Cabinet may sit on the Planning Committee;
 - The Chairman or Vice Chairman of Council may not be the Chairman or Vice Chairman of any committee or panel;
 - No Cabinet member may be the Chairman or Vice Chairman of any committee or panel.

Appointments

13. Officers have invited group leaders to submit the names of councillors they wish to sit on the Planning Committee as members and substitutes.

Financial implications

14. There are no direct financial implications.

Legal implications

15. These are set out in the body of the report.

Conclusion

16. Following the instruction by the leaders of the two political groups, a review of the allocation of seats available to each of the political groups represented on the council has been undertaken, based on the premise of a reduced Planning Committee membership. Council is invited to appoint councillors to the Planning Committee. If the committee and substitute places are not filled at the meeting, Council is invited to delegate authority to the head of legal and democratic to make appointments in accordance with the wishes of the relevant group leader.

Background Papers:

None