

REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE AND ALLOCATION OF SEATS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND PANELS	
Executive Summary	Following a change to the membership of the political groups at North Norfolk District Council, the Council is required to review the allocation of seats on committees, sub committees and working parties to reflect the political balance of the Council, in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and regulations made thereunder.
Options considered	This is a statutory report and Full Council is required to approve any change to the political balance. Alternative options are therefore not presented.
Consultation(s)	Following a change in the political balance it is necessary to review the allocation of seats on committees, sub-committees, working parties and panels.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That Council approves the revised political balance calculation as per section 2.6 of this report, noting the removal of an independent non-aligned member from the calculation. 2. That Council approves the allocation of seats to political groups as shown at Appendix A, noting that there is no change to the previous allocation agreed at the meeting of 24 July 2024

Wards affected	All
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since the last review of the political balance of the Council in July 2024, there has been a change to the political make-up of the Council. As a result of this change, it is necessary to review the political balance again and determine the allocation of seats on committees to ensure that they reflect the revised balance.
- 1.2 Council's duty is to determine the allocation of seats to be filled by appointments by the authority, except the Cabinet. The purpose is to ensure that there is proportionality across all formal activities of the Council, reflecting the overall political composition. It affects all formally constituted committees, sub-committees, working parties and panels which discharge functions on behalf of the authority.

2. Background

- 2.1 On 12th September 2024, a by-election was held in the North Walsham Market Cross ward following the resignation of the independent non-aligned member. A member of the Liberal Democrat Group was duly elected, resulting in the following change to the composition of the council: Liberal Democrats (25 members), Conservatives (13 members) Independent Group (2 members).
- 2.2 The Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/1553) states that ungrouped members are not entitled to committee seats and any seats given would have to be at the discretion of the majority group. As there are no longer any independent non-aligned members, this no longer applies.
- 2.4 Section 15(1) of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to review the representation of the different political groups on committees and sub-committees:
- at, or as soon as practicable after the Annual Meeting of the Council or,
 - where notice is received of a change in the composition of political groups
- 2.5 The Head of Paid Service has a duty, whenever such a review takes place, to submit a report to the Council showing what the allocation of seats, in their opinion, best meet the requirements of the above Act.
- 2.6 Political Composition

The political composition of the Council is outlined below:
(As referenced at section 2.2, the non-aligned member is removed from the calculations)

Group	No. of members	%
Liberal Democrat	25	62.5
Conservative	13	32.5
Independent	2	5
Total	40	100 %

- 2.4 The Council needs to approve the allocation of seats to the political groups on those committees which are required by law to be politically balanced.
- 2.5 The obligation to ensure that there is proportionality in the political composition of the Council's committees extends only to proportionate representation of members of political groups and does not require that a vacant seat is represented.
- 2.6 In carrying out any review, the Council is obliged to adopt the following principles and to give effect to them 'so far as is reasonably practicable':
- a) That not all seats on the Council are allocated to the same political group
 - b) That the majority of the seats on the Council are allocated to a particular group if the number of persons belonging to that group is a majority of the authority's membership

- c) Subject to the above, that the number of seats on ordinary committees of the Council which are allocated to each political group, have 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 and
- d) Subject to a) and c) above, that the number of the seats on the Council which are allocated to each group have the same proportion to the number of all the seats on that Council as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the Council.
- e) It was agreed at the Annual meeting of Full Council on 15th May 2024 that delegation should be given to the Group Leaders to make any changes required to appointments to committees, sub-committees, working parties and panels as long as they are in accordance with the political balance. Group Leaders will inform the Democratic Services Manager of any changes and Members will be informed via the Members' Bulletin. In addition, and to ensure they changes are recorded formally, an update will be provided to future next meeting of Full Council. It is proposed that this convention is continued to allow appointments to be filled without waiting for approval from Council.

3. Entitlement to Places

- 3.1. The table at Appendix A shows those Committees that are required to be politically balanced. Generally, the approach taken has been to round up percentages where they are above 0.5% or close to 0.5. It should be noted that political balance does not require that all the groups are represented across all of the committees but that their overall share of seats is reflected in the allocation. This tends to mean that the smallest group (the Independent Group) automatically has seats on the larger committees but that there is not always an allocation on the smaller ones. Changes to the allocation of committee seats (but not the overall number) can be agreed between the Group Leaders and on occasion, may mean that a larger group offers to 'give up' a seat on a committee to allow a smaller group member to take a seat.
- 3.2. According to NNDC's Constitution, Chapter 5 section 6.2 'Working Parties shall in law be Committees of the Council' and consequently the political balance rules will also apply to working parties – unless they are Cabinet sub-committees. Cabinet sub-committees are not required to be politically balanced but it is the practice at NNDC that they are and for this reason they are included in the table (marked with an asterisk)
- 3.3. The Employment & Appeals Committee acts as the Councils Disciplinary Panel for Chief Officers and this is required to be fully politically balanced, with representation from across the Groups. As it is legally required to be politically balanced, it is proposed that the Independent Group will be allocated a seat. It is also suggested that one of their allocated seats is on the Standards Committee as it is preferable that this committee has representatives from across the groups to ensure impartiality when assessing complaints.
- 3.4. Overall the percentages have reverted to the same as at May 2024 and are as follows:

The Liberal Democrat Group 62.5% of seats available (60 seats)

The Conservative Group has increased very slightly 32.5% of committee seats available (32 seats)

The Independent Group has changed very slightly to 5 % of seats allocated (5 seats)

- 3.5 The allocations at Appendix A are suggested by the Democratic Services Manager. Group Leaders can agree to alternative arrangements as long as the overall political balance is not affected.

3 Corporate Priorities

This is a statutory report.

4 Financial and Resource Implications

This is statutory report and there are no financial or resource implications.

5 Legal Implications

Full Council is required to approve any change to the political balance of the Council. A failure to do would be a breach of the statutory requirements.

6 Risks

As highlighted above, a failure to approve a change in the political balance of the Council would be a breach of the statutory requirements.

7 Net ZeroTarget

N/A

8 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

N/A

Conclusion and Recommendations

Following a change in the political balance it is necessary to review the allocation of seats on committees, sub-committees, working parties and panels. Overall, the impact has no change and it is suggested that there are **no** changes to the committee seat allocations.

Recommendations:

- 9 That Council approves the revised political balance calculation as per section 2.6 of this report.**
- 10 That Council approves the allocation of seats to political groups as shown at Appendix A, noting that there is no change to the previous allocation agreed at the AGM on 15th May 2024 and 24th July 2024.**