

REVIEW OF ALLOCATION OF SEATS TO COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTIES AND PANELS

Executive Summary	<p>A recent central government consultation entitled “Planning committee reform: statutory consultation on draft Regulations and guidance, included draft regulations setting a limit on the size of committees responsible for determining planning applications (Development Committee). The current committee has 14 members and the maximum size set out in the new regulations is 13 members.</p> <p>A report was taken to Development Committee on 30th April (Appendix A) seeking a steer from committee members on the preferred size and members agreed to recommend a committee of 13 members.</p> <p>Following a change to the size of a committee, the Council is required to review the allocation of seats on committees, sub committees and working parties to ensure that they reflect the political balance of the Council, in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and regulations made thereunder.</p>
Options considered	This is a statutory report and Full Council is required to approve any change to the political balance and the allocation of seats on committees. Alternative options are therefore not presented.
Consultation(s)	Members of Development Committee have recommended a reduction in the size of the Committee by one member. It is therefore 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 change to the size of Development Committee from 14 members to 13. 2. That Council approves the allocation of seats to political groups as shown at Appendix B, taking into consideration any arrangements agreed by the Group Leaders 3. That delegation is given to the Group Leaders to make any appointments to committees, sub-committees, working parties & panels.

Wards affected	All
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following recent government guidance on Planning Committee reform, it was necessary to review the size of the Council's Development Committee as, with 14 members, it was above the new maximum limit of 13.
- 1.2 A report was taken to Development Committee on 30th April, seeking a steer on the preferred size of the committee and members resolved to recommend to Full Council that it should comprise 13 members.
- 1.3 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 Although there has been no change to the political composition of the Council, a change to the size of a committee affects the number of seats allocated to each political group and Council must ensure that the political balance is reflected accordingly.
- 2.2 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
- 2.3 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.

The political composition of the Council is outlined below:

Group	No. of members	%
Liberal Democrat	26	65
Conservative	11	27.5
Independent	3	7.5
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) As in previous years, it is proposed 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 & Governance Manager of any changes and Members will be informed via email. 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 B 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. Proposed changes are highlighted in red.
- 3.2. To date, the convention at NNDC has been that 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 has historically been the practice at NNDC that they are and for this reason they are included in the table (marked with an asterisk)
- 3.3. As agreed at the meeting of Full Council on 21st May 2025, The Employment & Appeals Committee is required to be politically balanced and therefore the Independent Group will be allocated a seat. It was also agreed that the Independent Group was allocated a seat is on the Standards Committee as it is preferable that this committee has representatives from across the groups to ensure impartiality when assessing complaints. This has been reflected in the proposed seat allocations.
- 3.4. The Member Development Group has not met for some time. Its remit was to prepare the induction programme for members following a District Council election. With Local Government Reorganisation underway and there being no further district elections, it is proposed that this working group is removed from the seat allocations table, reducing the overall number of seats from 92 to 85.
- 3.5. Overall, the percentage entitlement to seats has not changed but the number of seats allocated has (as set out above) and it is as follows:

The Liberal Democrat Group has 65% of seats available (54 seats)

The Conservative Group has 27.5% of committee seats available (25 seats)

The Independent Group has 5% of seats to 7.5% allocated (6 seats)

4. The allocations at Appendix B are suggested by the Democratic Services & Governance Manager. Group Leaders can agree to alternative arrangements as long as the political balance of key committees is not affected. Following the recommendation to reduce the Development Committee by 1 seat and to remove Member Development Group from the seat allocations, the Liberal Democrats will lose one seat on Development Committee. No other allocations are affected.

5. Corporate Priorities

This is a statutory report.

6. Financial and Resource Implications

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

7. Legal Implications

Full Council is required to approve any change to the size of a committee and the to ensure that the political balance of the Council is reflected in the seat allocations. A failure to do would be a breach of the statutory requirements.

8. 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.

9. Net Zero Target

N/A

10. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

N/A

11. Community Safety issues

N/A

Conclusion and Recommendations

Following a proposed change to the size of Development Committee – from 14 seats to 13, it is necessary to review the allocation of seats to the groups to ensure that the political balance of the Council is reflected.

Recommendations:

1. That Council approves the change to the size of Development Committee from 14 members to 13.
2. That Council approves the allocation of seats to political groups as shown at **Appendix B**, taking into consideration any arrangements agreed by the Group Leaders
3. That delegation is given to the Group Leaders to make any appointments to committees, sub-committees, working parties & panels.