

Council report



Report of Head of Legal and Democratic

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To: COUNCIL

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Appointments to committees, panels and joint committees 2024/25

Recommendations

That Council:

1. appoints the committees and panels for the 2024/25 year, allocates seats to each political group and appoints councillors and substitutes to sit on them in accordance with paragraphs 9-13 of this report and as set out in the schedule circulated at the meeting;
2. appoints chairs and vice-chairs as set out in the schedule circulated at the meeting;
3. appoints members to the Community Grants Panel in accordance with paragraphs 15 and 16 of this report and as set out in the schedule circulated prior to the meeting;
4. appoints members to the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee in accordance with paragraphs 17 and 18 of this report and as set out in the schedule circulated at the meeting;
5. appoints members to the Licensing Acts Committee in accordance with paragraphs 19-21 of this report and as set out in the schedule circulated at the meeting;
6. appoints a representative and a substitute on the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
7. appoints a representative and a substitute on the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel;
8. appoints three representatives to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel;
9. 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. This report invites Council to agree appointments to those committees required to be politically balanced together with the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee, Community Grants Panel and the Licensing Acts Committee. It also invites Council to make appointments to joint bodies.

Background

2. Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 imposes a duty on a local authority at its annual meeting, or as soon as possible after it, to review the allocation of seats on the committees of the Council between the political groups. The Council may carry out such a review at any other time and may do so if requested by a political group.
3. In summary the Council has a duty to ensure the following principles are adhered to:
 - (i) where there is more than one political group, 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.
4. Ordinary committees are those that have decision-making powers but excluding the Licensing Acts Committee and area committees.
5. Ungrouped members are not entitled to committee seats and any seats given are at the discretion of Council.

Strategic Objectives

6. This report supports the council's corporate plan theme of openness and accountability. 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.

Political balance

7. The current composition of the Council's 36 seats by political group is as follows:
 - Conservative – 1 (0%) as not a group
 - Green Group – 8 (22.86%)
 - Henley Residents Group -3 (8.57%)
 - Labour and Co-operative Group - 3 (8.57%)
 - Liberal Democrat Group – 21 (60%)

8. The Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 require a constituted political group to be two or more members. As such the Conservative member is designated as a non-group member.

Composition of committees

9. The ordinary committees and panels that are required to be politically balanced both individually, and overall, are set out below.

Committee	Members	Comments
South Scrutiny Committee	9	
Joint Scrutiny Committee	5	10 in total with Vale of White Horse District Council
Joint Audit and Governance Committee	4	8 in total with Vale of White Horse District Council
Planning Committee	11	
General Licensing Committee	12	
Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee	6	
Appeals Panel	3	
Joint Staff Committee	5	10 in total with Vale of White Horse District Council
Totals	55	

- The membership of the General Licensing Committee and the Licensing Acts Committee are the same, although they are two separate entities. This allows for a sufficiently large, well trained pool of councillors from which to draw the Taxi Licensing and Licensing Panels and avoids confusion as to which members are on which committee. These committees may appoint the same, or different chairs and vice chairs.

10. The terms of reference of the council's committees and panels are set out in the constitution.

11. The 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. Some adjustments must be made to ensure that the overall percentage of seats is correctly apportioned.

Groups	Group members	Number of committee seats
Liberal Democrat	21	33
Green	8	13
Henley Residents	3	5
Labour and Co-operative	3	5

TOTAL	35	56(-1)
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	Green	HRG	Labour	Liberal Democrat	Total
Appeals Panel 3 seats	1	0	0	2	3
Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee 6 seats	1	1	1	4	7(-1)
General Licensing Committee 12 seats	3	1	1	7	12
Joint Audit and Governance 4 seats	1	0	0	2	3(+1)
Joint Scrutiny 5 seats	1	0	0	3	4(+1)
JSC 5 seats	1	0	0	3	4(+1)
Planning 11 seats	3	1	1	7	12(-1)
Scrutiny 9 seats	2	1	1	5	9
Total	13	4(+1)	4(+1)	33	56(-1)

- To obtain balance across the committees and overall, the Henley Residents Group and Labour and Co-operative Group must each gain an additional seat.
- Council also needs to agree the adjustments shown in brackets including a reduction of a member on the Planning Committee.

12. In agreement with the groups the vacant seat on the Joint Audit and Governance committee will be held by the Labour and Co-operative Group and the vacant seat on the Joint Scrutiny Committee will be held by the Henley Residents Group. The Liberal Democrat Group will lose a seat on the Community Governance and Electoral Issues Committee and take the vacant seat on the Joint Staff Committee. In addition, the Liberal Democrat Group has agreed to lose a seat on the planning Committee to achieve balance across the committees as required by legislation.

13. The Council does not have to adhere to the political groups regulations if:

- A political group does not use up its allocation.
- Notice of alternative proposed allocations is given to all members and no member objects.

Substitutes

14. 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.

Community Grants Panel

15. There is a maximum of nine seats (balanced politically) on the Community Grants Panel. This panel is not subject to the regulations detailed in paragraph 3 of this report and, therefore, has no effect on the overall allocation of seats. For this panel to be politically balanced alone, five seats are allocated to the Liberal Democrat Group, two to the Green Group and one seat each to the Henley Residents Group and Labour Group.

16. In accordance with the Council's constitution, each political group is entitled to substitutes as detailed in paragraph 14 above.

Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee

17. This advisory committee, comprising 12 members, is not subject to the regulations detailed in paragraph 3 of this report and, therefore, has no effect on the overall allocation of seats. A committee of 12 provides for representation from all the groups – three Greens, one Henley Resident, one Labour and Co-operative and 7 Liberal Democrats.

18. In accordance with the Council's constitution, each political group is entitled to substitutes as detailed in paragraph 14 above.

Licensing Acts Committee

19. The Licensing Acts Committee is a statutory committee and is not required to be included in the calculation of political balance. The whole committee meets rarely to deal with licensing and gambling policy matters but a membership of 12 provides a pool of councillors from which panels of three can be drawn to deal with hearings relating to premises licence applications and reviews, and gambling matters.

20. Council has previously agreed to appoint a committee in accordance with the political balance of the Council. The membership will mirror the membership of the General Licensing Committee and will, therefore, be politically balanced but will not in itself contribute to the total political balance of the council's committees.

21. As a statutory committee with a specified membership substitutes may not be appointed.

Eligibility to sit on committees and panels.

- 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 Chair or Vice Chair of Council may not be the Chair or Vice Chair of any committee or panel;
- No Cabinet member may be the Chair or Vice Chair of any committee or panel with the exception of the Joint Staff Committee;
- Most panels meet during the daytime, and only members who have some daytime availability should be selected for these panels. This includes General Licensing Committee and Licensing Acts Committee, which do most of their work through daytime panels.
- The requirement for members to declare disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and non-registrable interests or any conflicts of interest applies to all committees and panels.

Appointments

22. Officers have discussed and agreed the adjustments with group leaders and the non-group member, set out in this report, and have invited group leaders to submit the names of members they wish to sit on each of the above committees. A table of nominations will be circulated prior to the meeting.

Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23. Council is invited to appoint a representative and a named substitute to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel

24. Council is invited to appoint a representative and a substitute to the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel.

Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel

25. The Scrutiny Panel is non-statutory and is only advisory, unlike the council's scrutiny functions. The ability of the constituent council scrutiny committees is primary regarding the statutory ability to scrutinise the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. The chair will be elected by the members of the Scrutiny Panel.

26. As a non-statutory panel, the Scrutiny Panel does not need to be politically balanced, but councils are asked to have regard to their own political balance in making appointments.

27. Council is invited to appoint three representatives to the Scrutiny Panel.

Financial implications

28. There are no direct financial implications.

Legal implications

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

Climate and ecological impact implications

30. There are no climate or ecological implications arising from this report.

Equalities implications

31. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

32. In deciding the committees and panels it wishes to establish for the 2024/25-year, Council is required to allocate seats to political groups in the same proportion as they hold on the council as a whole. Against that background, Council is invited to establish the committees and panels set out in the table in paragraph nine of this report and to appoint councillors to them. Council is also invited to appoint councillors to the Community Grants Panel, the Climate and Ecological Emergencies Advisory Committee and the Licensing Acts Committee and to appoint representatives to the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel and the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel. If all committee and panel seats 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.