

Meeting: Standards Committee
Date: 12th November 2024
Classification: Part 1
Title of Report: Review of Committee Sizes

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 To consider the options for a reduction in the number of members on the committees of 17 in size having regard to benchmarking data and the political balance requirements.

2. Recommendations

That Committee:

- 2.1 Considers the options for a reduction in size of the Committees of the Council, in particular the 3 scrutiny committees and the Development Control Committee as set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report; and**
- 2.2 Recommends a preferred option to Council as part of the review of the Council's Constitution; and**
- 2.3 That any changes to the size of the committees be implemented at the beginning of the Municipal Year 2025/2026.**

3. Background

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 15th October 2024, councillors requested that a review of the size of the committees with 17 members be undertaken having regard to comparative data relating to our statistical neighbour authorities and the political balance requirements. This work forms part of the review of the Constitution.
- 3.2 The results of the benchmarking exercise are set out in Appendix 1 to this report and indicate that the size of the Council's scrutiny committees and the Development Control Committee are well above the average (scrutiny committees 10 development control committee 12). For completeness the review also includes comparisons with the other committees which are included in the normal political balance calculations.

3.3 The size of committees does affect political representation/proportionality and the implications of political balance is a factor that should be taken into account in reviewing committee size.

Options

3.4 There are 3 options put forward for consideration by the committee which would result in a reduction of members on the committees of 17 in size (scrutiny committees and Development Control Committee):

- (i) committees comprising 9 members
- (ii) committees comprising 11 members
- (iii) committees comprising 13 members

(Alternatively, the committee could consider a further option within the above range which would result in the Development Control Committee being smaller or larger than the three scrutiny committees).

3.5 Committees with an odd number of places have been put forward as these reduce the possibility of tied votes, which aids effective decision-making.

Entitlement to Seats on Committees

3.6 At present the total number of places across all the committee is 131. The seat entitlement is as follows:

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Labour - 49 Seats | (19 / 51 x 131 = 48.80) |
| Conservative – 41 Seats | (16 / 51 x 131 = 41.10) |
| Independent – 13 Seats | (5 / 51 x 131 = 12.84) |
| Liberal Democrats - 10 Seats | (4 / 51 x 131 = 10.27) |
| Reform UK – 5 Seats | (2 / 51 x 131 = 5.14) |
| Green – 5 - Seats | (2 / 51 x 131 = 5.14) |
| Non-Aligned – 8 Seats | (3 / 51 x 131 = 7.71%) |

3.7 The following table shows the entitlement to places on committees of 9,11 and 13 and the effect on political proportionality. The current position (17 members) is shown for comparative purposes.

| | Labour | Cons | Ind | Lib Dem | Reform | Green | Non-Aligned |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|
| Committees of 9 | 3 (3.35) | 3 (2.82) | 1 (0.88) | 1 (0.71) | 0 (0.35) | 0 (0.35) | 1 (0.53) |
| Committees of 11 | 4 (4.10) | 3 (3.45) | 1 (1.07) | 1 (0.86) | 0 (0.43) | 0 (0.43) | 1 (0.65) |
| Committees of 13 | 5 (4.84) | 4 (4.08) | 1 (1.27) | 1 (1.02) | 1 (0.51) | 1 (0.51) | 1 (0.76) |
| Committees of 17 | 6 (6.33) | 5 (5.33) | 2 (1.67) | 1 (1.33) | 1 (0.67) | 1(0.67) | 1 (1) |

(Adjustments would need to be made to committees of 11 and 13 in size to ensure that the number of members equates to the committee size total)

- 3.8 The principles for the allocation of places on committees between political groups are set out in Section 15(5) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Under the Act, places on committees must be distributed amongst the groups according to their respective size. The table above gives an indication as to how the seats would be allocated, however, the Act further provides that the distribution of places on individual committees must be adjusted so that proportionality is observed across all committees taken as a whole, even if this means departing from proportionality across a particular committee.
- 3.9 There are advantages with having smaller and larger committees. A smaller committee is more likely to reach a decision more speedily and would allow for a more streamlined committee that would be able to operate in a more efficient manner. Conversely, larger committees may make decision-making more cumbersome but do allow for greater cross-party representation. Whilst there is an argument that a smaller committee is less representative, the suggested reductions in committee size make little difference to the overall entitlement of the smaller groups, e.g the two groups comprising 2 members would only lose 1 place (5 to 4) overall if the committees are reduced to 9 in size.
- 3.10 The benchmarking data would suggest that there is a compelling case for reducing the size of the committees of 17 in number. Although the committees have operated for a number of years at the current size, a reduction in size is unlikely to have an impact on the ability of the committees to operate efficiently and effectively.
- 3.11 Should the committee be minded to recommend any of the suggested options, then it is suggested that the reductions in the size of the committees be implemented at the beginning of the new Municipal Year 2025/26 as part of the annual appointments process.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications associated with the suggested options.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 The legal implications are set out in the body of the report

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1 – Constitution Review Benchmarking exercise – Size of Committees.

7. Report Authorisation

| This report has been approved for publication by: | | |
|--|----------------|--------------|
| | Name: | Date: |
| Executive Director(s) | Claire Shuter | 04/11/24 |
| S151 Officer | Joe Chesterton | 01/11/24 |
| Monitoring Officer | Susan Zeiss | 01/11/24 |