

CONSTITUTION AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 24 January 2024
Report Subject	Review of Committee Sizes
Report Author	Chief Officer Governance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At its Annual Meeting Council resolved to review the size of committees with a view to them having an odd (rather than even) number of seats. That review has taken place and three options for the size of committees (smaller, status quo, larger) are presented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That committee sizes remain as they are.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE CURRENT REVIEW
1.01	The Council last reviewed the size of its committees in 2019. It agreed to reduce the size of committees so that they contained only councillors with particular interest or experience in the subject matter of that committee, and so that groups did not have to make appointments simply to “fill the numbers”.
1.02	Continuing that approach, and so far as is possible within the requirements of the political balance legislation, the Council also tries to allocate seats to groups based on the expressed interests of their members, which again helps to ensure that those with specific interests or experience can serve on a committee. Using this approach, the council has been able to allocate 131 out of 135 seats in accordance with the expressed preferences of councillors/political groups.
1.03	It has been suggested that, by having committees with 12 seats, certain

	<p>political groups are advantaged, that other groups are disadvantaged. Appendix 1 is a spreadsheet showing the current committee sizes and allocation of seats. It will be noted that no group has an overall majority on any committee, which reflects the fact that no group has an overall majority within the council.</p>
1.04	<p>The largest group has exactly half the seats on 5 out of the 11 standing committees. Whilst the largest group (at a little over 46%) contains almost half of the total number of councillors, it is therefore slightly “over-represented” on those 5 committees.</p>
1.05	<p>Appendix 2 shows committee sizes removing 1 seat from those committees with an even number of seats where a change is possible. Appendix 3 shows a possible political balance allocation if committees (where a change is possible) were to be increased by 1 seat. It is not possible to change the number of seats on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Governance & Audit Committee where lay members must make up precisely 1/3 of the membership of the committee so we will always have an even number of elected councillors on the committee; and b) North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority where the number of seats allocated to each constituent council is set by legislation.
1.06	<p>Appendix 2 shows in the column which is shaded pale peach the percentage of seats held by each group on each committee. That can be compared to the notional entitlement of each group both on each committee and overall. Clearly, the more closely those numbers match, the better. The closeness of the match varies from group to group, and from committee to committee. Some allocations on a committee greatly exceed the notional entitlement for the smaller groups because one cannot allocate a percentage of a councillor.</p> <p>The table below shows the overall percentage of seats for the different groups under each option and how well that matches the notional overall entitlement of each group. It is a complex table and shows that under each option some groups “gain” and other groups “lose”. Those gains/losses are marginally bigger in the option which reduces the number of seats on committees by 1. Unless the total number of seats is an exact multiple of the number of councillors (67, 134 or 201) the allocation of seats will always involve the rounding up/down of allocations.</p>

	Labour		Independent		Conservative		Liberal Democrat		Non Aligned		Eagle	
% of total number of Councillors	46.27		38.81		2.99		5.97		1.49		4.48	
	% of total seats	% +/-										
-1 seat	46.46	+0.19	38.58	-0.23	3.15	+0.16	5.51	-0.46	1.57	+0.08	4.72	+0.24
Current	46.67	+0.4	38.52	-0.29	2.96	-0.03	5.93	-0.04	1.48	-0.01	4.44	-0.04
+1 seat	46.15	-0.12	39.16	+0.35	2.8	-0.19	6.29	+0.32	1.4	-0.09	4.2	-0.28

1.07	In the option where the number of seats is reduced by 1, it is also necessary to give one group an overall majority on one committee in order for it to receive its full allocation of seats overall. This breaks one of the rules of political balance. This option should therefore be rejected. The other 2 options are compliant with the rules of political balance.
1.08	Overall, changing the number of seats would not improve the accuracy of the political balance calculations. The current allocation is lawful and meets the rules.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Group leaders have been consulted and, whilst not perceiving the need for change themselves, wanted to hear the view of the Committee.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – current allocation of seats Appendix 2 – reducing committee sizes by 1 Appendix 3 – increasing committee sizes by 1

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Council 4th May 2023.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Gareth Owens, Chief Officer Governance Telephone: 01352 702344 E-mail: Gareth.legal@ftinshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Political balance - provisions in the Local Government and housing Act 1989 (and subordinate legislation) which require seats to be shared with groups based on the size of the group. For example a group with 50% of councillors should be allocated 50% of the seats overall and on each committee. The rules below form a hierarchy with the most important being listed first:</p> <p>(a) that not all the seats on a committee can be allocated to the same political group;</p> <p>(b) that the majority of the seats on the body is allocated to a particular political group if the number of persons belonging to that group is a majority of the authority's membership;</p> <p>(c) subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, that the total number of seats across all committees allocated to each political group bears the same proportion as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority; and</p> <p>(d) subject to paragraphs (a) to (c) above, that the number of the seats on allocated to each political group on each committee bears the same proportion as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority.</p>