

Allocation of Seats on Committees to Political Groups and Membership of the Standards Committee

Report of the Clerk

For further information about this report please contact Sharon Lloyd, Corporate Services Manager, on 01743 260210.

1 Purpose of Report

This report advises the Fire Authority of the need to reallocate seats on its committees to political groups, following the local elections at Borough of Telford & Wrekin (sections 3, 4 and 5 and Appendix). The report also asks the Fire Authority to decide whether to continue with current arrangement regarding its representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board (section 6) and finally to agree the membership of, and nominate Members to, the Standards Committee (section 7).

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to agree:

- a) The proposed allocation of seats on its committees to political groups (as set out at the Appendix to this report), including a resolution that, under section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the political balance requirements of that Act do not apply to the Fire Authority's representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board;
- b) Whether to continue with the current arrangement regarding its representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board (see section 6) or, if not, what new arrangement should take its place; and
- c) The membership of its Standards Committee (see section 7).



3 Background

Under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and its Regulations, as amended by the Local Government Act 2000, seats on standing committees have to be balanced proportionately across all committee places (i.e. in aggregate) and, subject to that overriding requirement, each committee has to be politically balanced as far as reasonably practicable.

The Standards Committee is specifically exempted from the political balance rules. Working groups of the Fire Authority, such as the Budget Working Group, Integrated Risk Management Planning Working Group and the Principal Officers' Employment Panel, do not have any delegated powers and are not, therefore, subject to the political balance rules.

4 Borough of Telford & Wrekin Elections

As a result of the Borough of Telford & Wrekin elections on 3 May 2007 the various parties now hold the following number of seats:

Party	Members
Conservative	25
Labour	19
Liberal Democrat	3
Independent	4
TAWPA	3
Total	54

The change in the political balance at the Borough of Telford & Wrekin has in turn been reflected in its nominations to the Fire Authority.

The current and previous political balance of the Fire Authority (i.e. total membership from both constituent authorities) is shown in the table below.

Political Membership of the Fire Authority

Party	Members now		Members previously	
	SCC	BT&W	SCC	BT&W
Conservative	6	3	6	2
Labour	2	2	2	3
Liberal Democrat	3	0	3	0
Independent	0	1	0	1
Totals	11	6	11	6

SCC – Shropshire County Council
BT&W – Borough of Telford & Wrekin



5 Allocation of Seats on Committees to Political Groups

As the political balance of the Fire Authority has now changed it is necessary to reflect this in the allocation of seats on committees to the political groups. The Fire Authority is, therefore, requested to agree the allocations set out at the Appendix to this report.

6 Representation on the West Midlands Regional Management Board

At the time the West Midlands Regional Management Board was established the Fire Authority agreed that the three places on the Board should be taken by those Members holding the positions of Chair, Vice-Chair and Leader of the Main Opposition Group. To date these have been held by a Liberal Democrat, a Labour Member and a Conservative respectively. The Fire Authority is asked to consider and agree whether it wishes this arrangement to continue. If not, Members are asked decide what arrangement should take its place.

7 Membership of Standards Committee

Membership of committees is normally agreed at the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority in July and it is intended that a report dealing with this issue will be brought to Members at that time. The Fire Authority's Standards Committee has, however, been given the opportunity to participate in a pilot run by the Standards Board for England, which needs to take place during the early part of July. Councillors Hussey and Morgan, who sat on the Standards Committee, are no longer with the Fire Authority and Members are asked, therefore, to determine the membership of that Committee now in order that the pilot can proceed.

The Committee is made up of 6 Members, 2 of whom are non-elected, independent Members. The remaining elected Members are Councillor Mrs Holyoak (who sits on the Fire Authority as a Conservative representative) and Councillor Mellings (Liberal Democrat). As stated in section 3 above, the Standards Committee is not subject to the political balance rules. Consequently, the Fire Authority has taken the view in the past that the Committee should have representation from each of the political groups. It is, therefore, proposed that a Labour Member and an elected, Independent Member be nominated to sit on the Committee and the Fire Authority is asked to make nominations accordingly.

8 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.



9 Legal Comment

The Fire Authority must comply with the political balance requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and its Regulations, as amended by the Local Government Act 2000, when allocating seats on its standing committees. Under section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the Fire Authority can determine that political balance requirements do not apply to its appointments to any body, provided this resolution is passed without any Member voting against it.

10 Equality Impact Assessment

This report has been assessed to ensure that any effect it might have would not result in discriminatory practice or differential impact upon specific groups. Having considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2), officers have concluded that the recommendations made within this report would not have an adverse impact upon any particular group and an Initial Equality Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

11 Appendix

Allocation of Seats on Committees to Political Groups

12 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	*
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial		Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Initial Equality Impact Assessment Form completed	No



Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Proposed Allocation of Seats to Political Groups

Key

- * **Cons** – Conservative
- Lib Dem** – Liberal Democrat
- Ind** – Independent
- Lab** – Labour

- ** These rows indicate the actual number of Members each political group should have, based on the percentage of Members it has of the Fire Authority as a whole.

	Cons*	Lab*	Lib Dem*	Ind*	Total Seats
Shropshire County Council	6	2	3	0	11
Borough of Telford & Wrekin	3	2	0	1	6
Total	9	4	3	1	17

	Cons*	Lab*	Lib Dem*	Ind*	Total Seats
** West Midlands Regional Management Board Members: 3	1.59	0.71	0.53	0.18	3.01
Allocation to be decided					3

The Fire Authority has previously agreed that the three places on the West Midlands Regional Management Board should be taken by those holding the positions of Chair, Vice-Chair and Leader of the Main Opposition Group of the Fire Authority. Members need to consider and decide whether they wish this arrangement to continue.

Under section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 the Fire Authority can agree that the political balance requirements do not apply to the Board, provided no Member votes against the motion. In this case allocation of these seats would not need to be taken into account in the overall political balance calculations, which would then be as shown on the following page. This is the approach, which the Fire Authority has agreed since October 2005, when the new committee structure was introduced.



The following allocation of seats on the Fire Authority's committees is proposed.

	Cons*	Lab*	Lib Dem*	Ind*	Total Seats
** Urgency Committee Members: 7	3.71	1.65	1.24	0.41	7.01
Allocation	4	1	1	1	7
** Strategy and Resources Committee Members: 7	3.71	1.65	1.24	0.41	7.01
Allocation	4	2	1	0	7
** Audit and Performance Management Committee Members: 7	3.71	1.65	1.24	0.41	7.01
Allocation	4	2	1	0	7
** Human Resources Committee Members: 7	3.71	1.65	1.24	0.41	7.01
Allocation	4	1	1	1	7
** Disciplinary Appeals Tribunal Members: 5	2.65	1.18	0.88	0.29	5
Allocation	3	1	1	0	5
** Health Panel Members: 3	1.59	0.71	0.53	0.18	3.01
Allocation	1	1	1	0	3
** Appeals Committee Members: 3	1.59	0.71	0.53	0.18	3.01
Allocation	1	1	1	0	3

Under the Fire Authority's committee terms of reference any Member, who sits on the Strategy and Resources Committee, is precluded from sitting on the Audit and Performance Management Committee. As there is now only 1 Independent Member on the Fire Authority it is not possible for that party to be represented on both committees.



If Members agree to the proposals on the previous page the figures would be as follows:					
	Cons*	Lab*	Lib Dem*	Ind*	Total Seats
** Aggregate Seats	20.67	9.20	6.90	2.29	39.06
Total Seats Allocation	21	9	7	2	39

Standards Committee

This is not required to be politically balanced and does not, therefore, form part of the political balance calculations. The following allocation is, therefore, proposed.

	Cons*	Lab*	Lib Dem*	Ind*	Total Seats
Elected Members: 4	1	1	1	1	4

Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) Members' Working Group

Although Members agreed that this Group should be politically balanced, it does not form part of the political balance calculations, as, being a Working Group, it is not a fully constituted committee of the Fire Authority.

	Cons*	Lab*	Lib Dem*	Ind*	Total Seats
** Members: 7	3.71	1.65	1.24	0.41	7.01
Allocation	4	2	1	0	7

Principal Officers' Employment Panel

Members agreed that this Panel should not be politically balanced but should comprise of the Chair, Vice-Chair, Leader of the Main Opposition Group and Chair of the Personnel Committee. It was subsequently agreed that an Independent Member also be included in the Panel. In any event, this Panel is not a fully constituted committee of the Fire Authority and does not, therefore, form part of the political balance calculations.



Budget Working Group

As this Group is not a fully constituted committee, it does not form part of the political balance calculations. Currently, it has the same membership as the Strategy and Resources Committee.

Retained Review Implementation Group

As this Group is not a fully constituted committee, it does not form part of the political balance calculations. Currently it has 1 Labour Member, 1 Conservative Member and 1 Liberal Democrat Member.

Community Liaison Panel

As this Group is not a fully constituted committee, it does not form part of the political balance calculations. The Fire Authority has agreed that it should be made up as follows:

Members from:

Borough of Telford & Wrekin (x 2)
Bridgnorth District Council
North Shropshire District Council
Oswestry Borough Council
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
South Shropshire District Council

Although Shropshire County Council is not included in the above list, a number of Members sit on both the County Council and a Borough or District Council and will, therefore, provide representation for the former.

The membership will also include the Fire Authority's:

Older People's Champion; and
Fire Authority's Younger People's Champion

