

AGENDA 12, Enc iii) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL - PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION POLICY

Report for Full Council

Date: 29th July 2025

Report Author: Executive Officer

Proposed by: Cllr David Coyle

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been compiled to provide information to members of Ashington Town Council regarding the possible adoption of a Proportional Representation Policy for committee appointments. This policy has been proposed by Councillor David Coyle and seeks to establish fair and transparent principles for the allocation of committee seats that reflect the political composition of the Council.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Legislative Context

Parish and Town Councils are not bound by the proportional representation requirements set out in Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which applies only to higher tier authorities (district, county, and unitary councils). The Local Government Act 1972, which governs the processes and procedures of local councils including parish and town councils, does not prescribe any mandatory methodology for political balance on committees.

2.2 Voluntary Adoption

While not legally required, parish and town councils are able to adopt the principles of proportional representation voluntarily, provided they adhere to their prescribed legislation and ensure each committee has named members appropriately appointed to it. This approach promotes democratic representation, transparency, and fairness in local governance.

2.3 Current Council Composition

Ashington Town Council currently comprises 18 elected members with the following political composition:

- **Labour:** 12 members (66.7%)
- **Reform UK:** 6 members (33.3%)

3. PRINCIPLES OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

This policy adopts the following core principles, adapted from the Local Government and Housing Act 1989:

3.1 Prevention of Single Group Domination

No single political group shall monopolise all seats on any committee, ensuring minority representation and diverse perspectives in decision-making.

3.2 Majority Group Representation

Where one political group holds a majority of Council seats, that group should maintain a majority on each committee, reflecting the democratic mandate given by electors.

3.3 Proportional Allocation

The number of seats allocated to each political group on individual committees should, as far as practicable, reflect the same proportion as that group's representation on the full Council.

3.4 Fair Representation

All political groups should have meaningful representation on committees, promoting inclusive governance and ensuring all voices are heard in the decision-making process.

4. CALCULATION METHODOLOGY

4.1 Basic Calculation

Committee seats shall be allocated using the following formula:

- **Group Entitlement = (Group Members ÷ Total Council Members) × Committee Size**
- Results shall be rounded to the nearest whole number
- Where rounding results in an imbalance, adjustments shall be made to ensure the total equals the committee size

4.2 Current Allocation Formula

Based on the current political composition:

- **Labour allocation per committee = $(12 \div 18) \times \text{Committee Size} = 66.7\%$ of seats**
- **Reform UK allocation per committee = $(6 \div 18) \times \text{Committee Size} = 33.3\%$ of seats**

4.3 Minimum Representation

No committee shall exclude any political group that holds seats on the Council, ensuring each group has at least one representative where committee size permits.

5. COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND ALLOCATION

5.1 Current Committees

The *Finance and General Services Committee* includes all members so is not included.

Personnel Committee

- Total Members: 9
- Labour: 6
- Reform UK: 3

The proposal includes that the Membership of the Personnel Committee is increased to 9 members, which would allow all current 6 Labour Cllrs to maintain their membership, adding a further 3 Reform Cllrs to achieve the 33% proportional representation.

Youth Advisory Committee

- Total Members: 6
- Labour: 4
- Reform UK: 2

Allotment Liaison Committee

- Total Members: 5 (but could be 6)
- Labour: 4
- Reform UK: 1

Please note that no further names were achieved from either party.

Partnership Board

- Total Members: 6
- Labour: 4
- Reform UK: 2

CCTV Group

- Total Members: 4
- Labour: 3
- Reform UK: 1

Please note this is currently 2 Labour and 2 Reform.

Climate Change Committee

- Total Members: 7 (but could be more)
- Labour: 6
- Reform UK: 1

Please note that no further names were achieved from either party.

Ashington Town Forum

- Total Members: 4
- Labour: 3
- Reform UK: 1

5.2 Future Committees

This policy shall apply to any new committees established by the Council, with seat allocation calculated according to the methodology set out in Section 4 and based on the political composition at the time of committee establishment.

6. IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCEDURES

6.1 Annual Review

The proportional allocation shall be reviewed annually at the Council's Annual Meeting or following any by-elections that alter the political composition of the Council.

6.2 Nomination Process

Political groups shall nominate members to fill their allocated seats on each committee at the Annual Meeting of the Council. The Council shall appoint nominated members unless there are compelling reasons to reject a nomination.

7. VARIATIONS AND EXCEPTIONS

7.1 *Unanimous Agreement*

The Council may agree to vary the proportional allocation for specific committees where all members unanimously agree to an alternative arrangement.

7.2 *Specialist Committees*

For committees requiring specific expertise or qualifications, the Council may consider these factors alongside political balance when making appointments.

7.3 *Small Committees*

For committees with very limited membership where strict proportional representation would be impractical, the Council shall endeavour to achieve the closest possible proportional balance.

8. MONITORING AND REVIEW

8.1 *Policy Review*

This policy shall be reviewed every four years following ordinary elections, or earlier if significant changes in political composition warrant review.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council:

1. **ADOPTS** the Proportional Representation Policy as set out in this report;
2. **AGREES** to apply proportional representation principles to all existing committees of the Council;
3. **DELEGATES** authority to the Executive Officer to calculate seat allocations for committees in accordance with this policy; where this has not been achieved informally via decisions in May 2025, to place on a future agenda the nominations required, and any changes to terms of reference of that committee;
4. **AGREES** that this policy shall apply to any new committees established by the Council;
5. **NOTES** that this policy may be varied by unanimous agreement of all Council members for specific circumstances.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

This policy operates within the Council's existing legal framework and does not create any additional legal obligations. The policy enhances the Council's commitment to fair and transparent governance while remaining compliant with all applicable legislation.