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## **Paper C – Changes to political groups and allocation of committee places**

Lead Members: Leader of the Council, Councillor Bill Revans and Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Mandy Chilcott

Division and Local Member: All

Lead Officers: Monitoring Officer, Alyn Jones

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 In accordance with legislation and the Council's Constitution, this report sets out the political balance of the Council following the recent by-elections on 21 November 2024 for Rowbarton & Staplegrove and Blackmoor Vale divisions.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That the Council notes the recent by-election results and the changes to the political balance of the Council.**

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1 Political balance**

Following the approval of the Somerset Structural Changes Order 2022, Somerset Council came into effect on 1 April 2023 as part of local government reorganisation in Somerset. In accordance with the Structural Changes Order 2022, the 110 members elected on 5 May 2022 are the members of the new Somerset Council and represent 55 divisions.

- 3.1.2 Where membership of Somerset Council is divided into political groups the Council is required to review and allocate the total number of seats on committees in accordance with the strength of each political group. Following the recent by-elections the current position in terms of the number of members within a political group on the Council results in the following political balance:

- Liberal Democrats = 60 members (-1 from Annual General Meeting)
- Conservative = 34 members (+1 from Annual General Meeting)

- Labour = 5 members
- Green = 5 members
- Independents = 3 members
- No political group = 3 members

The Liberal Democrat political group therefore forms the majority Administration until the next council elections in 2027.

- 3.1.3 The above political balance results in the following entitlement to seats for committees where political balance rules apply and if Council agrees at its discretion (\*) to allocate to members of no political group:

<b>Political Group</b>	<b>No of Members</b>	<b>Entitlement to committee places</b>	<b>If Council chooses to use its discretion and allocate on basis of number of seats held</b>
Liberal Democrat	60	56.2%	54.5%
Conservative	34	31.8%	30.9%
Labour	5	4.7%	4.5%
Green	5	4.7%	4.5%
Independent	3	2.8%	2.7%
No political group *	3	0%	2.7%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note – the by-elections have resulted in a – 0.3% entitlement reduction for the Liberal Democrat group, a + 0.3% entitlement increase for the Conservative group and no change for the other political groups.

The by-election results and resultant changes to political group sizes have no material impact on the current allocation of committee places.

- 3.1.4 Appendix 1 sets out guidance regarding the method of allocation of seats / places on committees.
- 3.1.5 Since the last Council meeting, Councillor Fothergill has resigned as the Leader of the Opposition and Councillor Mandy Chilcott is now the Leader of the Opposition. Councillor Chilcott has confirmed that the opposition spokesperson roles are undertaken as follows:

<b>Opposition Spokesperson roles</b>	<b>Councillor</b>
Leader of the Opposition & Opposition Lead for Governance & Communications	Mandy Chilcott
Deputy Leader of the Opposition & Opposition Lead Member for Finance, Procurement & Performance	Diogo Rodrigues
Opposition Lead Member for Adult Services, Housing and Homelessness	Lucy Trimnell

Opposition Lead Member for Children, Families and Education	Frances Nicholson
Opposition Lead Member for Transport & Waste	Andy Dingwall
Opposition Lead Member for Communities, Housing Revenue Account, Culture, Equalities & Diversity	Suria Aujla
Opposition Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning and Assets	Sue Osborne
Opposition Lead Member for Public Health, Climate Change & Environment	Dawn Denton
Opposition Lead Member for Transformation, Human Resources & Localities	Faye Purbrick

- 3.1.5 The Council has delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer to make in-year changes between Annual General Meetings to committee appointments (excluding Chairs and Vice-Chairs) in accordance with the wishes of the political group leader that relates to the relevant place(s) on a committee.

#### **4. Legal Implications**

- 4.1 The rules governing the allocation of seats on Committees and Sub-Committees to political groups are set out in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and regulations made thereunder including the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.

The provisions of the 1989 Act include the requirement that, where Members of the Council are divided into political groups, then the membership of its committees and sub-committees must reflect the political balance of the Council as a whole.

#### **5. Impact Assessment**

- 5.1 The Council's duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 is to have "due regard" to the matters set out in relation to equalities when considering and making decisions on the provision of services. There are no direct impacts of these recommendations on the provision of services. There are no direct impacts on sustainability, health and safety, community safety or privacy aspects as a result of this proposal.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 No additional financial implications have been identified from the proposals set out in this report.

## **7. Background Papers**

- 7.1 Somerset Council Constitution
- Somerset Council Annual General Meeting 24 May 2023
- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government and Housing Act 1989
- Local Government Act 2000
- Somerset Structural Changes Order 2022
- Local Government Structural Changes Transitional Arrangement Orders 2008
- Localism Act 2011
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Public Service Pensions Act 2013

**Note** For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author.