

## London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	Calculation of Political Balance (Proportionality) and arrangements for committees
Meeting / Date	Council, 26 February 2026
Directorate	Resources
Report author/ Contact details	Emily Wood, Head of Democratic Services <a href="mailto:Emily.wood@walthamforest.gov.uk">Emily.wood@walthamforest.gov.uk</a> Rianna Terry, Assistant Director, Leadership and Democracy <a href="mailto:Rianna.terry@walthamforest.gov.uk">Rianna.terry@walthamforest.gov.uk</a>
Wards affected	All
Public access	Open
Appendices	Appendix 1 – Proportionality for Committees

### 1. Summary

1.1. This report summarises the political balance of the Council following changes in the makeup of political groups and sets out matters relating to the allocation of seats to committees.

### 2. Recommendation

#### 2.1. Council is asked to:

2.1.1. Note that the political balance of the Council is:

- 44 members of the Labour Group
- 10 members of the Conservative Group
- 3 members of the Reform UK Group
- 3 Ungrouped Members
  - 3 independent members

2.1.2. Note the committees set out for the municipal year 2025/26 listed in Appendix 1 as agreed at the Annual Council Meeting held on 22 May 2025.

2.1.3. Agree to vary proportionality as set out in Appendix 1 and adopt some arrangement other than that prescribed by the Act or Regulations.

2.1.4. Agree any changes to the memberships of those committees as tabled at this Council meeting for approval.

### 3. Background

- 3.1. A change in the political composition of the Council has occurred following Councillor Rhiannon Eglin becoming an independent (ungrouped) member having previously been part of the Labour Group. As well as Councillor Marion Fitzgerald and Councillor Tim James becoming Reform UK members having previously both been part of the Conservative Group.
- 3.2. Consequent to this change, the Council must review the allocation of places on committees and other bodies subject to the proportionality requirements of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990.
- 3.3. When allocating seats proportionally to political balance, independent members are combined with any individual party members (ungrouped).
- 3.4. The Council may, when carrying out a review of proportionality, adopt some arrangement other than that prescribed by the Act or Regulations. Any decision on such a proposal must be passed without objection (i.e. abstentions will not impede the decision, but a single vote against the proposal will cause it to fall).

#### Ordinary Committees

- 3.5. The Council is required, under the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 (ss. 15-17) and the Regulations made under that Act, to comply with political balance rules when appointing 'Ordinary' Committees (i.e. committees appointed under Sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972).
- 3.6. The Rules provide that seats on 'Ordinary' Committees must be allocated in line with the following principles in order of precedence:
  - a. That not all seats on a body are allocated to the same political group.
  - b. That the majority of seats on the body are allocated to a political group which has a majority of the Council's membership.
  - c. That, subject to principles (a) and (b) above, the total number of seats across all the Ordinary Committees shall be allocated to each political group in the proportion of their size on the Council as a whole.
  - d. That, subject to principles (a) to (c) above, seats on each individual body shall be allocated to each political group in the same proportion as to their size on the Council as a whole.
  - e. Principle (d) (but not principles (a), (b) or (c)) also applies to sub-committees and advisory committees.

3.7. The political balance of the authority (60 councillors) is as follows:

Labour	44 councillors (73%)
Conservative	10 councillors (17%)
Reform UK	3 councillors (5%)
Ungrouped	3 councillors (5%)

3.8. Appendix 1, table 1 sets out the allocations required on Ordinary Committees, following the changes to political balance.

3.9. For Ordinary Committees, the changes require appointments across all committees to meet proportionality.

3.10. Appendix 1, table 2 recommends a proposal for a variation to proportionality, where all members are to remain appointed to their committees as currently allocated, regardless of whether their political grouping has changed.

3.11. The recommendation to vary proportionality is to ensure continuity of member appointments and representation across committees given close proximity to the end of the 25/26 municipal year and scheduled local government elections 2026.

3.12. This would mean:

- The Conservative Group donating one seat to Reform UK group on Audit and Governance Committee.
- The Labour Group and Ungrouped Members donating a seat each to the Conservative Group on Licensing Committee.
- The Conservative Group donating one seat to Reform UK Group on Pension Fund Committee.
- The Conservative Group and the Ungrouped Members donating a seat each to Reform UK on Staffing Committee.

3.13. The Council may, when carrying out a review of proportionality, adopt some arrangement other than that prescribed by the Act or Regulations. Any decision on such a proposal must be passed without objection (i.e. abstentions will not impede the decision, but a single vote against the proposal will cause it to fall).

#### Overview and Scrutiny Committees

3.14. The proportionality principles at paragraph 3.6 also apply to Overview & Scrutiny Committees and sub-committees. However, because these are bodies established under the Local Government Act 2000 (and not section 101 or 102 of the Local Government Act 1972), they are not included when calculating the total number of seats on Ordinary Committees (principle c).

3.15. Consequently, a separate calculation is undertaken for Overview & Scrutiny Committees with the result set out at Appendix 1, table 3.

3.16. Reform UK and the Ungrouped Members are shown in Appendix 1 to have differing appointments across Scrutiny Committees, despite having the same political balance. This is due to Reform UK and the Ungrouped Members having equal allocations, per scrutiny committee, but there only being one seat available. Therefore, as there are six Scrutiny Committees, three appointments have been given to Reform UK and three appointments to the Ungrouped Members.

3.17. The recommendation in this report (found in Appendix 1, table 4) suggests varying proportionality, where all members are to remain appointed to their committees as currently allocated, regardless of whether their political grouping has changed.

3.18. The recommendation to vary proportionality is to ensure continuity of member appointments and representation across committees given close proximity to the end of the 25/26 municipal year and scheduled local government elections 2026.

3.19. This would mean:

- The Labour Group would donate three seats to the Conservative group on: Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny, Housing and Inclusive Economy Scrutiny, and Climate Scrutiny Committees.
- The Reform UK Group would donate one seat to Conservative Group on Communities and Public Protection.
- The Conservative Group would donate one seat the Ungrouped Members on Coordinating Scrutiny Committee.

3.20. As with Ordinary Committees, the Council may adopt some arrangement other than that prescribed by the Act or Regulations. Any decision on such a proposal must be passed without objection (i.e. abstentions will not impede the decision, but a single vote against the proposal will cause it to fall).

#### Committees not subject to political balance rules

3.21. The following bodies are entirely excluded from the Political Balance Rules:

##### The Cabinet

3.21.1. The Cabinet is appointed by the Leader and may comprise councillors from one political group only. It must have 2 to 9 members in addition to the Leader.

##### Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Committee

3.21.2. The Political Balance Rules do not apply to this Committee nor its sub-committees (although they do apply to the Licensing (General) Committee and its sub-committees). However, it is normal practice to constitute the sub-committees (panels) in accordance with political balance (i.e., two Labour members and

one Conservative Member) as far as practicable. Membership of the sub-committees is drawn from the membership of the parent committee. The Terms of Reference of the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Committee will be reviewed this year and outcomes reported to Audit and Governance Committee for recommendation to a later meeting of full Council.

#### Health and Wellbeing Board

3.21.3. Although the Health and Social Care Act 2012 requires the Council to establish a Health and Wellbeing Board as a section 102 committee, The Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 modified and disapplied certain provisions of section 102 (and other sections of the Local Government Act 1972), as well as the political balance provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Appointments to the Health and Wellbeing Board therefore do not figure in the political balance calculations.

### 4. Implications

#### 4.1. Finance, Value for Money and Risk

4.1.1. Chairs and Vice-Chairs of certain committees will be entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance as set out in the Members' Allowances Scheme.

#### 4.2. Legal

4.2.1. The legal implications are contained in the body of this report. The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 2001 provide that the Council must have standing orders with regard to the appointment of specified senior officer posts (i.e. the posts in s.2 of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989). The Council may delegate this authority to a committee.

#### 4.3. Equalities and Diversity

4.3.1. None specifically.

#### 4.4. Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder).

4.4.1. None specifically.

#### 4.5. Council Infrastructure (e.g. human resources, accommodation or IT issues

4.5.1. None specifically.

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None.