

APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS

1. Members asked for advice on the appointment of committee chairs, in particular:-
 - Whether they could be appointed by the Council as is the current practice
 - Whether they could be appointed in each cases by the committee at its first meeting
 - Whether in either case the appointment of chairs of committees could follow (as far as is possible) the political balance rules in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 by applying as far as possible those rules to the number of committee chairs so that the chairs reflect as far as can be achieved the same proportion as the party political groups represent on the full council.

2. To remind members, the political balance rules are in order of application:-
 - (a) that not all the seats on the body are allocated to the same political group;
 - (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;
 - (c) subject to paragraphs (a) and (b) above, that the number of seats on the ordinary committees of a relevant authority which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the total of all the seats on the ordinary committees of that authority as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority; and
 - (d) subject to paragraphs (a) to (c) above, that the number of the seats on the body which are allocated to each political group bears the same proportion to the number of all the seats on that body as is borne by the number of members of that group to the membership of the authority.

3. In relation to the first two points either method of appointment of chairs is lawful and a reasonable practice to adopt.

However, in order to accommodate the third point (political balance) the appointment of chairs by the committees themselves would render an attempt to emulate the political balance rules impossible. As the two principles of central appointment (by Council) and self - appointment (by the committee itself) come into conflict.

In any event applying rules to appointment of chairs when those rules were not designed for appointment of chairs may be a difficult enough exercise

Recommendation: If members wish to retain as their principal objective the application as far as possible of the political balance rules to the appointment of chairs then the optimum chance of achieving that is to have chairs appointed by the Council.

David Johnson

17 March 2016