

Bristol City Council

Audit Committee

27 January 2017

Report of: Service Director – Legal & Democratic Services

Title: Applications for dispensations

Ward: Citywide

Officer presenting report: Service Director Legal & Democratic Services

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Recommendation

Audit Committee is recommended to grant dispensations to the elected Mayor and councillors listed in Appendix A to this report to enable them to participate in discussion, vote on matters in relation to the civic budget 2017-18 and the setting of the council tax, at the Council budget meeting on 21 February, 2017. Such dispensation to be granted for this meeting only.

Summary

This report describes the rules in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) and details those members who will have such interests in relation to the civic budget debate but would otherwise be unable to participate in the discussion and vote thereon. It recommends that they be granted dispensations to enable them to take a full part in the meeting on the basis that it would be appropriate to grant such a dispensation.

The significant issues in the report are:

The statutory provisions in relation to disclosable pecuniary interests, the grounds where dispensations may be granted, and the details of those members who are seeking dispensations to enable them to participate in the meeting.

Policy

Not applicable

Consultation

All members

Context

1. The Localism Act 2011 introduced provisions for the registration of disclosable pecuniary interests (DPI's).
2. What constitutes a DPI, is described in the appendix to the DCLG document "Openness and transparency on personal interests"

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/240134/Openness_and_transparency_on_personal_interests.pdf

In essence DPI's are **business interests** (eg employment, trade, profession, contracts or any company in which a member and/or their spouse/partner etc are associated) and any wider financial interests which they may have. These interests are those shown in section 1 of the register of members interests.

3. When attending meetings of full Council, its executive, any committee or sub-committee etc, members who have a DPI **relating to any business that is or will be considered at the meeting** must not:
 - Participate in any discussion of the business of the meeting or if they become aware of a DPI during the meeting, participate further in any discussion of the business or
 - Participate in any vote or further vote taken on the matter at the meeting.

Such prohibitions apply to any form of participation, which includes speaking as a member of the public. Failure to observe this requirement could result in a criminal offence being committed.

Dispensations sought

4. The rules allow the Council (delegated to Audit Committee) to grant dispensations to permit members, in certain circumstances, to take part in the business of the authority even if a member has a DPI relating to that business. These circumstances are described in detail in the guidance but the main reasons for granting a dispensation are as follows:
 - (a) Without the dispensation the number of Members prohibited from participating/voting in any particular business would be so great a proportion of the body transacting the business as to impede the transaction of the business.
 - (b) Without the dispensation the representation of different political groups on the body transacting any particular business would be so upset as to alter the likely outcome of any vote relating to the business.
 - (c) The grant of the dispensation would be in the interests of the inhabitants of Bristol.
 - (d) Without the dispensation every Member of the Executive would have a DPI prohibiting them from participating/voting in any particular business to be transacted by the Executive.
 - (e) It is otherwise appropriate to grant the dispensation.
5. It is considered that one or more of the circumstances will apply to some members at the budget meeting. Members have been asked to consider whether they will have a DPI in relation to the business for the budget meeting and if so, to apply for a dispensation to enable them to speak and vote at the meeting.

Appendix A details the applications lodged where the Monitoring Officer considers that members have a DPI which warrants an exemption to enable them to vote at the meeting.

Other interests that have been registered by members but the Monitoring Officer considers these are not interests which qualify for a dispensation under the Localism Act and therefore do not prevent members from participating in the meeting and voting.

6. Members are also asked to note the following;

- Interests in the budget which they have by virtue of being council tax payers / recipients of a council tax discount under the new local arrangements for council tax support do not prevent participation in and voting at this meeting, so seeking a dispensation is unnecessary;
- The dispensation which the Council may grant does not extend to the consideration of, or allocation of, funds in respect of an individual interest. In such circumstances the interest would no longer be incidental to the budget as a whole and it would be inappropriate for the member to participate in the budget discussion or vote thereon.

Other Options Considered

Not applicable

Legal and Resource Implications

As described above

Appendices:

Appendix A – Schedule of dispensations

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None