

# **EXTRAORDINARY GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2016**

**Councillors Present:** Jeff Beck (Vice-Chairman), Graham Bridgman, James Cole, Lee Dillon, Rick Jones, Anthony Pick and Quentin Webb (Chairman)

**Also Present:** David Holling (Head of Legal Services) and Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor Steve Ardagh-Walter, Chris Bridges and Barry Dickens

### **PART I**

#### **28 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### **29 Request for Dispensation**

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 3) which pertained to an application for a dispensation from Councillor Lynne Doherty to speak and vote at all Council and Executive meetings where the 2016/17 budget was discussed. Councillor Doherty's employer was in receipt of short break funding which would form a small part of the budget discussions. The amount equated to 0.00007% of the Council's total budget for the 2016/17 year.

The Monitoring Officer noted that it was the Member's employer which received some short breaks funding and the overall amount was a small proportion of the overall budget. Councillor Doherty also brought some knowledge of the arrangements in her role as Portfolio Holder which might be of assistance to Members of Council generally should there be debate on this particular line of the Budget. The Monitoring officer did not consider that Councillor Doherty had a disclosable pecuniary interest but at best an 'other interest' under the Council's Code of Conduct.

He stated that should the Committee be minded to grant a dispensation in this instance it be recommended that it should be limited to meetings of the Executive and Council at which the 2016/17 Budget was discussed only.

All three Independent Persons (IPs) were consulted.

Lindsey Appleton concurred with the view of the Monitoring Officer and stated that it was Councillor Doherty's employer that received the funding and the generic knowledge that she possessed as portfolio holder, could potentially aid discussions. She also concurred that Councillor Doherty did not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in this matter.

James Rees had made no comment on the report. Mike Wall stated that that he felt that a dispensation should not be granted on the grounds of perception. However, if a dispensation were to be granted it should be to speak but not vote.

Barry Dickens had advised the Chairman that he was of the opinion that a dispensation should be granted to speak but not vote on this matter.

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Councillor Jeff Beck and Quentin Webb noted that the funding was granted to her employer and not to the Councillor herself and therefore she should be able to participate fully in the debate.

Councillor Lee Dillon commented that he was generally in favour of granting dispensations but that he felt that Councillor Doherty should not speak or vote on that specific line of the budget discussions to ensure that there were no perception of bias. He would not like to see her advocating funding for her employer. Preventing her from discussing that particular item would not effect the political balance of the Council. He was however comfortable with her speaking and voting on the budget as a whole.

Councillor Anthony Pick stated that in his opinion it was important that Councillor Doherty participate fully in the debate given her responsibilities. Councillor Graham Bridgman commented that he felt that the report did not provide sufficient information. It was not clear what position Councillor Doherty was employed in. He would have preferred to see what the level of funding was in monetary terms and it was not evident what proportion of the organisations funding would be effected,

The Monitoring Officer commented that he was only able to include information that was given to him. It was noted that Councillor Doherty's Register of Interest form stated that she was employed by Homestart but did not indicate what position she held.

Councillor Rick Jones commented that he fully supported the granting of a dispensation to participate fully in the debate. He reminded Members that the line in the budget would be about reducing the grant to Councillor Doherty's employer. A reasonable person would therefore conclude that there was no bias involved. Councillor Quentin Webb asked the Committee if they wished to defer the decision until the information Councillor Bridgman was seeking could be provided. At the vote this proposal fell.

Members then agreed to vote on the proposals separately At the request of Councillor Bridgman it was agreed that Members would vote on participation at the Executive and Council separately.

**RESOLVED that:**

- 1. a Dispensation should be granted;**
- 2. at Full Council Councillor Doherty should be permitted to speak and vote on the entire budget;**
- 3. at Executive meetings Councillor Doherty should be able to speak and vote except where this specific line was discussed when she should be able to speak but not vote;**
- 4. the Dispensation be granted for all Council and Executive meetings where the 2016/16 budget was discussed (in the sole opinion of the Monitoring Officer) the same issue or matters arising from the same issue.**

*(The meeting commenced at 6.17 pm and closed at 6.36 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....