

# **SPECIAL GOVERNANCE AND ETHICS COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2016**

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

**Also Present:** Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager)

**Councillors Absent:** Chris Bridges and Barry Dickens

### **PART I**

#### **37 Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Lee Dillon declared an interest in Agenda Item 3, and reported that, as he had an other interest he would not be taking part in the discussion or voting on this item.

#### **38 Request for a Dispensation**

*(Councillor Lee Dillon declared an other interest in Agenda item 3 by virtue of the fact that the request for a dispensation had come from him.. As his interest was personal and prejudicial he took no part in the debate or voting on the matter).*

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 3) which pertained to an application for a dispensation from Councillor Lee Dillon to speak and vote at Council meetings where the 2016/17 budget was being discussed.

The Monitoring Officer advised that Councillor Dillon had no higher management responsibility in the Warden Service as he was employed in a different part of the employer's organisational structure. He felt that Members needed to determine whether members of the public would consider the public interest would not be served as a result of his position by the impact on his employer. The granting or otherwise of a dispensation would not impact on the quorum for Council. .

All three Independent Persons (IPs) were consulted. Lindsey Appleton stated that as a direct employee of Sovereign Housing Councillor Dillon would have a potential conflict of interest. She acknowledged that his six years' experience and knowledge was relevant and that he was employed within a different organisational structure. She also acknowledged his declaration of non-pecuniary interests at Thatcham Town Council meeting. However she felt that his close proximity to the employer was clear and therefore the perception from the public would be such that public interest might not be deemed served. She was therefore minded not to grant a dispensation in this case.

James Rees commented that due to the potential perception of bias Councillor Dillon should be able to speak but not vote at Council meetings where the 2016/17 budget was discussed. He was also of the view that Councillor Dillon should be able to speak at Executive meetings where the budget was discussed.

Mike Wall was of the view that Councillor Dillon should be able to speak but not vote at Council where the 2016/17 budget was discussed. He supported granting a dispensation for Councillor Dillon to speak at Executive meetings where the 2016/17 budget was discussed.

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Councillor Anthony Pick stated that he felt that a dispensation should be granted to Councillor Dillon to speak and vote at Council meetings where the 2016/17 budget was being discussed and that he should be able to speak at Executive meetings where the 2016/17 budget was discussed.

Councillors Jeff Beck and Graham Bridgman stated that a dispensation should be granted for all discussions on the 2016/17 budget. Provided that Councillor Dillon declared an interest, by virtue of his employment with Sovereign Housing Association, he should be able to speak at any meeting of the Executive or Council on any aspect of the 2016/17 budget. Councillor Dillon should not be able to vote at any meeting of the Council where the vote pertained only to a specific 2016/17 budget item relating, in whole or in part, to a housing association or housing associations generally, including the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme. They stated that provided that he declared an interest by virtue of his employment with Sovereign Housing Association, he should be able to vote at any meeting of the Council where the vote pertained to the 2016/17 budget in its entirety; or a specific 2016/17 budget item that did not relate, in whole or in part, to a housing association or housing associations generally.

Councillors James Cole, Steve Ardagh-Walter and Quentin Webb agreed that a dispensation should be granted but that the dispensation should be to speak but not vote in view of public perception. They concurred that the dispensation should pertain to any discussions on the 2016/17 budget.

Councillor Rick Jones also agreed that a dispensation should be granted. He was of the opinion that Councillor Dillon should be able to speak but not vote at any meeting of Executive and Council, when the 2016/17 budget was featured on the agenda and that this condition should be applied to both full budget and individual line items.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- 1. A dispensation should be granted;**
- 2. Councillor Dillon should be permitted to speak but not vote on items pertaining to discussions on the 2016/7 budget ;**
- 3. The dispensation be granted for all Council and Executive meetings where the 2016/17 budget is discussed.**

*(This was a virtual meeting)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

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