

Legal Services, 7 Newington Barrow Way, London, N7 7EP

Report of: Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Meeting of: Standards Committee

Date: 16 November 2023

Subject: General Dispensations under the Code of Conduct

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. To propose that a general dispensation be granted to all councillors in relation to a limited range of interests that they may have in matters coming before the council's decision-making bodies. This will enable them to participate in meetings where these interests may be thought to arise but their position is shared with a significant proportion of other members of the council and/or in the community and transaction of council business might otherwise be impeded.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To grant the dispensation in respect of trade union membership detailed in paragraph 3.5 of this report, in respect of participation in discussion and voting at meetings, with effect until the annual meeting following the next full local elections.

3. Background

- 3.1. Section 31(4) of the Localism Act 2011 provides that a Member who has a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be considered at a meeting may not participate in any discussion, or vote on the matter. However, by virtue of section 33, an authority may, on a written request by a Member, grant a dispensation relieving the member from either or both of the restrictions in Section 31(4) if criteria set out in section 33(2) of the Act are satisfied. Dispensations may also be granted in relation to the personal interests set out in the Code of Conduct.

3.2. The relevant criteria are that:

- (a) Without the dispensation the number of persons prohibited from participating 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) Granting the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the authority's area; or
- (d) it is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation.

3.3. It is common practice in many other local authorities for a set of general dispensations for all members to be agreed for each administration, based on those that were included in the nationally applicable Code of Conduct that applied prior to the Localism Act 2011 and dispensations have already been granted to all councillors in the following circumstances:

- (i.) housing, where you are a tenant of your authority provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease;
- (ii.) school meals, extra-curricular activities, school organisation issues or school transport, and travelling expenses, where you are a parent or guardian of a child in full time education, or are a parent governor of a school, unless it relates particularly to the school which the child attends;
- (iii.) an allowance, payment or indemnity given to members;
- (iv.) setting council tax or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- (v.) Setting of Council Housing rent levels and approving the Housing Revenue Account (HRA): where the Councillor (or spouse or partner) holds a tenancy or lease with the Council [by way of clarification as these may be regarded as financial rather than Housing matters];
- (vi.) Housing benefit in relation to over arching budget reports: where the Councillor (or spouse or partner) receives housing benefit;
- (vii.) Adult Social Care in relation to overarching budget reports: where the Councillor (or spouse or partner) receives adult social care support.

- (viii.) For a Member in receipt of Council Tax Benefit in relation to Local Council Tax Support.
 - (ix.) Government grants and related support and including cost of living grants.
 - (x.) Non Domestic Rates and Discretionary Rate Relief except where it affects the member's individual property.
- 3.4. The vast majority of elected members are members of at least one trade union and without a dispensation relating to trade union membership, it would mean that 'the number of persons prohibited from participating in any particular business would be so great a proportion of the body transacting the business as to impede the transaction of the business' and the proposed dispensation therefore meets the criteria for an exemption under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 3.5. It is therefore proposed that an additional dispensation be granted to all members in respect of trade union membership with immediate effect, until the Annual Meeting following the next local elections in 2026.

4. Implications

4.1. Financial Implications

- 4.1.1. No specific financial implications arise from this report.

4.2. Legal Implications

- 4.2.1. These are contained in the body of the report.

4.3. Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

- 4.3.1. No specific environmental implications arise from this report.

4.4. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 4.4.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

4.4.2. No equalities implications arise from this report.

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1. That a general dispensation be granted to all councillors in relation to trade union membership in matters coming before the council's decision-making bodies, for the reasons stated above.

Appendices: None

Background papers: None

Final report clearance:

Authorised by:

Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

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Legal Implications
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