

## **Access to Information Arrangements**

### **Exclusion of access by the public to Council meetings**

Information Compliance Ref: LGA-1438-13

Meeting / Decision: Cabinet

Date: 13 November 2013

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Report Title: Learning Partnership West

The Report contains exempt information, according to the categories set out in the Local Government Act 1972 (amended Schedule 12A). The relevant exemption is set out below.

Stating the exemption:

- 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).*

The public interest test has been applied, and it is concluded that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure at this time. It is therefore recommended that the Report be withheld from publication on the Council website. The paragraphs below set out the relevant public interest issues in this case.

#### **PUBLIC INTEREST TEST**

If the Committee wishes to consider a matter with press and public excluded, it must be satisfied on two matters.

Firstly, it must be satisfied that the information likely to be disclosed falls within one of the accepted categories of exempt information under the Local Government Act 1972. Paragraph 3 of the revised Schedule 12A of the 1972 Act exempts information which relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The officer responsible for this item believes that this information falls within the

exemption under paragraph 3 and this has been confirmed by the Council's Information Compliance Manager.

Secondly, it is necessary to weigh up the arguments for and against disclosure on public interest grounds. The main factor in favour of disclosure is that all possible Council information should be public and that increased openness about Council business allows the public and others affected by any decision the opportunity to participate in debates on important issues in their local area. Another factor in favour of disclosure is that the public and those affected by decisions should be entitled to see the basis on which decisions are reached.

Weighed against this is the fact that the exempt report contains the opinions of Council officers. It would not be in the public interest if advisors and officers could not express in confidence opinions which are held in good faith and on the basis of the best information available.

The exempt report also contains details on the financial and business affairs of the Council and other third party organisations and is commercially sensitive. Release of this information would likely prejudice the commercial interests of the parties and the Council does not have authority to release the information regarding the third parties in to the public domain.

It is also important that Cabinet should be able to retain some degree of private thinking space while decisions are being made, in order to discuss openly and frankly the issues under discussion in order to make a decision which is in the best interests of the Council.