

Access to Information Arrangements

Exclusion of access by the public to Council meetings

Information Compliance Ref: LGA-1217-14

Meeting / Decision: joint single member decision

Date: 7 July 2014

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Report Title: Assignment of premises

Exempt Appendices

Appendix One – Business Case

Appendix Two – Site Location and Layout Plans

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 sub-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.

The officer responsible for this item believes that this information falls within the following exemptions and this has been confirmed by the Council's Information Compliance Manager.

The following exemptions are engaged in respect to this report:

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

Secondly, it is necessary to weigh up the arguments for and against disclosure on public interest grounds. It is considered that there is specific public interest in information regarding the assignment of the leasehold interest in the property. Other factors in favour of disclosure include:

- furthering public understanding of the issues involved;
- furthering public participation in the public debate of issues, in that disclosure would allow a more informed debate;
- promoting accountability and transparency by the Council for the decisions it takes;

Weighed against this is the fact that the exempt appendices contain financial information about the organisations and the Council which is commercially sensitive and could prejudice the commercial interests of both parties.

The exempt appendices also include the observations and opinions of officers on the proposal and financial merit of the proposal.

The Council's funds are in essence public funds and there is an obligation to obtain best value for money. Release of this information would prejudice the Council's ability to ensure best value in this matter. It is in the public interest that the Council is able to deliver cost-effective solutions in relation to significant local issues. This depends partly on the Council being able to protect its commercial position while the detailed terms of relevant schemes are agreed.

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.

It is important for public authorities to have some measure of 'private thinking space', and that they are able to share important information with Elected Members tasked with representing the local community.

It is considered that the public interest is best served in this matter by not releasing this information at this time and that a significant amount of information regarding the matter has been made available on these issues – by way of the main report. Relevant information regarding any property transactions will be put in the public domain at the appropriate time.