

Access to Information Arrangements

Exclusion of access by the public to Council meetings

Information Compliance Ref: LGA- 774994
Meeting / Decision: Full Council
Date: Thursday 24th March 2022
Author: Simon Martin
Report Title: Aequus Group – Governance, Structure & Business Plan Appendix 1 – Current Company Structure Appendix 2 – Proposed New Company Structure Appendix 3 – Amended Reserved Matters Schedule Appendix 4 – Aequus Accounts for 2021/22 Exempt Appendix 5 - Aequus Business Plan 2021/22 to 2023/24 Appendix 6 – Aequus Overview 2021

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 exempt appendix 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 Council 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:

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

It is necessary to weigh up the arguments for and against disclosure on public interest grounds. It is considered that there is a public interest in information about property disposal being disclosed into the public domain. 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 appendix contains strategic and financial information which could prejudice the commercial interests of the parties if disclosed at this time. The exempt appendices also includes the observations and opinions regarding the proposal. It would not be in the public interest if advisors and officers could not express in confidence opinions which are 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 in the public interest that the Council is able to deliver cost-effective solutions. This depends partly on the Council being able to protect its commercial position while the detailed terms of relevant schemes are agreed.

The Council considers that the public interest has been served by the fact that a significant amount of information regarding the report has been made available – by way of the main report. Therefore it is recommended that exemptions set out above apply. The Council considers that the public interest is in favour of not holding this matter in open session at this time and that any reporting on the meeting is prevented in accordance with Section 100A(5A).