

City of London Corporation

Dispensation Panel

14 November 2024

Independent Persons:	Officers:
Amanda Orchard (Chair)	Kate Doidge (Governance Officer)
Robert Coyle	Edward Wood (Assistant City Solicitor)
Philip Thicknesse	

DECISION NOTICE

The request

1. On 14 October 2024, Alderman Robert Howard (“the Applicant”) requested a dispensation to speak on all matters concerning the City Junior School (“CJS”) at the Board of Governors of the City of London School for Girls (“CLSG”) other than where his pecuniary interest was directly engaged e.g. the setting of school fees.
2. The requested length of the dispensation was for the duration of his term as Chair/governor of CLSG.
3. The Applicant had a disclosable pecuniary interest (“DPI”) that had prompted the request and that would potentially otherwise prohibit his participation. As the parent of a child at the CJS, which was an independent fee-paying school, he had an undischarged contract for services with the City Corporation.

The decision

4. The Dispensation Panel (“the Panel”) met on 11 November 2024 to consider the request and decided that it should be granted with minor modifications.
5. The Applicant was granted a dispensation to speak on all matters concerning the CJS at the Board of Governors of the CLSG, in which his DPI was engaged, other than:
 - (i) any item of business that would have a direct financial impact on the Applicant, such as the setting of school fees; and
 - (ii) any item of business that related solely or particularly to his own child.
6. The dispensation was granted for a period of four years.

Reasons

7. The Panel considered the Policy and guidance on the granting of dispensations under the Localism Act 2011 and the Members’ Code of Conduct dated 19 January 2024 (“the Policy”).
8. The Panel considered that the application was consistent with the Policy, which provided that Members should generally be granted a dispensation to speak (but not vote) on matters where they have an engaged DPI, other than when that DPI would be directly and materially impacted (paragraph 5 of the Policy).
9. Whilst this was still subject to the proper exercise of the statutory discretion in each case, the Panel was satisfied that the granting of a dispensation in the circumstances was “otherwise appropriate” (paragraphs 15(e) and 18 of the Policy).
10. In coming to this conclusion, the Panel accepted that the application was well considered and proportionate, and that suitable limitations had been incorporated into the request (paragraphs (f) and (j) of Appendix 3 to the Policy).

11. The Panel had further clarified the circumstances in which the Applicant's DPI would be directly and materially impacted, in order to provide sufficient safeguards, and did not consider that there would be any risk of damage to public confidence arising from the proposed grant (paragraph (a) of Appendix 3 to the Policy).
12. In particular, the Panel noted that the Applicant would not exercise his ex officio right to sit on the Board of Governors of the CJS itself – the joint sub-committee that dealt with the main business of the CJS – and that the dispensation would not apply to meetings of this body.
13. The Panel also noted that the dispensation was designed to allow the Applicant to continue to operate effectively in his current role for CLSG, which he had taken up before the DPI had arisen.
14. The Panel therefore considered that this request could be differentiated from previous more wide-ranging applications for dispensations from Members with children at the City Corporation's independent schools, who were seeking to be more active parent governors, which had historically been refused by the former Standards Committee (paragraph (k) of Appendix 3 to the Policy).
15. The Panel noted that the Applicant had become Chair of the Board of Governors of the CLSG in June 2023 and that the maximum term of a Chair was six years. However, the Panel could only grant dispensations for a maximum duration of four years.
16. It was therefore noted that the Applicant would need to reapply for a further dispensation from November 2028 if his circumstances remained unchanged.