

Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Conflicts of Interest Protocol: Loans or grants to businesses

1. Purpose

The Codes of Conduct adopted by the LEP and the Combined Authority address how members are required to register and declare pecuniary and other interests at formal meetings where members take decisions.

This **Conflicts of Interest Protocol: loans or grants to businesses** sets out the process which the LEP and the Combined Authority follow to demonstrate that applications from businesses for loans or grants are dealt with in an impartial, fair and transparent way, including where they are considered by officers. It provides an additional safeguard (for the LEP, the Combined Authority and for applicants) to minimise the risk of reputational damage from any perception of undue influence.

The process requires additional scrutiny of any application where a potential conflict of interest arises.

2. Scope

This protocol should be followed where an application for a loan or grant is made by any business (including a company, social enterprise or a sole trader) to the LEP or to the Combined Authority¹.

The protocol applies to:

- any member of the LEP Board,
- any member of the Combined Authority, and
- any voting member of a committee or panel of the Combined Authority, (including an advisory panel which reports to the LEP).

It applies to both local authority and private sector representatives.

3. General

This protocol supplements the Conflicts of Interest Policy. It does not replace or alter any requirement of the Codes of Conduct for the LEP and the Combined Authority,

¹ Including any grant or application under the following funding streams or programmes: Access Innovation, Apprenticeship Grants for Employers, Business Growth Programme, Cycling and Walking Fund, Digital Inward Investment Fund, Growing Places Fund, Resource Efficiency Fund, Strategic Business Growth and Strategic Inward Investment Fund.

nor any other procedure of the LEP or the Combined Authority which addresses conflicts of interest.

Where any conflict of interest arises outside of those specifically required to be registered or declared under any Code of Conduct, a procedure referred to in the Conflict of Interest Policy or this protocol, a member should declare their interests **erring on the side of caution**, in line with the Nolan Principles.

4. Setting policies and strategies relating to loans and grants

Members must follow the relevant Codes of Conduct which set out requirements for registering and declaring interests at meetings. These Codes restrict members' involvement in decision making at formal meetings of the LEP Board, the Combined Authority and committees and panels where a conflict of interest arises.

However, to secure the input of suitable expertise and a range of representative views into the decision-making process, appropriate involvement in matters in which Members may have an interest² is facilitated by exceptions and dispensations granted under the Codes.

Members are not generally precluded from participating in or voting on developing or setting any overarching policy or strategy, including setting criteria against which any application for a loan or grant will be assessed. However, **this is subject to exceptions** such as where a direct financial interest arises.

At any meeting where an item relates to a **change of criteria** for any loan or grant programme in respect of which a member (or a business in which they have registered an interest) has applied for a loan or grant during the previous 24 months (successfully or otherwise), the member should declare the application. Any such declaration should be noted in the minutes of the meeting, but (unless otherwise precluded by the Code) the member may nevertheless participate and vote in the decision.

A member may, however, choose not to participate or vote in the item if they are aware that any proposed change in criteria may affect an application which they (or the business in which they have registered an interest) intend to make for the loan or grant.

Members should check with the Monitoring Officer if they are unsure whether they may participate or vote in relation to any particular item.

² For example, where they are appointed because of their expertise in a particular sector.

5. Applying for a grant or loan

Each application form for a loan or grant to businesses will ask the applicant to declare whether the applicant, any Director(s) or employee(s) of the business, or their spouse or civil partner³, is:

- a) a member of the LEP Board,
- b) a member of the Combined Authority,
- c) a voting member of any committee or panel appointed of the Combined Authority (including any advisory panel which reports to the LEP), or
- d) an employee of the Combined Authority.

All applicants must declare any potential conflicts of interest on their application form. Failure to do so will affect their application – see section 7 below.

To facilitate this, members who (to comply with a Code of Conduct) have registered an interest in any business⁴, must:

- **notify that business of their involvement** with the LEP or the Combined Authority,
- **ask the business to declare their involvement** as a conflict of interest when applying for any relevant loan or grant, and
- **make arrangements for the business to notify them** on any occasion when the business applies for a relevant loan or grant.

Members must also:

- a) **notify the Monitoring Officer**⁵ on each occasion where:
 - they apply for a loan or grant, or
 - a business which is registered as an interest on their register of interest applies for a loan or grant⁶,
 - any other interest arises which may be perceived as giving rise to a conflict of interest (for example, where an application is made by a close friend, or family member, or they are related to an officer of the Combined Authority).
- b) so far as reasonably practicable **avoid any personal involvement**⁷ with any application to the LEP or the Combined Authority for any loan or grant, or

³ Any reference in this protocol to a spouse or partner should be taken as including any person with whom the member lives as a spouse or civil partner

⁴ Including any business interest of their spouse or civil partner which they are required to register.

⁵ The Executive Support Officer (Private Sector Representatives) may receive notifications from private sector representatives, and the Governance Services Manager from local authority representatives on behalf of the Monitoring Officer.

⁶ This includes any interest of their spouse or civil partner which they are required to register.

⁷ This includes advising on, drafting or signing the application

c) where it is not reasonably practicable to avoid personal involvement with an application:⁸

- **declare on any application form their involvement** if they are not a signatory,
- **not discuss the application verbally** with any officer of the Combined Authority, and
- **communicate only in writing** about the application after it has been submitted.

6. Advising on loan and grant applications

To avoid improper use of “inside information” about the assessment process for applications, where a member’s role includes or has included **advising on individual grant and loan applications from businesses**, no application from them, their spouse or civil partner, or from a business which they have (or should have) registered as an interest under the relevant Code of Conduct shall be considered until **6 months** has elapsed since they carried out that role.

7. Considering loan and grant applications

Every application is considered on its own merits, and no applications are granted unless the eligibility criteria for the loan or grant are met.

No member may participate or vote on any decision-making relating to any application in respect of which they have a conflict of interest.

Members must not seek in any way to improperly influence the outcome of any application which has (or may be) made in which they have an interest.

Where an interest has been declared by an applicant on the application form, and/or a member (or where an interest is otherwise brought to the attention of a relevant Director⁹), the application will not be progressed unless:

a) the Monitoring Officer has confirmed that:

- the member has **registered the business as an interest** on their register in accordance with the requirements of the relevant Code of Conduct, and
- a full and complete **declaration of interest** by the member has been received in relation to the application in accordance paragraph 5 of this protocol.

and

⁸ For example, where they are a sole trader and apply on their own behalf

⁹ Each relevant Director will carry out a **sample audit** of applications at quarterly intervals, to review whether declarations are being made in line with this protocol.

b) the relevant Director has confirmed that:

- a **declaration of interest was made by the applicant** on the application form in accordance with paragraph 5,
- **the member did not discuss the application verbally** with any officer of the Combined Authority after its submission, nor otherwise **seek to improperly influence** the application.

Subject to a) and b) above, where an interest arises, the application should be referred for determination by:

- the Combined Authority's Managing Director, or
- a meeting of the Combined Authority or a relevant committee¹⁰.

An application may only be granted further to a recommendation from a **relevant Director** who has assessed the application, and confirmed that it has been considered on its own merits and meets relevant eligibility criteria.

The decision-maker should take into account any other relevant information which relates to the conflict of interest.

The **record of any decision** about an application where a conflict of interest has arisen must record the conflict of interest declared by the member, and that this protocol has been followed¹¹.

8. Reporting

The Monitoring Officer will **annually report** to the LEP Board and Combined Authority's Governance and Audit Committee on the number and outcome of applications considered in accordance with this protocol during the financial year and on any breaches of the protocol.

¹⁰ For example, where the Managing Director considers that they should not exercise their delegated authority in respect of the application.

¹¹ This extends to any published record of the loan or grant.