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When registering a private company, there are a number of legalities that are important to get right. This includes naming the roles of the director and shareholder, for example. This information is public record and could therefore create problems if the shareholder wishes to remain anonymous. According to UK company law, all shareholders information must be recorded at Companies House and on the company's statutory registers. So, if, as the beneficiary owner, you wanted to protect your identity as the legal owner of a company, then a nominee shareholder is the answer. What is a Nominee Shareholder? A nominee shareholder acts as a legal, unrelated, third party, who is officially registered as the holder of shares on behalf of the actual shareholder. This shields the beneficiary owner from being publicly associated with that particular company. Will a Nominee Shareholder Benefit From a Declaration of Trust, Known as a Custodial Agreement, Showing They Have No Legal Claim Over the Shares, Thus Protecting the Beneficiary Owners Assets? They will also have no access to bank accounts or other assets, and they will not be able to make decisions or sign any documentation of shares on behalf of the company. How Do I Select the Nominee Shareholder Service For My Company? Our nominee shareholder service offer is structured to keep your personal information off the public record while ensuring full legality. We have over 40 years of experience and an excellent track record with our customers, putting their business needs at the heart of every decision we advise on. Our nominee shareholder package starts at 279.99 + VAT. You can find out more information on our Nominee Shareholder page. Skip to main content When registering a private company, there are a number of legalities that are important to get right. This includes naming the roles of the director and shareholder, for example. This information is public record and could therefore create problems if the shareholder wishes to remain anonymous. According to UK company law, all shareholders information must be recorded at Companies House and on the company's statutory registers. So, if, as the beneficiary owner, you wanted to protect your identity as the legal owner of a company, then a nominee shareholder is the answer. What is a Nominee Shareholder? A nominee shareholder acts as a legal, unrelated, third party, who is officially registered as the holder of shares on behalf of the actual shareholder. This shields the beneficiary owner from being publicly associated with that particular company. Will a Nominee Shareholder Benefit From a Declaration of Trust, Known as a Custodial Agreement, Showing They Have No Legal Claim Over the Shares, Thus Protecting the Beneficiary Owners Assets? 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They are the registered owner of shares in that their name appears on the public register of members. But they do not stand to benefit from it. Only the real shareholder can dispose of the shares, draw dividends on them, exercise voting rights and gain any other benefits associated with their ownership. > Share certificate management> Dividend management> Share splits and consolidations> Share conversions and redemptions> Share options Inform Direct makes it all quick and simple. Start now Find out more > Log on Nominee shareholders should not be confused with proxy shareholders. A proxy shareholder stands in for a shareholder in their absence and has all the voting powers of the actual shareholder. As we shall see, that is not the case with nominee shareholders. There is no way of knowing from UK records themselves that a member on the public register is a nominee shareholder. The main purposes of a nominee shareholder are to hide the real owners name from public view, oversee the administrative burden in cases where there are numerous shareholders. The following are examples of genuine practical uses of nominee shareholders. A large company may choose to use a nominee shareholder company to consolidate multiple diverse shareholders into one registered member. This nominee shareholder company can engage in corporate actions and otherwise act on behalf of the actual shareholders. This works in cases where the shareholders are willing to hand over some or all of their decision-making ability to the nominee. An overseas investor may choose to use a nominee for simplicity and to reduce costs. A financial institution or stockbroker buys and holds shares for a client. They act as nominee shareholder because it would be costly and time-consuming to register the client as the shareholder for every share transaction that takes place. Strong bonds of trust, usually codified and documented, ensure that the beneficial owner has full access to and control over their shares. Confidentiality rather than obfuscation. For example, a politician or other public figure may wish to conceal their interest in a company or their wealth in general, to avoid possible reputational damage. In addition to protecting identity, using a nominee will keep personal details such as month and year of birth and address off the public register. There is no way of knowing from the records themselves that a member on the public register is a nominee shareholder. The name will appear on the register of members without annotation or comment, just as that of the beneficial owner would. It therefore gives the beneficial owner complete anonymity as far as the public record is concerned. A nominee shareholder can be an individual or a company. Commercial providers of nominee services will quite often use the same nominee names for thousands of different beneficial owners. These may become known as obvious nominee names. It is therefore worth considering any reputational implications resulting from being associated with known nominee accounts. The nominee holds the shares on behalf of the shareholder in a bare trust. The relationship is defined by a declaration of trust signed by both parties. Share certificates are issued in the nominees name, since only they are registered as a member. But the location of trust limits what the nominee can do with the shares to practically nothing. It obliges the nominee to exercise voting rights attached to the shares in accordance with the beneficial owners instructions. In addition to these safety measures, the beneficial owner is usually able to transfer the shares into their own name whenever they wish. Some providers or nominee shareholder services give the beneficial owner an undated share transfer form for this purpose. The nominee shareholder arrangement breaks down when a beneficial owner owns more than 25% of a company's shares and therefore becomes a PSC (person with significant control). They must then be declared as a PSC or, if a body corporate, as a relevant legal entity (RLE) to Companies House and it is a criminal offence to fail to do so. Why arent nominee shareholders banned? Considering the governments ongoing efforts to improve corporate transparency, it might be surprising that substituting names under nominee arrangements is still permitted. It seems to run against the current push to clarify multiple layers of ownership and control to reveal the true beneficial owners of a company. Nominee shareholders can be used as fronts for criminal activity in much the same way nominee directors can, especially corporate directors. This type of abuse is being tackled in the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act by forcing directors and PSCs to have their identities verified. But what of nominee shareholders? There are still legitimate uses of nominee shareholders (see above), and a blanket ban would be highly disruptive. Efforts to shed light on chains of corporate ownership are therefore being focused on where they are needed most: tackling the abuse of the UKs open economy by overseas actors. That means unexplained wealth in the UK and money laundering operations carried out by criminals, terrorists and Russian oligarchs. A share held by a person as nominee for another is to be treated as held by the other (and not by the nominee). Companies Act 2006, Schedule 1A, Part 1, paragraph 19 and Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022, Schedule 2, Part 5, paragraph 19 The Economic Crime (Transparency and Enforcement) Act 2022 has given law enforcement agencies powers when it comes to overseas nominees. Like the rules on PSCs, it treats an overseas entity as a beneficial owner of a UK company or property if it holds more than 25% of the shares or voting rights. But like the PSC rules it also states that they will be treated as a beneficial owner if they have the right to exercise, or actually exercise, significant influence or control over the UK company. If the nominee shareholder is simply acting on instructions from a third party, the third party is treated as if exercising significant influence or control. This brings beneficial ownership in line with PSC rules. It effectively looks through any nominee arrangement that could be used to obfuscate ownership and circumvent transparency laws. It also aims to thwart attempts to sidestep the rules on beneficial ownership by playing with the figures. One example has been having five people or entities each own 20% of a company. This way none owns 25% and none are therefore registrable as beneficial owners. A nominee shareholder arrangement only assures anonymity to the beneficial owner on the public record held at Companies House. It is possible under certain conditions for a company to require a beneficial owners identity to be revealed. Section 793 of the 2006 Companies Act allows a public company to issue a notice requiring anybody it thinks may have an interest in the company to state whether they do or not. Section 793 notices can only be issued by public companies, for example to protect themselves from suspected takers or other outside attempts to influence their boards. If you are considering using a nominee shareholder in order not to have a shareholders name appear on the public record, you can approach one of the corporate service providers who offer this service on a commercial basis. They usually charge a setup fee and an ongoing annual fee. If you do not pay to continue the service they will resign as a shareholder and pass the shares to the beneficial owner. You may register a nominee yourself, but a professional nominee service provider can guide you through legal steps such as the declaration of trust. They will also be better equipped to manage any issues that may arise either around the time of nominee appointment or further down the line. A nominee can be appointed at the time of incorporation or at a later time. Bear in mind that when appointing one at a later time, the beneficial owners name, if previously registered, will remain on historic confirmation statements. Manage shareholder records and company registers easily in Inform Direct, a vastly improved interface with Companies House that saves time and keeps everything organised. Jump to blog category Select a category API Inform Direct news Company records Company officers Shares and shareholders Confirmation statements Company formation News and opinion Business management Business finance Annual Returns A nominee can be someone who is nominated and entrusted, whether it be a person, partnership or company, to hold assets on behalf of another entity. A nominee company is required to hold shares in their name on behalf of investors within the business. The reason why this type of structure is put in place is to not only save time but to make things more simple. It helps to establish and maintain ongoing relationships and the whole process is seen as easier for both the issuer and investors. The safekeeping of investors securities or property is seen as a declaration of trust. The securities are held by the nominee who is legally the owner in name, however, the beneficial holds onto the real ownership of shares in the company. The nominee shareholder or company has to sign a custodial agreement, which states they have no legal claim over the shares, which in turn protects the beneficiaries' assets. A nominee shareholder structure is put in place to help and protect both parties. The individual or company, otherwise known as a nominee, holds property or shares of the beneficial owners. The company or nominee shareholder is named on public record as holding the shares but is accountable to the owner of the shares or property, the beneficial owner, who remains anonymous. For more information on nominee shareholders, our blog post explains what they are, their rights and the benefits of having one. Why use a nominee company? The appointment of a nominee company or shareholder will help keep the beneficiaries' identity safe and anonymous. There are many reasons why a beneficial owner will use a nominee company, whether it be for personal or business reasons. Disclosing financial information and remaining anonymous is perfectly legal and legitimate. Politicians, lawyers or journalists are examples of beneficial owners who, for obvious reasons, want to keep their finances confidential. Using a nominee company can also be an attractive proposition for foreign investors. Difficulty in managing shares is one problem that an investor may face, so they will therefore appoint a nominee company or shareholder to help save time and money. Stockbrokers will often use a nominee company, holding shares that belong to their clients, making the buying and selling of those shares much easier. Investors and businesses can both benefit from a nominee share structure. Investors often face difficulties in contacting start-up businesses to invest in, likewise with businesses who communicate with hundreds of investors, taking up an enormous amount of time and effort. Having a structure in place helps to deal with this problem. In a nominee share structure, the investor's shares are managed by a nominee company. Need help? Our nominee services are structured to help keep your personal information off the record. With over 40 years of experience and an excellent track record with our customers, you can rely on us. You can find out more information on our Nominee Shareholder page. Table of Contents Put simply, a nominee shareholder is an entity or individual that holds shares on behalf of someone else. The most frequent form of a nominee is a trustee holding shares on trust for beneficiaries. Furthermore, nominee structures have many benefits, including tax management, regulatory compliance, and simplified corporate governance and company administration. This article explains formal nominee structures where a company engages a nominee company to hold shares of minority shareholders. When a company has a lot of shareholders that hold small parcels of shares, the company may consider establishing a nominee structure. The nominee entity is often either an entity engaged by the company (there are a number of businesses that provide nominee services to hold shares and manage nominee structures) or a subsidiary incorporated by the company. To implement the nominee structure, you will need the following documents: You will need to amend the shareholders agreement in respect of the company to incorporate changes to the voting rights of the beneficial holders (being the former minor shareholders), and take into account the aggregation of the relevant shareholders parcels of shares, into the single nominee entity. This is a document that the company and the nominee entity enter into. It regulates the manner in which the nominee will acquire, hold and deal with each shareholders shares. This is a document each relevant shareholder enters into in respect of the nominee entity. It creates a bare trust, in which the nominee is the trustee and the shareholder is the beneficiary, in relation to the relevant shares. Under the bare trust, the nominee entity has no discretion to act in relation to the shares. Rather, it must only act according to the beneficiaries instructions (including transferring any dividends or proceeds related to the shares directly to the beneficiary). This is a document each relevant shareholder enters into in favour of the company. Under this power of attorney, the shareholder generally appoints the directors of the company (or some other authorised individual) to execute certain documents on the shareholders behalf regarding the establishment and ongoing administration of the nominee structure. Pursuant to the Corporations Act 2001 (Ch) (the Act), one of the key characteristics of a proprietary limited company is that it cannot have more than 50 non-employee shareholders (with some specific exceptions). Therefore, if a company has more than 50 non-employee shareholders, it must convert into a public company. This can be listed or unlisted. Consequently, unlisted public companies are subject to additional regulatory requirements, including changes to minimum officer/holders, and increased financial reporting requirements. Additionally, all companies which have more than 50 shareholders (employees or not), are now subject to the Acts takeover provisions. When a company has many shareholders, it can become increasingly difficult to effectively carry out its corporate governance. This includes administering the companys affairs in accordance with the companys constituent documents (such as a constitution and shareholders agreement). Thus, giving notice to, or seeking approval or consent from all shareholders, can become a time-consuming and complicated. Further, the Act requires the unanimous approval of all circular resolutions. Therefore, if any minority shareholders are unresponsive, the company will need to carry out all business by way of general meetings, adding to the administrative burden and increasing time delays and costs. The increasing popularity of employee incentive schemes (employee share schemes, or ESOPs) is also increasing the utility of nominee structures. As companies grow and employ more staff, the number of ESOP participants who could become shareholders increases. Therefore, a nominee structure ensures that companies can continue offering equity to employees, beyond the shareholder limits imposed by the Act. Continue reading this article below the form Nominee structures are a useful tool to allow proprietary companies the flexibility to have a greater number of shareholders (in excess of the statutory limits provided in the Act), while avoiding the onerous additional obligations of becoming an unlisted (or listed) public company. Additionally, nominee structures also have the benefit of reducing the administrative burden of having large numbers of shareholders. A company should consider the cost, time and effort involved in setting up, and maintaining a nominee structure. However, generally for a company in this position, the benefits do outweigh the burdens. If you need help with nominee structures, our experienced business lawyers can assist as part of our LegalVision membership. For a low monthly fee, you will have unlimited access to lawyers to answer your questions and draft and review your documents. Call us today on 0808 196 8594 or visit our membership page. What is a nominee structure? In a nominee structure, the shareholdings of minor shareholders are transferred to a single shareholder entity that holds these shares on trust. What documents do you need to implement a nominee structure? You will need a shareholders agreement, nominee deed, bare trust deed and power of attorney. Was this article helpful? Thanks! We appreciate your feedback your submission has been successfully received. Tuesday 3 June 11:00 - 11:45am BST Online Learn how to promote your business on social media without breaking the law. Register for our free webinar today. Register Now Tuesday 10 June 11:00 - 11:45am BST Online Explore startup funding options and avoid common pitfalls. Register for our free webinar. Register Now Tuesday 17 June 11:00 - 11:45am BST Online Is your employee underperforming? Learn the appropriate steps to take. Register for our free webinar. Register Now Tuesday 24 June 11:00 - 11:45am BST Online Learn how to protect your business most valuable asset: intellectual property. Register for our free webinar. Register Now See more webinars > Share this article Twitter Facebook LinkedIn Tags Nominee shareholders are people or entities that hold shares on behalf of someone else usually for a person or particular company that wishes to remain anonymous for business or legal reasons. When a nominee shareholder is appointed, their name is registered as shareholder. Unlike customary shareholders who buy and own company shares by themselves, and are publicly known, nominee shareholders are reliable people nominated by someone to hold shares on their behalf; they become the public shareholder. A nominee shareholder (also known as the registered owner) can step in and buy the share, giving the other person (the beneficial owner) owner all of the benefits, without the drawbacks. Whether youre considering enlisting the services of a nominee shareholder, or wish to become one yourself, weve outlined all the information you need. Discover the benefits and drawbacks of nominee shareholders status here. The Difference Between A Nominee Shareholder & A Shareholder Nominee shareholders and conventional shareholders differ on one key point: conventional shareholders own the stock directly, while with a nominee arrangement shareholders own them on paper, but in reality, they belong to someone else. People hold shares for many reasons: shareholder voting rights, dividend payments, and selling rights. Nominee shareholders hold the share in trust for a conventional shareholder, but they forfeit any rights to the share benefits. As you might expect, the true owner retains the share benefits and access. Whether a shareholder is a direct owner or has recruited the help of a nominee shareholder, that person or entity retains full rights and access to the shares benefits they get to vote on the board depending on the share type, enjoy quarterly dividend payments, and they can also sell the share. Benefits of Using Nominee Shareholders People choose nominee shareholders for a multitude of reasons, including anonymity. To remain anonymous, quite often nominee shareholders are used to avoid the attention of business leaders or the public; politicians are known to employ nominee shareholders to stay out of the public eye. It makes administration easier: some companies wish to streamline their operations by communicating with a single person rather than many individuals; nominee shareholders mean fewer people on the books. Builds flexibility into a business: Lets say a business has an employee share scheme or wishes to consolidate share ownership; nominee shareholders offer the business better options for structural flexibility. Protecting the business from takeovers: Nominee shareholders offer a business better protections against hostile takeovers or third party intervention since the shareholder owners are harder to track down. Keeping the business private: Businesses with sensitive information or confidential business dealings can make use of nominee shareholders to guard operations and maintain advantages. How Are Nominee Shareholders Appointed? When someone wishes to become an anonymous shareholder, they need to identify a suitable nominee shareholder to represent them to act on behalf of actual shareholders. After finding an appropriate third party, they must reach a formal agreement or declaration of trust on the terms and conditions of the arrangement. Most agreements contain the following items: Beneficial owners identity: Anonymity is often the main reason for this type of agreement, but the owners identity will be known to the nominee; however, the nominee must maintain total confidentiality. The number of shares to be held: Every nominee agreement should outline how many shares are to be held by the nominee shareholder. The duration of the arrangement: Nominee shareholder agreements always specify the duration of the arrangement, which can be for a fixed term, or until the shares are sold by the beneficial owner. The rights of the beneficial owner: Nominee shareholder agreements should outline the rights of the beneficial owner; things such as rights to dividend payments, selling rights, and other ownership rights. The duties of the nominee registered shareholder: These agreements should also include the duties of the nominee shareholder, like the requirement to act according to the beneficial owners instructions. On signing such an agreement, the nominee shareholder becomes the legal guardian of the shares on behalf of its owner. The nominee shareholders name appears on the public register and any legal documentation, that said, they dont have any right to the benefits of the share and legally, the beneficial owner controls it, can access it at any time, and can sell it when they choose. What Regulations Surround Nominee Shareholders? Nominee shareholder regulations are different depending on the country, for this reason, its imperative for companies to be fully aware of region specific regulations that can influence the nominees agreement with the shareholder. Disclosure Requirements Nominee shareholders tend to be used in order to shield beneficial owners from the public register (at Companies House) or third-party companies, but regulation states that companies still need to hold a register of beneficial shareholders, even if they are held by a nominee shareholder. Additionally, companies can be asked to disclose the names of beneficial shareholders. Anti-money laundering regulations In some instances, authorities might ask a company to disclose its beneficial shareholders in relation to money-laundering enquiries. In this case, nominee shareholders would need to provide sufficient information of the beneficial shareholder, including their identity and funds. Fiduciary Duties Fiduciary duties are a duty of care to the beneficial shareholder and typically form part of the nominees agreement. These duties require the nominee shareholder to always act in the best interests of the beneficial shareholder and offer total transparency in regard to conflicts. Tax Regulations Shareholders might have a nominee on the register, but that doesnt mean they avoid taxation. Whether its reporting dividend profits, or capital gains to the tax authorities, beneficial shareholders are obligated to compile reports and satisfy the tax authorities. Securities Regulations In special circumstances, such as national defence or insider trading, nominee shareholders are required by law to disclose the beneficial owners identity and any pertinent information. These security measures are in place to protect markets and the public from security threats. Enlisting the services of nominee shareholders can be incredibly beneficial, but its also crucial to ensure that official requirements to act according to the beneficial owners instructions. On signing such an agreement, the nominee shareholder becomes the legal guardian of the shares on behalf of its owner. The nominee shareholders name appears on the public register and any legal documentation, that said, they dont have any right to the benefits of the share and legally, the beneficial owner controls it, can access it at any time, and can sell it when they choose. What Regulations Surround Nominee Shareholders? 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