

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

15th DECEMBER 2009

Motion from Council – Members’ Expenses Claim Forms

OPEN	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Monitoring Officer
CONTACT OFFICER:	Mrs C S Newlands Ext. 2715
APPENDIX 1	Examples of Members’ Expenses Claim forms

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. To inform Members of a motion that was agreed by Council on 22nd October 2009 regarding Member Expenses Claim forms.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1. The Committee is asked to DECIDE:

The proposed scheme for the publishing of Members’ expenses is appropriate.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. At the Council meeting on 22nd October 2009 a Motion was submitted by the Leader of the Council – Councillor John-Paul Campion as follows:

“Wyre Forest District Council has a reputation for being open and transparent in the way it conducts its business on behalf of the local community it serves.

To further reinforce that reputation and to ensure that local residents can have full confidence in its Council, the Council resolves that all expenses claim forms from members are published on the Council’s website in full with only personal information redacted such as signature and car registration numbers.

Council requests that the system of the publication of Councillors’ allowances and expenses be reviewed by the Ethics and Standards Committee in due course.

These measures will further ensure that every penny paid to Councillors in allowances and expenses is open to the power of public scrutiny.”

- 3.2. There has been a considerable amount of publicity in the national and local media concerning the payment of expenses to MP’s and Local Government Members.

- 3.3. Public perception of what Members do for the expenses they are paid has been tainted by these reports. Hence there are increasing demands that transactions relating to Members' expenses should be available for inspection so that Members can be accountable to the local electorate.
- 3.4. In order to ensure that local residents will have full confidence in the Council's Members it was resolved by Council on 22nd October 2009 that all Members' expenses claim forms would be published on the Council's website for transparency purposes as it was considered that this would ensure that these expenses were open to public scrutiny. This further endorses the new duty to inform, consult and involve local people and would aim to rebuild trust by extending accountability.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1. Following a joint audit investigation with the County Council regarding Members' expenses forms, new procedures were put into place.
- 4.2. One of the outcomes from the Audit was the requirement to impose restrictions on backdated claims to improve accountability and transparency and to ensure that claims are dealt with in a timely manner.
- 4.3. A procedure is now in place both at the County Council and here at the District Council that the maximum time a Member may backdate their claims is two months. Some examples of the claim forms are attached at Appendix 1.
- 4.4. It is proposed that the forms will be included on the website under the Councillors' Section.
- 4.5. At the Council meeting on 22nd October 2009 an amendment was made to the motion to allow that any Members who do not claim expenses (and the Council does have Members who claim none), will have a nought put by their name to make it clear to the public that they claim no expenses.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The financial implications of publishing all Members' claim forms on the Council's website can be met from existing budgets.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There is no legal requirement for the Council to publish Members' expenses forms however it promotes transparency and allows public scrutiny of tax payer's money. It is also widely considered to be good practice.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1. Failure to publish Members' expenses forms would be considered to be bad practice and would not promote transparency.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1. The endorsement of Council to publish Members' expenses forms is a positive step forward in promoting transparency. Not only is it considered to be good practice, but it reinforces the new duty to inform, consult and involve local people and would aim to rebuild the public's trust by extending accountability.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1. Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Ethics and Standards Committee.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1. Motion to Council, 22nd October 2009