

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
ETHICS AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE
27TH JANUARY 2010

Review of Members' Interests

OPEN	
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Monitoring Officer
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APPENDICES:	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To review arrangements for the recording and reporting of Members' Interests.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to DECIDE: whether the current arrangements for the reporting and recording of Members' Interests need further improvement.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Standards for England expect Ethics and Standards Committees to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members and are also required to oversee the Register of Members' Interests.
- 3.2. The Ethics and Standards Committee also assists in ensuring that Members observe the Code of Conduct and monitor its operation.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The Committee needs to consider whether the current system whereby the register of Members' Interests and declarations of interests need to remain maintained only in hard format by the Monitoring Officer or whether for transparency purposes they should be available on the Council's website.
- 4.2 The following neighbouring Councils maintain hard copy and electronic registers in order to make them publicly accessible:
- Worcestershire County Council
 - Wychavon District Council
 - Redditch Borough Council
 - Bromsgrove District Council
- 4.3 Whilst there have only been a few requests to view the Register of Interests it would meet National Indicator 14 (Avoidable Contact) whereby Council's strive to make information electronically available thus reducing the need to contact a member of staff and make an appointment to view them.

- 4.4. By having the information available on the Council's website it may remove the need for members of the public to submit a Freedom of Information Request.
- 4.5. The Annual Return to Standards for England included a question as to whether the authority's register of interests is available for inspection on the Council's website and have been monitoring what Councils do in this connection.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 If the Committee decided that the information should be loaded onto the Council's website there are some financial implications e.g. the use of staff resources to carry out this but these can be met through existing budgets.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Section 81 of the Local Government Act 2000 requires all Members within 28 days of their election to register their financial or other personal interests. It is also a requirement for members to notify the Monitoring Officer of any changes to their personal interests within 28 days of becoming aware of any changes.
- 6.2 Members must also notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of any gift or hospitality received that has a value of £25 or more by registering their existence and nature.
- 6.3 In meetings of the Council, Members are required to declare any personal or prejudicial interest in any business of the Council. This is necessary irrespective of whether the interest has been registered.
- 6.4 The Monitoring Officer maintains a separate written record of declarations of interests in addition to the record made in Council minutes.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An equality impact needs assessment has been undertaken and it is considered that there are no discernable impacts on the six equality strands.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 It is a mandatory requirement for Councils to maintain a register of Members' Interests and to keep these updated. Democratic Services staff will therefore hold 6 monthly reviews to ensure that the information is up to date.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The review of the Register of Members' Interests by the Ethics and Standards Committee demonstrates its commitment to promoting high standards of ethical governance

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Local Government Act 2000