

REPORT TO: Standards Committee
DATE: 25th May 2011
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Policy and Resources
SUBJECT: Declaration of Interests of Members
WARDS: N/A

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To report on the local application of the systems for declarations of interests by Members in order to maintain the values of good governance and ethical behaviour.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Committee notes the Report

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of the Committee on 26th May 2010, the second annual report on Declarations of Interest by Members was submitted.

3.2 The purpose was to remind Members that integrity in local government is essential to command the confidence of the community and of all organisations with which the Council comes into contact.

3.3 The report offered a reminder as to personal and personal prejudicial interests.

3.4 Personal interests are where the issue being discussed in the meeting affects the wellbeing or finances of a member of his or her family or close associated more than most other people who live in the area affected by the issues. Personal interests also relate to matters which must be registered by Members.

3.5 Personal and Prejudicial interests go a stage further and are personal interests which affect a member or his or her family or close associates in terms of their finances, or regulatory functions such as Licensing or Planning and which a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of the facts would believe likely to harm or impair the member's ability to judge the public interest.

3.6 The Council has a challenging culture of declaration of interests. The prime responsibility rests with individual members, but the practical expression of the culture takes various forms:-

1. The Declaration of Interests by Members at the start of meetings, both formal and informal.
2. Availability of Guidance from the Monitoring Officer and his staff
3. The completion of the Register of Interests
4. The annual sending out of a Declaration form which forms an opportunity to reflect and self- review
5. Guidance and Training
6. Engaged involvement by the Standards Committee.

3.7 As reported last year, the Register of Members Interests is held by the Principal Committee Services Officer. Members are sent fresh forms to complete each May and also receive a form should new interests be declared at any meetings during the year. There is a list on each Councillor's page on the Council's web-site indicating that information on interests is publicly available on request from Committee Services. All newly elected Members were invited to the Council's Member Induction Programme on 11th May 2011 when further advice was given by the Monitoring Officer on Declaration of Interests.

3.8 Committee Services also maintain the Register of Gifts and Hospitality. Members are required to register any gifts or hospitality worth £25.00 or more received in connection with Official duties as a Member, together with the details of the person who makes the offer or gives the gift of hospitality. This must be done within 28 days of receipt. At meetings when an item is under discussion which is likely to affect the giver or the gift of hospitality, then the existence and nature of the gift must be declared by the Member as well as the name of the giver and how the business relates to that person. The Member must then consider whether the interest is also a prejudicial interest. The Monitoring Officer looks at the Register of Gifts and Hospitality periodically, and it is clear that Members are aware of its existence and using it. Since 1 May 2010, there have been 13 entries by Members and 15 by officers.

3.9 Although the Government proposes to abolish the model Code of Conduct in the Localism Bill, the requirement to declare interests will remain, and it is proposed to introduce a new criminal offence to deal with failure.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Failure to comply with the Registration and Declaration requirements would amount to a breach of the Code of Conduct and have serious risks to the Authority.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

None

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None