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**REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor John Williams, Leader**

**Responsible Director(s) - Paul Wildsmith, Director of Corporate Services**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Members agreement to the Register of Members' Interests being placed on the Council's website.

**Background**

2. The Local Government Act 2000 and the Code of Conduct introduced a new register of Members Interests. All Members have to complete the register which must be available for public inspection. The legislation did not set out how the register was to be available for inspection but the usual practice is to have it available in the Council's offices through the Monitoring Officer. This is the current practice in this authority. The current register is a paper copy signed by the Member, although an electronic copy of the content of the register is also held.

**Openness**

3. The Freedom of Information Act and other rules about access to information encourage public bodies to be open about the information that they hold. Council Members as elected politicians are expected to be open to public scrutiny about their personal interests to ensure that these do not conflict with their public duties. The Audit Commission have indicated that as part of the inspection of local authorities they visit Council's website to see how easy it is to access information and in particular how easy it is to find a copy of the Council's Code of Conduct and the register of Member Interests. It is good practice already adopted by a number of other Councils. Wandsworth Council in London has had its register available on the website for several years. Closer to home York City Council has its register available with the page for each councillor

**Electronic Register**

4. An electronic version of the register has been prepared which will make it easier for Members to update their register regularly. It will also mean that if a request is made for a register to be sent to a member of the public who cannot, for whatever reason, visit the town hall, this could be sent a copy electronically. The register will not bear a copy of the Member's signature.

## **Security**

5. Although by law, the register must already be available for inspection by Members of the public, there may be concerns from some Members about some of their entries being available to all users of the World Wide Web. If individual Members are concerned that their register or an entry on their register should not be placed on the website then an entry will be included to say that this entry is available for inspection via the Monitoring Officer. Many of the entries held on the Members' register are already available for public inspection such as their address, and membership of other public bodies.

## **Consultation**

6. A report was taken to Standards Committee on 9th September, 2006 which recommended that a consultation process with the wider membership be undertaken. All members were invited to express a view when they made changes to their register of interests form. 16 Members responded in favour of the proposal, one was against and the remainder express no opinion. The one Member who was against, expressed the view that he had no objection to his own entries being on the register but objected in principal to Members' being required to place their registers on the website.
7. The majority of those Members who expressed a view were in favour of placing the register on the website. Standards Committee considered the results of the consultation and have decided to recommend to Council that the registers should be placed on the website subject to the proviso that if a Member objects to an entry being placed on the register then the entry will indicate that the Monitoring Officer holds that information.

## **Legal Implications**

8. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

9. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

## **Council Policy Framework**

10. The issues contained within this report are consistent with the Council's policy framework.

## **Conclusion**

11. The Members' register of interests be made available via the Council's website, with the proviso that confidential entries will be retained on the paper register held by the Borough Solicitor.

## **Recommendation**

12. Council are requested to :
  - (a) Approve the Register of Members' Interests being included on the Council's website.
  - (b) Members note that confidential entries will be retained on the paper register held by the Borough Solicitor.

## **Reasons**

13. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) It will demonstrate transparency in the Council's arrangements in accordance with the guidance made under the Local Government Act 2000.
  - (b) To ensure where necessary Members are not exposed to any risks with result to the Members' Register of Interests.

**Paul Wildsmith**  
**Director of Corporate Services**

## **Background Papers**

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Catherine Whitehead : Extension 2306  
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