

Subject: Publication of the Register of Members' Interests on the Council's website

Status: For Publication

Report to: Standards Committee
Full Council

Date: 24th February 2009
26th February 2009

Report of: Executive Director – Business

Portfolio

Holder: Finance and Resources

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To ask members to consider the publication of the Register of Members' Interests on the Council's website.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective.

- Well Managed Council (Improvement, Community Network)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Publishing the Register on the web site would encourage Councillors to adopt the highest high ethical standards and so help to avoid breaches of the Councillors Code of Conduct and potential damage to the Council's reputation. It will also ensure that members keep their register up to date and failure to publish them on the web site may mean members do not update their interests.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 Members are required under the Code of Conduct to record financial and certain other personal interests in a register available for public inspection. Any changes to those details also have to be notified to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the change taking place. Currently the Register is kept in a paper copy format and is available for public inspection at the Council's Offices at Futures Park.
- 4.2 The Audit Commission's annual Use of Resources Assessment of the Council, now includes a section on "ethical framework and culture". Guidance on the next assessment, issued by the Council's auditors, includes a statement that it is good practice for information included in the Register to be available through the Council's web site.
- 4.3 A number of Local Authorities are now publishing the register on their website. Lancashire County Council already publishes the information declared by its Councillors on its web site. Pendle Borough Council and Wyre Borough Council are due to publish their registers soon and, one or two other District's in Lancashire intend to consider the issue in the light of the new best practice guidance.
- 4.4 Publishing the registers on the web site would make the information much more readily accessible, would accord with best practice and would demonstrate the Council's commitment to openness and high ethical standards.

ADVICE FROM THE STANDARDS BOARD

- 4.5 Some authorities may consider it appropriate for their Register of Interests to appear on their website. This would certainly be a step towards greater openness regarding members' interests and The Standards Board would encourage such a move. However, our view is that information on the Register of Interests relating to individual Councillors should only be posted on an authority's website with the consent of the individual councillor concerned. The Standards Board believes that failure to obtain consent constitutes a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998.
- 4.6 If a Member is of the opinion that there is sensitive information which would expose a member to the risk of violence or intimidation then they can approach the Monitoring Officer to ask that sensitive information is with held.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 No specific financial implications arising from the report.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 The Register is a public document and must be made available for public inspection on request. It is good practice to publish such interests on the website to ensure that the public / local community have confidence in the transparency of decision making at Rossendale Borough Council.
- 6.2 This will contribute to the overall ethical well being of the Council ensuring we have a culture of high ethical standards which the public and our partners can have confidence in.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

- 7.1 No implications on human resource matters.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 By converting the current Register of Members' Interests to an electronic format and publishing on the Council's web site, Rossendale would be seen to be adopting best principles of transparency and openness in governance.

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 That the Standards Committee recommends to Full Council that the Register of Members' Interests be made available to the public by publication on the Council's website except for particular entries relating to matters where publication on the Council's website might reasonably place the safety of the member concerned or his/her family at risk. Where a member feels that a particular entry presents such a risk an application should be made to the Monitoring Officer for consideration and confirmation that the entry can be withheld from website publication.
- 9.2 That if Full Council supports the placing of information on the website it requests that members who do not wish to take part to write to the Monitoring Officer within 7 days of the Full Council meeting.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 10.1 Standards Committee and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- Is a Community Impact Assessment required No
- Is a Community Impact Assessment attached No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached No

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No background papers