

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 15TH MARCH 2010

Report of the Monitoring Officer

ITEM 7 PUBLICATION OF REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS ON THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

Purpose of Report

To enable the Committee to consider the views of the Leaders' Meeting in respect of the publication of the Register of Members' Interests on the Council's website.

Recommendation

1. That the consultation through the Leaders' Meeting in respect of publishing the Register of Members' Interests on the Council's website be noted.
2. That, as a result of the consultation, the approach of the Council to continue to provide information on the Council's website about how to inspect the Register but that the Register itself is not published be endorsed.

Reason

1. To enable the views of group leaders and deputy leaders to be considered.
2. To support the current arrangements on the basis of the views of group leaders and deputy leaders.

Background

At its meetings on 8th June 2009 the Committee considered a report on the Annual Return to Standards for England (minute 6 refers) and at its meeting on 28th September 2009 the Committee considered a further report setting out a timetable for dealing with issues raised in the Use of Resources Assessment by the Audit Commission (minute 12 refers). One of the issues raised in both cases was the publication of the Register of Members' Interests. The Annual Return included a question as to whether the Register was accessible to the public on the Council's website and one of the recommendations from the Use of Resources assessment was to increase access to the Register via the Council's website. In considering this matter the Committee identified the need to obtain the views of members on this matter and asked that this initially be done through the political group leaders.

On 14th December the matter was considered at the Leaders' Meeting which is attended by the leaders and deputy leaders of the three political groups. The report to that meeting set out that should the Council decide not to make the Register available on its website this could have a negative impact on the Council's rating in this part of the Use of Resources assessment (good governance) and, potentially, its overall score but that publication in this way raised a number of practical issues. The main issues identified were:

- Publication of addresses – The Register includes a section on land within the Council area in which a councillor has a beneficial interest. That will include the councillor’s home, whether as owner, lessee or tenant. Contact information for councillors is already published on the Council’s website, however a number of councillors have chosen to use the Council offices as their contact address rather than have their home address published.
- Voluntary disclosures – The Register of Interests form includes a section for councillors to voluntarily provide additional information to that which they are required to under the Code of Conduct and whether to publish this information would need to be considered.
- Format of published version – There were a number of ways in which the Register could be published, for example creation of an electronic version of the Register or scanning the paper documents which currently comprise the Register.

The Leaders’ Meeting considered these issues and concluded that the Council should not publish the Register of Members’ Interests on its website. Instead the current arrangements should continue so that general information is available on the Council’s website about the Register including how to view the Register at the Council offices and who to contact to arrange to do so.

In addition, Standards for England have published a summary of the Annual Returns made by councils. This showed that in 2008/09 34% of councils published their Register on their website and 66% did not.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Risk Management

No specific risks have been identified with this decision.

Background Papers: None

Officers to Contact: Michael Hopkins (01509 634785)
michael.hopkins@charnwood.gov.uk
 Simon Jackson (01509 634699)
simon.jackson@charnwood.gov.uk