

S24 **MEMBER' REGISTER OF INTERESTS**

The Committee was asked to consider whether the Register of Members' interest should be published on the Council's website. The legislation currently only required the register to be available at the council offices for inspection at reasonable hours. A few councils had adopted the practise of publishing it on their website, which would make the information more accessible as the purpose of the register was to enable members of the public to ascertain the interests of an individual member.

A survey of other Council's had revealed that no other authority in Essex had adopted this practise although Castle Point District Council was considering doing so.

A number of Councillors said that they could see no problem with this suggestion as the names, addresses and wards of District Councillor's were currently on the website and information as to their interests was already in the public domain. However, it was essential that there was a proviso that an interest could be excluded if it could put the councillor in danger of violence or intimidation. The Assistant Chief Executive said that he was not aware of any such cases but para 10 of the Code of Conduct already made provision to exclude interests that were of a sensitive nature.

Some members commented that information on a website was looked at on a more casual basis and could be used to pry into councillor's personal affairs. There was also a feeling that if members of the public had a particular interest or concern they would come to the Council Offices to inspect the register. However, on balance it was felt that the suggestion should be supported as the Council should be aiming to promote openness and transparency and improved access for the public.

It was explained that this Committee could only recommend that this suggestion was adopted and it was up to the District Council and the relevant town and parish councils to decide whether to accept this recommendation. It was appreciated that some parish council's did not have a website in any event. The Assistant Chief Executive said that he did not think it was appropriate for the Register of Town and Parish interests to be published on the District Council website unless all of the Councils agreed to this.

RECOMMENDED that the Members Register of Interests be published on the Council's website.