

REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS -an explanation

A “disclosable pecuniary interest” or DPI is any relevant financial or business interest that a councillor should be open about in relation to council business. The basic principle is that a councillor should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare any interests and relationships. It is considered essential there is confidence that all councillors are putting the public interest first and not benefiting their own financial affairs from being a councillor. For a parish council, the monitoring officer of the borough council must establish and maintain the council’s register of members’ interests. DPIs include employment, trade, contracts, ownership of land and assets, and business interests in the local council area. Other interests are usually non-pecuniary or personal interests. The council’s code of conduct will determine what actions must be taken in respect of personal interests. A councillor must disclose to the principal authority’s monitoring officer any DPIs and any other disclosable interests referred to in the council’s code of conduct within 28 days of becoming a member of the council.

This rule on disclosure also applies to councillor’s spouses, civil partners or cohabitantes, as if their interests were those of the councillor. The register of interests does not distinguish between a councillor’s interests and those held by a partner. The monitoring officer will compile a register of interests available to the public, usually on the principal authority’s website. If the monitoring officer decides that, by making a disclosable interest public, a councillor might be subject to a threat of violence or intimidation, the interest can be registered without details of the interest. This is known as a ‘sensitive’ interest. A copy of disclosable interests should be given to the clerk for the council’s website, or it can be published on the website of the principal authority with a link on the local council website to where the information is located. The declaration of interests at meetings is intended to give the public confidence in council decision making. The agenda will usually give councillors an opportunity to declare an interest early in a meeting. If a councillor (or his or her partner) has a DPI in any matter to be considered on the meeting agenda, then they must not take part in the discussion or vote on the matter without a dispensation. For instance, if a planning application is made by a councillor relating to their own property, then the councillor clearly has a financial interest in the outcome of that planning application. Therefore taking part in discussion and voting through their own planning application clearly creates a DPI.