



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Conflicts of Interest Policy
Date:	9 th December, 2011
Reporting Officer:	Ciaran Quigley, Assistant Chief Executive (ext 6038)
Contact Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext 6314)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In March, 2011, the Audit Panel recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve a conflicts of interest policy for Councillors. Consideration of the policy was subsequently deferred by the Committee at its meeting on 18 th March.
1.2	The reason for the deferral was for further information to be given on the role of Members on outside bodies, how this impacted upon their membership of Council Committees and the indemnity for Members serving on such outside bodies.
1.3	Following the local elections in May and as part of the development of the Council's Constitution, the time is now considered to be right to seek to introduce the conflicts of interest policy.
1.4	A report, together with the draft policy, was accordingly submitted to the Committee on 18 th November.
1.5	At that meeting the Committee agreed to defer until its meeting in December consideration of the policy to enable the Political Parties to give due consideration to the matter.
1.6	Subsequent to the meeting, the draft policy was circulated to the Party Leaders. However, at the time of re-issuing the report no comments have been received. Therefore, in accordance with the Committee's decision the draft policy has been re-submitted to the Committee for consideration.

2	Key Issues
2.1	In order to clarify the issues for Members, it is suggested that the approach to be taken should have two distinct but complementary parts.
2.2	The first report, which is included at Appendix 1, deals with the establishment of a register of Members' interests and gives advice on when and how a Member should declare a private pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest at a Council or Committee meeting.
2.3	This report specifically excludes any advice on the matter of the declarations of interest which may arise due to the membership which a Councillor might hold on an outside body, to which they have been appointed by the Council. That matter, together with the broader issues of the roles of Councillors on outside bodies and the indemnity issues which might arise, will be dealt with in a subsequent report.
2.4	The establishment of a Register of Members' Interests will take a little time to implement given that a pro forma registration form will need to be designed, some initial training will need to be provided to Members and time will be required for Members to complete and return the forms. Given the timescales involved it would be prudent to establish the Register with effect from 1st April, 2012.
2.5	The policy, as it impacts upon the declaration of interests at Committee meetings, if approved by the Committee and endorsed by the full Council on 4 th January, could be implemented with effect from 1st February, 2012.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>The development and implementation of a policy on Councillors' conflicts of interest will have resource implications in terms of the delivery of training to Councillors on the new policy and in dealing with any issues that may arise. This will be met from the existing Member Development budget.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>The development and implementation of a policy on Councillors' conflicts of interest will have resource implications in terms of the establishment of relevant processes / registers / monitoring of processes. This work can be incorporated into existing job roles.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p> <p>The consequences of not implementing the new policy are potentially significant in terms of ensuring the Council has credible governance arrangements and the trust of its partners, citizens and stakeholders.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	None. The policy will be applied to all Councillors.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the Conflicts of Interest Policy for Councillors; 2. Agree that the Register of Members' Interests will be established with effect from 1st April, 2012; 3. Agree that the policy, as it affects the declarations of interests at Committee meetings, will apply from 1st February, 2012; and 4. Note that a further report on the declarations of interest which may arise due to the membership which a Councillor might hold on an outside body, to which they have been appointed by the Council, together with the broader issues of the roles of Councillors on outside bodies and the indemnity issues which might arise, will be dealt with in a subsequent report.

6	Decision Tracking
<p>Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager</p> <p>November, 2011</p>	

7	Documents Attached
<p>Appendix 1 – Conflicts of Interest Policy for Councillors</p>	