

Committee(s)	Dated:
Standards Committee	15 th May 2015
Subject: Annual Update to Members' Declarations	Public
Report of: The Town Clerk	For Decision

Summary

This report provides Members with a further update, following the submission to the last meeting of the Committee on 20th February 2015, on the annual update to the Members' Declarations which commenced in December 2014 following the introduction of new requirements in the Members' Code of Conduct. The Committee felt that whilst it was clear that a number of Members had been fastidious about bringing their Registers of Interest up to date ahead of the 1st January 2015 implementation date, some updates had not taken place and in certain instances the on-line Registers contained typographical errors and incomplete details pertaining to non-pecuniary interests. Consequently, as a number of reminders had been issued by the Town Clerk since December, it was felt that the issue of non-compliance with the registration requirements should be escalated and a formal communication issued by the Comptroller and City Solicitor, in his capacity as the Monitoring Officer, to relevant Members.

This report provides an update about the status of the Members' Registers of Interest following circulation of correspondence by the Comptroller & City Solicitor (in his capacity as the City Corporation's Monitoring Officer) in March 2015 in respect of non-compliance and incomplete declarations.

This report also updates Members of the Committee in respect of their requests that the following be explored by the Town Clerk:

- (i) the potential for Members to update their own on-line Registers of Interest; and
- (ii) the on-line Register of Interest form be reviewed with a view to including separate non-pecuniary categories within the form.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:-

- (i) note the report; and
- (ii) approve the proposal in respect of the future arrangements for managing Members' Declarations, including the testing and implementation of on-line registration by Members via their intranet page and the introduction of separate categories of non-pecuniary interests within the on-line form..

Main Report

Background

1. At the meeting of the Standards Committee on 20th February 2015, an update report about the Annual Update to Members' Declarations was considered and concern was expressed that a number of Members did not appear to be compliant with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of their statutory declarations and/or the declaration of non-pecuniary interests. Following that discussion it was agreed that the Comptroller & City Solicitor would write to those Members who did not appear to have fully updated their declarations, where no forms had been received or where confirmation had not been received by the Town Clerk that there were no updates.

Current Position

2. Since the meeting on 20th February 2015, the Comptroller & City Solicitor has written to thirty-five Members about their Members' Declaration (Register of Interest). Two different letters were circulated with the first relative to a response having not been received from a Member in respect of the annual update; and the second concerning, potentially, incomplete declarations.
3. Following circulation of those letters in March, various updates have been received and a number of Members' Declarations – including both the statutory and non-pecuniary categories - have been updated. The current position in respect of responses and updates to the Members' Declarations is set out in Appendix 1 which shows that of the thirty-five Members that were contacted in March 2015, twenty-seven responses were subsequently received and the on-line declarations have since been updated. It is important to note that of the thirty-five Members that were contacted one has since retired from the Court of Common Council. Consequently, eleven Members have not yet responded to the correspondence that was previously circulated by the Comptroller and City Solicitor.
4. Where amendments have been highlighted these have been updated on the committee management system which enables, in the case of elected Members, the changes to be visible to the public straight away via their Members' webpage.
5. With regards to Co-opted Members' declarations, the current position is set out in a separate report to the Committee at Item 8.

Moving Forward

6. At the February meeting the Committee queried whether there was scope for Members to be able to update their own registers of interest on-line. This has been explored by the Town Clerk, as requested, and the position is that the committee management system can be reconfigured to enable the City Corporation's elected Members to update their own registers of interest on-line, via the intranet. Whilst some revisions to the system will be required and

a period of testing would need to be undertaken, possibly involving some Members of the Standards Committee, all elected Members would thereafter be able to update their register of interest via their web page (on the intranet) as and when changes are required. Following an update to the system, an assigned officer group within the Town Clerk's Department would review the amendment and, subject to any queries, publish this to the external facing webpages. Whilst we are aware that a large number of Members do not regularly log on to the City Corporation's IS network (the intranet) and this approach to updating registers of interest might not therefore be widely adopted it could, following a testing period, be profiled amongst Members as an option. Those who prefer to submit amendments to the Town Clerk's Department for entry and publishing could continue to do so.

7. The testing period would be important to ensure that the system works as expected and appropriate auditing functionality is in place to allow the Town Clerk's Department to effectively manage the registers of interest.
8. In respect of the Committee's earlier query as to whether the on-line Register of Interest form could be amended to include specific non-pecuniary categories within the form, this has also been explored by the Town Clerk and such changes can be implemented. With the Committee's approval the data in the existing registers of interest will be migrated into the new form template with a view to this exercise being completed as soon as possible and by no later than the July recess.
9. Following the recent Annual Update process, the next all-Member update will take place in April 2016.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

10. The annual reminder to review and update Members' declarations satisfies the objectives of the Standards Committee in seeking greater transparency about the City of London Corporation's governance framework and those involved in decision-making processes.

Conclusion

11. The annual reminder process is an important exercise to maximise transparency of the City of London Corporation's decision-making processes and those who serve on the City Corporation's committees and sub-committees. This follow-up to the initial update exercise which commenced in December 2014 highlights the on-going lack of understand by some Members about the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and suggests that guidance should be circulated to Members periodically and, where appropriate, refresher training to Members about the Code of Conduct should be scheduled through the formal Member Development Programme. The latest Member Development Session about the role of Members and the Standards regime took place on 21st April 2015 and was attended by three Members of the Court of Common Council.

12. Members are invited to note the current position in respect of the annual update and the subsequent reminder exercise that took place in March 2015 and approve the proposal in respect of the future arrangements for managing Members' Declarations, including the testing and implementation of on-line registration by Members via their intranet page; and the introduction of separate categories of non-pecuniary interests within the on-line form.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - current position in respect of responses and updates to the Members' Registers of Interests Annual Update process and the issuing of reminder correspondence by the Comptroller & City Solicitor.

Background Papers

The Members' Code of Conduct (*as agreed on 16th October 2014*)

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