

Date: Thursday 11th November

Time: 2pm - 3.30pm

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly Building

Title: REGISTER OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS - UPDATE REPORT FOR MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Purpose

1. To provide an update on the register.

Action

2. None; for information only.

Update

3. Since the publication of the first quarter's report of the Register of Members' Interests, a number of Members have sought to amend their entries either in the light of what others have registered or in respect of new declarations. After an initial flurry of interest from the press, we have had very few enquiries about the Register since the report was published in August.

Lessons learnt

4. It is clear that many Members are registering a variety of matters that are not required to be registered under Standing Order 4. The "Guidance for Assembly Members on the Registration and Declaration of Members' Financial and Other Interests" states that gifts exceeding the value of £125 and hospitality that is in excess of 0.5% of an Assembly Members salary (£170) should be registered. The Table Office has sought to give advice to Members to dissuade them from registering minor matters but despite this some have clearly preferred to register as much as possible, including small gifts. That is of course, their prerogative and some are clearly concerned not to fall foul of the system by failing to register something that might reasonably be thought to influence their actions in the Assembly, and this may have resulted in an over cautious approach. However, unnecessary declarations could lead to the Register

becoming loaded with lengthy minor entries particularly, in the category of gifts and hospitality and to unfavourable comparisons with those Members who have registered only the minimum necessary.

5. The Deputy Presiding Officer has also raised the issue of inconsistencies in the Register in relation to election expenses. The guidance under the heading 'Financial Sponsorships' – category 6, states that election expenses should be registered if, *"as a candidate for election to the Assembly, where to the knowledge of the Member the sponsorship in any case exceeds 25% of the candidates election expenses"*.

6. The Table Office is keeping the level and type of declarations under review but ultimately it is a matter for the individual Member to determine. In order to promote as much consistency as possible we have issued a reminder to Members on the key points of the guidance. And wherever possible we are recommending that future amendments to the Register reflect only those issues that are required to be registered.

Publication of the Register

7. It has been agreed that the Register of Members' Interests should be published every quarter including an annual publication. As the first quarter report was published in August, it follows that the next three publications should be in November, January and April.

8. Following the practice adopted for the first quarter, we have sent a draft Report of the Register of Members' Interests to all Members for comment, with the aim of publishing the document by the middle of the month.

Table Office

November 1999