

Report to Standards Committee

Subject: Gifts and Hospitality 2018/19

Date: 4 July 2019

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1. Purpose

To inform members of the Standards Committee of gifts and hospitality received between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019.

Recommendation

THAT the report be noted.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council has a Gifts and Hospitality Code of Practice for Members and Officers to enable Members and Officers to decide on the circumstances and the manner in which gifts and hospitality may be accepted. The Code was reviewed during 2018 and minor amendments approved by both Standards Committee and Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee. In addition to the Code of Practice, there are also obligations in the Code of Conduct relating to gifts and hospitality which Members were reminded of as part of the recent Code of Conduct training, in particular the ongoing requirement to register any future gifts and hospitality.
- 2.2 Historically, each council department held its own register of gifts and hospitality in which details of gifts and hospitality offered to Officers were registered. However, since 2012 the register has been held centrally in an electronic folder. The register of gifts and hospitality for Members is also held in the electronic folder and is updated on the Monitoring Officer's behalf by Democratic Services.
- 2.3 In addition to the review of the Gifts and Hospitality Code of Practice an advisory audit conducted by RSM relating to Strategic Fraud touched on gifts and hospitality. A number of recommendations have been made and the following actions agreed:

- The gifts and hospitality registers will be reviewed on a quarterly rather than an annual basis to ensure that any questionable declarations do not go undetected for 12 months before being identified.
- The register has been amended to require more specific detail of who offered the gift/hospitality. In future both the name of the person and the Company (if applicable) will be recorded. In addition, the estimated value of the gift/hospitality will now need to be recorded.

The advisory audit recognised that the recent review of the Code of Practice was reaching a conclusion and made a number of other suggestions in relation to the Code of Practice which will be considered the next time it is reviewed.

- 2.4 Regular reminders have previously been sent to Service Managers asking them to ensure all staff register all gifts and hospitality offered, whether accepted or not. Following the review of the Code of Practice last year, staff have been reminded of the obligations relating to gifts and hospitality again and a specific briefing given to SLT and Service Managers by the Monitoring Officer.
- 2.5 The entries on the Register shows that during 2018/19, across the Council officers, 33 offers of gifts or hospitality were accepted and none were refused. Most common gifts were boxes of chocolates, and boxes of biscuits. There were 2 instances of hospitality offered consisting of dinner at a conference/Awards ceremony. No offers of gifts or hospitality were recorded by Members. A breakdown of the gifts and hospitality offered appears at Appendix 1.
- 2.6 A review of the Register entries has identified the following gaps/concerns:
- Two instances where the “Authorised by Manager” column includes the name of the officer to which the gift was offered.
 - Three instances where the “Authorised by Manager” column is blank.

These have been raised with the relevant managers direct and a general reminder sent to all Service Managers making it clear that the Manager must authorise the acceptance of a gift/hospitality (not the individual to which it is offered) and this must be recorded.

3. Proposal

It is proposed that the Committee notes the report.

4. Resource Implications

None.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Breakdown of gifts and hospitality received 2018/19.

6. Background papers

None identified.