

Report to Standards Committee

Subject: Gifts and Hospitality 2020/21

Date: 10 June 2021

Author: Monitoring Officer

Purpose

To inform Standards Committee of gifts and hospitality received between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 and identify any issues arising from the annual review of the Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

Recommendation

THAT the report be noted.

1 Background

- 1.1 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 of Practice was reviewed during 2018 and minor amendments approved by both Standards Committee and Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee. Historically, each council department held its own register of gifts and hospitality in which details of gifts and hospitality offered to Officers were registered. Since 2012 the register for officers has been held centrally in an electronic folder on the I:Drive and during 2019 it was transferred to the online Employee Claims system. The system automatically sends an email reminder to Service Managers at the end of each quarter requesting that they ensure the register entries are up to date.
- 1.2 During 2020, quarterly reports on Gifts and Hospitality were delivered by the Monitoring Officer to SLT.

- 1.3 The register of gifts and hospitality for Members is still held in an electronic folder in the I:Drive and is updated on the Monitoring Officer's behalf by Democratic Services. Standards Committee will recall that in its report on Ethical Standards in Public Life, the Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended that local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format, such as CSV. This recommendation was accepted by the Standards Committee and the register was published on the website at the end of quarter 1 with no updates through quarters 2-4 (due to no gifts or hospitality being reported). It will continue to be published on a quarterly basis. Members received training on the need to register gifts and hospitality in excess of £50 as part of the induction training following the 2019 borough elections. They are being reminded on a quarterly basis to keep their Register of Interests including gifts and hospitality received up to date via the 'Councillor Contact' emails or by direct email.
- 1.4 The entries on the Register for officers shows that during 2020/21, across the Council's officers, 22 offers of gifts or hospitality were made; all were accepted. Most common gifts were boxes of chocolates, and boxes of biscuits. There were no instances of hospitality offered consisting of networking lunches and dinners at a conference/Awards ceremony.
- No offers of gifts or hospitality were recorded by Members in 2020/21.
- The Gifts and Hospitality Register for Officers appears at Appendix 1. The Gifts and Hospitality Register for Members is not appended as it contains no entries.
- 1.5 In reviewing the register for officers, there are significantly fewer entries for 2020/21 than previous years (92 gifts recorded in 2019/20). This is likely to be as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic which saw many of the Council's facilities closed through 2020/21. In addition, with the cancellation of networking events and conferences due to the pandemic, no offers of hospitality were received by officers. This does not give rise to a cause for concern and as facilities return to normal, business, and events start to return to a face to face basis, officers will be reminded of the need to ensure all gifts and hospitality offered are recorded.
- 1.6 A review of the registered entries has identified that there are still occasions when managers do not promptly authorise gifts. Those managers have been spoken to, to ensure the system is updated promptly.
- 1.7 There are no specific issues in relation to value of gifts accepted or repeat gifts from the same company which would give rise to a cause for concern.

- 1.8 In reviewing the register for Members, again there are significantly fewer entries for 2020/21 than the previous years (31 offers of hospitality offered to Members recorded in 2019/20). There are however no specific issues which would give rise to a cause for concern. Historically, members have predominantly recorded offers of hospitality from attendance at events and conferences, again, given the pandemic, such events have not been conducted during 2020/21, and as such the offering of such hospitality has not occurred.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that the Committee notes the report.

3 Alternative Options

- 3.1 Not to provide an update on gifts and hospitality offered to officers and members,

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 With regard to Officers, Section 117(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that an Officer of a Local Authority shall not, under the colour of his or her office of employment, accept any fee or reward whatsoever other than his or her proper remuneration. The Bribery Act 2010 makes it an offence to seek, accept or agree to accept a financial or other advantage as an inducement or reward to perform a function improperly. In simple terms, it is a criminal offence for employees to seek or accept a financial or other advantage in return for making a decision, granting an award or performing any other public function, regardless of what decision is made.
- 5.2 The Code of Conduct requires Members to notify the Council's Monitoring Officer in writing of any gift, benefit or hospitality with a value in excess of £50.00 which they have accepted as a member from any person or body other than the authority within 28 days of receipt.
- 5.3 The Council has a Gifts and Hospitality Code of Practice for Members and Officers which has been approved by Standards Committee and Appointments & Conditions of Service Committee.

6 Equalities Implications

- 6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7 Carbon Reduction/Environmental Sustainability Implications

- 7.1 There are no carbon reduction/environmental sustainability implications arising from this report.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 - Gifts and Hospitality Register for Officers 2020/21.

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 None.

Statutory Officer approval

Approved by the Chief Financial Officer

Date:

Drafted by the Monitoring Officer