

## **Report to Standards Committee**

**Subject:** Gifts and Hospitality 2023/24

**Date:** 18 July 2024

**Author:** Monitoring Officer

### **Purpose**

To inform Standards Committee of gifts and hospitality received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and identify any issues arising from the annual review of the Register of Gifts and Hospitality.

### **Recommendation**

THAT Committee:

- 1) Notes the details of the annual review of gifts and hospitality.

## **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 2023 and minor amendments approved by both Standards Committee (December 2023) and Appointments and Conditions of Service Committee (October 2023). Since 2012 the register for officers has been held centrally in an electronic folder and during 2019 it was transferred to the online Employee Claims system. The system automatically sends an email reminder to Managers at the end of each quarter requesting that they ensure the register entries are up to date.
- 1.2 Quarterly reports in relation to the Gifts and Hospitality register are taken to Senior Leadership Team (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. Members received induction training in 2023 on the need to notify the Monitoring Officer of gifts and hospitality accepted in excess of £50 as this will be included on their register of interests in line with the Member Code of Conduct. In addition to this requirement, Members should notify the Monitoring Officer of any gifts and hospitality offered for inclusion on the members Gifts and Hospitality register. Members 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 2023/24, across the Council's officers, 40 offers of gifts were made; 2 gifts were refused. One refusal was of gifts, the details of which were not specified by the offeror, but the offer was made to public protection officers and was made by an organisation that provides medical assessments for taxi drivers, it was not considered appropriate to accept in line with the Code of Practice. The other refusal was an offer made to planning policy and was refused due to the offer coming from a supplier. These refusals demonstrate an understanding by managers of the Code of Practice, however managers have been advised to give clear reasons for refusal on the register.
- 1.5 The most commonly recorded gifts were boxes of chocolates, boxes of biscuits and flowers given by members of the public to staff which were shared amongst teams. All gifts were of a low value.
- 1.6 Only one offer of hospitality was made in 2023/24 to officers, this was a gin tasting experience offered to Leisure Services and was refused at a value of £40.
- 1.7 The Gifts and Hospitality Register for Officers appears at Appendix 1. There was only one gift recorded on the Gifts and Hospitality Register for Members in 2023/24. The gift was a book of low value and was accepted.
- 1.8 In reviewing the register for officers, there are 6 more entries for 2023/24 than 2022/23, but it is still a significantly lower number than in 2019/20 (92 gifts recorded in 2019/20) prior to the pandemic where conferences and events were more frequently held face to face.
- 1.9 A review of the registered entries has identified that managers are generally prompt to respond and authorise gifts and hospitality where appropriate. Managers have been reminded to ensure officers are declaring any gifts and hospitality received. Following amendments to the Code of Practice in 2023, Heads of Service were briefed on the Code of Practice and cascaded information to teams.

- 1.10 There are no specific issues in relation to the value of gifts accepted, or repeat gifts from the same company which would give rise to a cause for concern. The large proportion of officer gifts are given to front facing services such as Customer services and Leisure Services and are received from customers.

## **2 Proposal**

- 2.1 It is proposed that the Committee notes the report in terms of the annual review of Gifts and Hospitality and work undertaken to review the Code of Practice.

## **3 Alternative Options**

- 3.1 Not to provide an update on gifts and hospitality offered to officers and members, however, given that the Code relates to officers and members, this is considered to be the appropriate forum for consideration of such offers.

## **4 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report, as indicated, all gifts and hospitality accepted were of a low value.

## **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. Under the Code of Practice, members are also required to record gifts and hospitality on the

gifts and hospitality register, in addition, refusal of gifts offered should also be recorded.

- 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 but which should be kept under review.

## **6 Equalities Implications**

- 6.1 There are no direct 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 2023/24

## **9 Background Papers**

- 9.1 None.

**Statutory Officer approval**

**Approved by the Chief Financial Officer**

**Date:**

**Drafted by the Monitoring Officer**