

Agenda item 8
AGS/23/23

Report title: Annual Review of Members Gifts and Hospitality Register 2022-23	
Report to: Audit, Governance and Standards Committee	
Report author: Paul Turner, Director Legal and Assurance	
Date: 5 June 2023	For: Discussion
Enquiries to: paul.turner@essex.gov.uk or sophie.crane@essex.gov.uk	
County Divisions affected: 'All Essex'	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report informs members of the outcome of the review of the 2022-23 Member Gifts and Hospitality register.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members of the Committee are asked to note the findings of the review and make any recommendations they may have.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 All Members must, within 28 days of receipt, notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of any gift, benefit or hospitality with a value in excess of £50 which they have accepted as a Member from any person or body other than the Authority. The Monitoring Officer places the notification on a public register of gifts and hospitality. This duty to notify the Monitoring Officer does not apply where the gift, benefit or hospitality comes within any description approved by the Authority for this purpose. This is set out in part 5 of the Constitution. Members are not required to register the value of the hospitality.
- 3.2 The Model LGA Code of Conduct adopted by ECC on 1 June 2022 changed the limit from £25, which had been in place since 2001, to £50, and now requires all Members to register any gifts and hospitality which were offered but not accepted.
- 3.3 In the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 there were 17 instances of gifts or hospitality declared and these were logged on register of gifts and hospitality and published on the individual Councillor's profile on the Committee Management System. In the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 there were 10 instances. There were 63 Members who did not declare any gifts or hospitality in comparison to 68 in 2021-22. This is perhaps to be expected given the new requirement to record offers which have been declined and also

as people travelled more in 2022/23 as there were no significant restrictions on movement during this period whereas there were significant restrictions in place in 2021/22.

- 3.4 An examination by officers does not reveal any particular concerns relating to the acceptance of significant hospitality from ECC contractors or those seeking funding from ECC. The register does not demonstrate any trends in terms of those offering the gifts and hospitality. Nonetheless members should form their own view and should consider whether or not they wish to express any view on any of the hospitality accepted.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1 This report has no financial implications

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 Registration of gifts and hospitality is required by the ECC Code of Conduct.

6. Equality and Diversity implications

- 6.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 6.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 6.3 This report simply presents the register of gifts and hospitality to the Committee.

7. List of appendices

- 7.1 Member gifts and hospitality register 2022-23.