

Date of issue: Wednesday 13th March, 2024

MEETING	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
DATE AND TIME:	TUESDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2024 AT 6.30 PM
VENUE:	COUNCIL CHAMBER - OBSERVATORY HOUSE, 25 WINDSOR ROAD, SL1 2EL
DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER: (for all enquiries)	NICHOLAS PONTONE 07749 709 868

SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS

The following Papers have been added to the agenda for the above meeting:-

* Items 5, 6 and 7 were not available for publication with the rest of the agenda.

PART 1

<u>AGENDA ITEM</u>	<u>REPORT TITLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>	<u>WARD</u>
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Slough Borough Council

Report to:	Standards Committee
Date:	19 March 2024
Subject:	Whistleblowing Annual Report
Chief Officer:	Stephen Taylor - Monitoring Officer
Contact Officer:	Sarah Wilson – Assistant Director Legal and Governance
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	None

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an annual update in relation to the Council's whistleblowing arrangements.

Recommendations:

The Committee is recommended to:

1. Note and endorse the contents of this report

Reason:

The Whistleblowing Code provides for the Monitoring Officer to review the Council's whistleblowing arrangements annually. It is considered best practice in many authorities for the relevant member committee to receive an annual report in relation to whistleblowing. The provision of an annual report to the committee increases the profile of whistleblowing across the Council and affords the opportunity to highlight areas of good practice and identify any requirements for improvement. This is particularly important for a council in intervention where there may be issues of trust with both staff and residents.

Commissioners Review

This report has been reviewed by Commissioners and there are no specific comments to add.

2. Report

- 2.1 The Whistleblowing Code was last amended in 2022. It has been reviewed and it is not recommended that any further changes are made to it. The Council's former internal auditors, RSM, conducted a follow up audit in 2022/23, reporting in February 2023. In the previous audit only a partial assurance opinion was provided. The review found that the Council has demonstrated improvements in its whistleblowing

practices. This has included increased communications, the agreement of reporting arrangements and evidence of initial enquiries being completed for concerns raised.

2.2 In terms of internal controls, the audit noted that the following controls were adequately designed and operating effectively:

(a) Guidance for staff – The Code was published on the Council’s website and intranet pages and there had been regular communication to staff on its existence. Whistleblowing guidance was accessible and information outlined how to raise concerns and highlighted prescribed individuals.

(b) Training content – there is a whistleblowing module in the Council’s e-training for staff. This defined whistleblowing, referenced relevant regulations and legislation, outlined the type of concerns to be raised and ended with a ten question assessment. In person training had been delivered to senior managers which also highlighted avenues available to staff to raise concerns.

(c) Culture improvement – the Corporate Plan 2022-25 contained two themes of leadership and culture and governance which linked to whistleblowing. There was evidence of promotion of the Council as a learning organisation in the Chief Executive’s staff roadshows and improvement and recovery plans.

(d) Reporting arrangements – an annual report was to be provided to the Standards Committee to include all reported whistleblowing concerns. A review of the report to Standards Committee in July 2022 demonstrated appropriate reporting and changes to the Code were agreed by Full Council.

(e) Whistleblowing cases – a review of documented concerns showed that initial enquiries were completed where relevant and in line with timescales, with appropriate reporting to stakeholders. Conclusions not to proceed with formal investigations were supported by the outcomes from initial enquiries and agreed through correspondence with those involved.

2.3 The audit resulted in three medium and two low priority actions as set out below:

(a) Confidential Whistleblowing Code – The July 2022 Code to replace the May 2021 version accessible on the Council’s website. This action has been completed.

(b) Whistleblowing training compliance – non-compliance reports will be issued on a monthly basis, for further dissemination within directorates. Line managers will review and follow up upon non-compliance as part of regular one to one meetings. HR have put in place a system for issuing non-compliance reports to managers. The Council is reviewing its onboarding systems and its management development learning and development arrangements. This will include focus on the importance of compliance with mandatory training and ensuring such training is regularly reviewed so it remains fit for purpose.

(c) Temporary / Contractor staff training – staff appointments made via Matrix will be reported to the Workforce Development Team. These staff will have training accounts set up and be assigned mandatory training modules. This action has been completed. It should be noted that there is relatively high turnover of staff and some contractors are utilised for short periods. In addition to mandatory training, it is important to ensure the culture is right and all Council officers are

encouraged to report concerns. The Code of Conduct for Employees has been reviewed and amended to a Code of Conduct for Officers. This Code emphasises officers' personal responsibility for reporting concerns, whether these relate to criminal wrongdoing, health and safety or bullying or harassment. It is proposed that there will be staff and trade union engagement before the new Code is considered by members and adopted by Full Council. Following adoption, the Code will form an important part of the onboarding and staff training programme.

- (d) Staff survey – the staff survey will capture staff views on whistleblowing, including how it can be improved. Feedback will be used to identify specific improvement points to be actioned. A staff survey has been undertaken, including questions on culture, relationships and the ability and confidence to report concerns. The results of the survey are being considered by senior officers with a view to this informing part of the wider culture change programme.
- (e) Whistleblowing cases – the Monitoring Officer will monitor the Monitoring Officer inbox in the absence of the Democratic Services Lead. There is a system in place for democratic services staff to regularly monitor the inbox, including ensuring cover when the assigned officer is on leave.

2.4 The number and nature of whistleblowing concerns raised in 2022/23 and to date in 2023/24 are shown below:

2022/23 – 4 complaints raised. Two were raised anonymously, one by a former agency worker, and one by a member of staff. Two did not raise issues covered by the whistleblowing code and one was subject to initial enquiries to determine whether to conduct investigation. No evidence was found in that instance to substantiate the allegations of corruption in relation to contracting arrangements. An investigation was carried out by the Council's Corporate Fraud unit and the complaint was not upheld. Concerns not covered by the whistleblowing code were referred to relevant Executive Directors for action.

2023/24 – No complaints have been received, to date.

Background

2.5 Whistleblowing is the term used when an employee passes on information concerning wrongdoing. An employee is protected in law from being subjected to detriment or dismissed on the basis of whistleblowing if they reasonably believe that they are acting in the public interest and they reasonably believe that the disclosure tends to show past, present or likely future wrongdoing falling into prescribed categories.

2.6 The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) guidance recommends that employers should have clear policies and procedures for dealing with whistleblowing, which will help demonstrate that the organisation welcomes information being brought to the attention of management. This is demonstrated by the following:

- Recognising workers are valuable ears and eyes – getting information can prevent wrongdoing, which can negatively impact on performance and in extreme cases prevent people from harm and death

- Getting the right culture – the lack of a supportive culture will be a barrier to disclosures, firstly because workers may fear reprisals and secondly that no action will be taken in response to the disclosure
- Training and support – training, mentoring, advice and support systems should be in place to ensure workers can approach a range of people within the organisation
- Being able to respond – prompt investigation and where appropriate feedback is in the interests of the organisation
- Better control – embracing whistleblowing will ensure that managers have better information to make decisions and control risk
- Resolving the wrongdoing quickly – the benefits of internal disclosures are that there is an opportunity to act promptly and put right any wrongdoing.

Review of current practice

2.7 The Whistleblowing Code and procedures have been reviewed against the requirements of the DBEIS guidance and code of practice.

2.8 The review has considered the best practice set out in the guidance regarding the need for a whistleblowing code of practice. The results of this are set out below:

- **Have a whistleblowing policy or appropriate written procedures in place**

The Council has a Whistleblowing Code, which is in its constitution and published on its website. In addition, it has codes of conduct for members and employees which provide guidance and create obligations in relation to the need to act in the public interest, a member officer relations protocol which sets out the different roles of elected members and officers and provides obligations on officers to raise concerns if they are subjected to improper pressure and an anti-fraud corruption strategy and policy which again provides an obligation on officers to report any suspicious activity. These documents collectively provide a strong ethical framework in which all elected members and officers should act. The member officer relations protocol was reviewed in 2023 and the Council is in the process of reviewing its code of conduct for employees.

- **Ensure the whistleblowing policy or procedures are easily accessible to all workers**

The Whistleblowing Code is part of the Council's Constitution, which is published online and has a separate part listing the documents that collectively provide the ethical framework. In addition the Council's intranet contains guidance for staff.

All staff are expected to complete mandatory training, which further raises the procedures in place for whistleblowing.

- **Raise awareness of the policy or procedures through all available means such as staff engagement, intranet sites, and other marketing communications.**

On a monthly basis, the Workforce Development team issue mandatory training compliance reports to all Directors to highlight both compliance and non-compliance

in their directorates, requesting their support to cascade to the managers and drive up compliance. All line managers have also been given training reporting functionality to monitor their teams progress themselves. The importance of whistleblowing and raising concerns in general is regularly highlighted in staff communication. The Council is currently reviewing its onboarding processes and its manager development arrangements and will consider whether there is more that can be undertaken to show the key role staff play in being the “eyes and ears” of the organisation.

- **Provide training to all workers on how disclosures should be raised and how they will be acted upon**

There is a mandatory training module on whistleblowing. The mandatory training has been extended to agency workers. The Council has also introduced a governance learning training programme for managers which covers a range of governance topics highlighting the roles and responsibilities of public sector employees. Disclosures can be raised directly to the Monitoring Officer or via another senior officer. In addition details are given of prescribed persons and organisations who can assist any individual concerned as to how to raise an issue.

- **Provide training to managers on how to deal with disclosures**

The governance learning programme covers various topics relating to governance, including the constitutional rules and ethical framework. Managers’ responsibilities are also highlighted in the mandatory training and in the Code and guidance notes.

- **Create an understanding that all staff at all levels of the organisation should demonstrate that they support and encourage whistleblowing**

This is part of a wider piece of work on the Council’s values and behaviours. The review of the Code of Conduct for Employees provides a good opportunity to engage with staff about their role as public servants, including their responsibility to report concerns about others and to report “near misses” and take responsibility for their own health and safety. This will support wider work on culture change.

- **Confirm that any clauses in settlement agreements do not prevent workers from making disclosures in the public interest**

All settlement agreements are approved by the Council’s HR department and HB Public Law, as the Council’s shared legal practice. The template agreement specifically states that the confidentiality obligations in the agreement do not prevent the employee from making a protected disclosure, making a disclosure to a regulator, reporting a criminal offence to any law enforcement agency or assisting with a criminal investigation or prosecution.

- **Ensure the organisation’s whistleblowing policy or procedures clearly identify who can be approached by workers that want to raise a disclosure. Organisations should ensure a range of alternative persons who a whistleblower can approach in the event a worker feels unable to approach their manager. If your organisation works with a recognised**

union, a representative from that union could be an appropriate contact for a worker to approach.

The Code provides clear guidance on how to deal with a range of concerns. For instance:

(a) Councillors and officers are informed that a breach of either the councillor code of conduct or the local code of conduct for employees should be raised with the Council's Monitoring Officer. There is a generic monitoring officer email account for those councillors or staff who may be unaware of who the monitoring officer is or who prefer to use this official email account.

(b) Existing HR policies and procedures are referred to for resolving HR related concerns – the procedures are listed.

(c) A schedule is provided of the type of concern that should be raised under the whistleblowing code.

The Code advises individuals to raise concerns with colleagues, a line manager or their superior and if they feel unable to do so, to raise it with a chief officer. If the above has been exhausted or is not appropriate, the concern should be raised with the Monitoring Officer or if it relates to the Monitoring Officer or s.151 Officer, with the Chief Executive.

- **Create an organisational culture where workers feel safe to raise a disclosure in the knowledge that they will not face any detriment from the organisation as a result of speaking up.**

The Council conducted a staff survey, which included questions relating to culture. Senior officers are in the process of reviewing the results to inform an action plan.

- **Undertake that any detriment towards an individual who raises a disclosure is not acceptable**

The Code contains a section on support that is available for employees raising a concern and others affected. This includes reference to the Employee Assistance Programme, the use of trade unions or regulatory bodies, reference to the Employee Support Group and support that is available if the employee has to give evidence in subsequent proceedings.

- **Make a commitment that all disclosures raised will be dealt with appropriately, consistently, fairly and professionally**

The Code makes clear that managers are responsible for making their staff aware of the policy and procedures, should encourage a positive open working culture for staff and others working at the Council to express their concerns, to take concerns seriously and to guide staff to the most appropriate route.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 Encouraging staff to raise concerns will help ensure the Council meets its best value duties and delivers safe, lawful and value for money services.

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 Employees and other certain types of workers are provided with protection when whistleblowing under the Employment Rights Act 1996. The protection is from being dismissed or subjected to a detriment because they have made a protected disclosure (blown the whistle). There are a number of conditions which an individual must fulfil in order to qualify for the protection. There must be a disclosure of information which the individual reasonably believes tends to show that one or more of six specified types of malpractice or failure has taken place. The individual must also have a reasonable belief that the disclosure is in the public interest. Further, the disclosure must be made to one of the categories of people listed in the Act, one of which is their employer.

3.3 Risk management implications

- 3.3.1 Having effective systems in place to allow councillors and officers to raise whistleblowing concerns is a critical part of the Council's risk management systems. By improving the policy, procedures and culture to allow for concerns to be raised and acted upon, the Council will reduce its risks of fraud, being the victim of criminal offending, permitting or allowing a criminal offence to be committed, failing to comply with the law, endangering someone's health and safety, damaging the environment and individuals or organisations deliberately concealing any wrongdoing.

3.4 Environmental implications

- 3.4.1 None, although damage to the environment is listed as a category of wrongdoing.

3.5 Equality implications

- 3.5.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to pay due regard to the need to
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.5.2 Failing to comply with an obligation set out in law is covered as a category of wrongdoing. By having in place an effective system for whistleblowing, individuals can raise concern that the Council is not properly complying with its equality duties. In addition, by undertaking a staff survey including questions on whistleblowing, the Council will be able to analysis the monitoring data to see if certain groups of staff feel less able to raise concerns than others and put in place an action plan to address this.

4. Background Papers

None.

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Slough Borough Council

Report to:	Standards Committee
Date:	19 th March 2024
Subject:	Schedule of Code of Conduct Complaints - Update
Chief Officer:	Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer
Contact Officer:	Nick Pontone, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Ward(s):	All
Exempt:	No
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Schedule of Code of Conduct complaints

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update in relation to the activity under the Councillors' Code of Conduct in 2023/24.

Recommendations:

The Committee is recommended to note the outcome of complaints under the Code of Conduct as set out in Appendix 1.

Reason:

The Councillors' Code of Conduct is a key part of the Council's Ethical Framework and this report updates Members on activity since May 2023.

Commissioner Review

This report has been reviewed by Commissioners and there are no specific comments to add.

2. Report

Introduction

- 2.1 At the start of the 2022/23 municipal year the Council set up a separate Standards Committee to assist the Council to meet its duty under s.27 of the Localism Act 2011. Part of the Committee's remit is to advise the Council on the adoption or revision of the Councillor's Code of Conduct and to determine written complaints made against an elected member alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct.
- 2.2 The Monitoring Officer is also scheduled to produce bi-annual reports on Member Conduct Complaints. This is the second report on such complaints during the municipal year and updates members of the committee on complaints activity since the last meeting on 10th October 2023.

Complaints made under Code of Conduct in 2023/24

- 2.3 There have been 10 formal complaints received to date under the Councillors' Code of Conduct since May 2023. The schedule is set out in the Appendix to the report. All the complaints have been about Borough councillors. For comparison, there were a total of 6 formal complaints in 2022/23, 5 about Borough councillors and 1 about a parish councillor.
- 2.4 Members are asked to note that two complaints were withdrawn by the complainants. One case, which was the subject of two separate complaints, has been referred for investigation and remains open. The remaining open complaints are at various stages of determination with the Monitoring Officer consulting the Independent Person.
- 2.5 The induction programme for councillors following the elections in May 2023 included training on the Code of Conduct and other aspects of the ethical framework. Council approved a revised Member Officer Relations Protocol at its meeting in January 2024.
- 3.1 Financial implications**
- 3.1.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 3.2 Legal implications**
- 3.2.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 places a duty on local authorities to ensure that their members and co-opted members maintain high standards of conduct and require them to adopt a code of conduct for their members.
- 3.2.2 Section 28 confirms that the adopted code should be consistent with the seven "Nolan" principles of standards in public life and must set out the rules that the authority wants to put in place in relation to registering and disclosing pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests. The Council adopted the LGA's model code of conduct in 2021.
- 3.2.2 Section 28 also requires local authorities to put in place arrangements under which it can investigate an allegation of a breach of the code made in writing and, if it considers that it warrants investigation, requires that the authority appoint at least one independent person whose views must be sought after it has made an investigation and before it takes a decision. The Council appointed Mr R Tomkinson as the Council's independent person from 19 May 2022.
- 3.3 Risk management implications**
- 3.3.1 Having an effective code of conduct in place setting out the standards of behaviour for elected members and an effective system for managing and monitoring such behaviour is a key part of the Council's ethical framework and risk management system. As a public body, the Council should act lawfully and in the public interest and failing to do so opens it up to challenge. Decisions of the council can be challenged where they have not been made on a rational basis or having followed a fair process. Ensuring that elected members take decisions in an appropriate and properly informed way, including declining to take part in decision-making when they have a relevant interest, will help ensure fair and lawful decisions and reduce the risk of successful legal challenge.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 There are no specific environmental implications arising from this decision.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to pay due regard to the need to

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3.5.2 The Code of Conduct requires members to promote equalities and not discriminate unlawfully against any person. It explains the central role that elected members have in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the Council's performance and strategic aims and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.

4. Background Papers

None.

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Code of Conduct complaints – 2023/24

Date received	Complaint Reference	Nature of complaint	Subject member	Outcome	Comments
29 August 2023	2324/01 First reported to Committee on 10 th October 2023.	Failure to register declarable interests	Borough Cllr 1	Complaint withdrawn. Complaint closed.	No formal investigation required.
1 September 2023	2324/02 First reported to Committee on 10 th October 2023.	Various allegations including abuse of power	Borough Cllr 2	Informal resolution resulting in action taken and apology to complainant. Complaint closed.	No formal investigation required.
1 September 2023	2324/03 First reported to Committee on 10 th October 2023.	Various allegations including abuse of power	Borough Cllr 3	Informal resolution sought resulting in apology to complainant. Complaint Open.	Independent Person consulted.

Date received	Complaint Reference	Nature of complaint	Subject member	Outcome	Comments
19 September 2023	2324/04 First reported to Committee on 10 th October 2023.	Damaged the reputation of office/authority; used their position improperly; abuse of power; comprising the impartiality of people who work for the authority; and not behaving with integrity.	Borough Cllr 4	MO determined on 9 th November 2023 that the subject member was not acting in their capacity as a councillor and Code did therefore not apply. Complaint closed.	No formal investigation required.
22 November 2023	2324/05	Alleged unprofessional behaviour at a meeting and failure to represent constituents.	Borough Cllr 5	Complaint open.	No formal investigation required.
22 November 2023	2324/06	Alleged behaviour towards another councillor at a committee meeting.	Borough Cllr 6	Complaint open.	-

Date received	Complaint Reference	Nature of complaint	Subject member	Outcome	Comments
22 November 2023 Further complaint on same matter received on 28 th November 2023	2324/07 and 2324/08	Alleged aggressive and inappropriate behaviour.	Borough Cllr 1	Investigation ongoing. Complaint Open.	-
28 th November 2023	2324/09	Councillor was said to have acted in a "deceitful and fraudulent manner".	Borough Cllr 7	Complaint unsubstantiated and withdrawn by complainant. Complaint closed.	-
30 th January 2024	2324/10	Behaviour in breach of code due to inappropriate language used to complainant.	Borough Cllr 5	Complaint Open.	-

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Slough Borough Council

REPORT TO:	Standards Committee
DATE:	19 March 2024
SUBJECT:	Annual Update on Members' Register of Interests and Gifts & Hospitality 2023/24
CHIEF OFFICER:	Monitoring Officer
CONTACT OFFICER:	Nick Pontone, Democratic Services Lead
WARD(S):	All
EXEMPT:	No
APPENDICES:	Appendix A – summary of Register of Interests 2023/24 Appendix B – summary of Gifts & Hospitality 2023/24

1 Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 This report provides the annual update to the Standards Committee on the Members' register of interest and declarations of gifts & hospitality in the 2023/24 municipal year.

Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to note and comment on any aspects of the report.

Reason:

Members' registering and declaring interests and receipt of gifts and hospitality is a key part of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. This report sets out the processes in relation to such declarations and the activity in 2023/24 to provide both transparency and an opportunity to review and strengthen any of the Council's processes. Article 9A of the Council's Constitution sets out the terms of reference of the Standards Committee and includes a requirement "to receive an annual statistical report from the Monitoring Officer on declarations of interest."

Commissioner Review

This report has been reviewed by Commissioners and there are no specific comments to add.

2 Report**Introduction**

- 2.1 Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of interest for Members of the authority. This is to ensure that the authority, public and any other interested parties know of any interests a

councillor may have that might give rise to a conflict of interest. An accurate and up to date register is a core part of the Council's Ethical Framework, demonstrates openness and promotes accountability.

- 2.2 The Councillors' Code of Conduct in Part 5.1 of the Constitution sets out the relevant interests that should be declared and disclosed in both the register and at meetings. Members are personally responsible for registering and declaring their interests and are encouraged to seek advice from the Council's legal and democratic services officers.
- 2.3 There are three types of interest
 - Disclosable pecuniary interest (DPIs)
 - Other registerable interests
 - Non-registerable interests
- 2.4 DPIs must be registered within 28 days of election and whenever a change is required. DPIs include employment, land, directorships and contracts that may be held with the Council. The Council also requires councillors to register and declare non-statutory interests which can include membership of outside bodies, political parties and other community bodies such as charities or school governorships.
- 2.5 The procedure at Slough Borough Council is that a councillor must complete a new registration of interest form at the start of their term of office. Any changes during the course of their term must then be notified within 28 days. The Council requires hard copy forms to be completed which must be signed and dated by the Member.
- 2.6 To ensure that councillors review the accuracy of their register each year all Members will be required to confirm they have reviewed their register and either confirm its accuracy or notify any changes on an annual basis. This annual update process will take place at the start of the next municipal year in May 2024.
- 2.7 Members must also declare any interest which relate to any matters on a meeting agenda and take any appropriate action. If a Member has a DPI they must not take any part in the decision and should leave the meeting room. Declarations, and the action taken, are recorded in the minutes and published on the Council website on each councillor's webpage.

Activity in 2023/24

- 2.8 Appendix A shows the activity in relation to the register and declarations at meetings since the start of the 2023/24 municipal year. In summary it shows that:
 - All councillors elected or re-elected in May 2023 submitted a new register of interests form within the required 28 days of their election and this information was published on the Council website.
 - 13 councillors made declarations at meetings. These includes a variety of matters but the majority were from the Planning Committee, for example where a councillor declared that an application was in their ward or that they had been contacted by the applicant or an objector. There has only been one case where the interest declared was considered by the Member to be a conflict which required them to either not take part in the decision or leave

the room during consideration of the item. The minutes of meetings record whether or not a Member left the room having declared an interest.

Sensitive Interests

- 2.9 Five councillors currently have sensitive interests which are withheld from the register published on the website. A sensitive interest is one which the member and the Monitoring Officer consider that disclosure of its details could lead to the member, or a person connected to the member, being subject to violence or intimidation.
- 2.10 In considering such requests the Monitoring Officer would take into account the reasons for the request and guidance from March 2019 from Rishi Sunak MP, the Minister for Local Government at that time, on the publication of councillors' and candidates' home addresses which asked Monitoring Officers to treat requests to withhold such information sympathetically. For the avoidance of doubt, the Monitoring Officer still retains such information on the Members' register of interests, but publication is withheld from the version of the register published on the Council website.

Training

- 2.11 Annual training is provided on the Councillors' Code of Conduct, including declarations of interest. Newly elected councillors should complete this training before submitting their register of interest form or update their interests having received training. The councillors welcome and induction session was held on 11th May 2023 which included a section on the Code of Conduct and interests. A more detailed session was held in the 1st Induction Workshop for Members on 8th June 2023. A refresher session will be held later in the year.
- 2.12 Training was also previously given to the independent person and the newly appointed independent members of Audit and Corporate Governance Committee. Whilst these individuals are not voting members of the committees, they are asked to complete a register of interest and abide by the Code of Conduct for Members in the same way as elected members are expected to.

Lesson learned and areas for improvement

- 2.13 The processes for the register of interests were reviewed in 2022 and a number of improvements were introduced. This included the annual review carried out that year to ensure Members were asked to review their register each year and confirm that it remained accurate, or to update accordingly. This provides assurance that the register is kept up to date over each councillors 4-year term of office.
- 2.14 Further measures were taken following the May 2023 elections, particularly given the high proportion of new councillors. This included additional training and a proactive approach from the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services to review each councillors register once they had been submitted. A number of queries were raised with individual councillors about potential omissions and gaps which has improved the accuracy of the registers and new Members understanding of interests that should be declared on their register. Whilst it remains the responsibility of each councillor to ensure their register is accurate and kept up to date, this more proactive approach has been effective in this first year following the whole Council elections in May 2023.

- 2.15 Regular reminders are given to Members in the weekly bulletin to inform councillors of their responsibility to update their register if there are any changes. 27 of the 42 Councillors have made updates to their register since the original submission in May 2023 which is an indication that Members are keeping their interests up to date.

Gifts and Hospitality

- 2.16 The Code of Conduct sets out the procedure for registering Members' gifts and hospitality. Councillors are advised not to accept gifts or hospitality, irrespective of the estimated value, if it could give rise to a real or substantive personal gain or reasonable suspicion of influence. However, it is recognised that there are occasions where gifts and hospitality are not refused and the Code requires Members to register any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of at least £50 within 28 days of receipt. The Code also requires members to register the refusal to accept gifts or hospitality of a significant value.
- 2.17 Since June 2021 all registrations by Members have been published on each councillor's webpage. Older declarations are maintained in a file held by democratic services and available for public inspection.
- 2.18 Appendix B shows the gifts and hospitality declared by councillors since the start of the 2023/24 municipal year:
- There has been 1 declaration made, compared to 8 in the most recent comparable reporting period.
- 2.19 The Council is not complacent about the low level of declarations of gifts and hospitality and will take further steps to regularly remind Members of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct to declare any such matters.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

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

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 Section 29 of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Monitoring Officer to establish and maintain a register of members' and co-opted members' interests and to make the register available for inspection and publish on the Council's website. The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 set the disclosable pecuniary interests required to be registered under the Act.

3.3 Risk management implications

- 3.3.1 Failure to maintain an accurate register of interests could cause a reputational risk to individual councillors and the Council as a whole. The risks are mitigated by the measures detailed in this response to maintain an accurate register and ensure councillors understand their responsibilities to register and declare relevant interests.

3.4 Environmental implications

3.4.1 None.

3.5 Equality implications

3.5.1 The public sector equality duty (PSED) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

4. Background Papers

None

SUMMARY OF MEMBERS' REGISTER OF INTERESTS 2023/24

COUNCILLOR	Start of term of office	Register published within 28 days of taking office	Most recent update	Number of Declarations at meetings 2023/24
Amjad Abbasi	May 2023	Yes	25 October 2023	0
Ejaz Ahmed	May 2023	Yes	22 May 2023	0
Iftakhar Ahmed	May 2023	Yes	13 November 2023	1
Zaffar Ajaib	May 2023	Yes	31 May 2023	0
Sabia Akram	May 2023	Yes	31 May 2023	0
Rob Anderson	May 2023	Yes	2 August 2023	0
Puja Bedi	May 2023	Yes	4 September 2023	0
Martin Carter	May 2023	Yes	28 July 2023	1
Wal Chahal	May 2023	Yes	24 August 2023	0
Haqueeq Dar	May 2023	Yes	8 February 2024	0
Siobhan Dauti	May 2023	Yes	17 October 2023	3
Balwinder Dhillon	May 2023	Yes	28 February 2024	0
Andrea Escott	May 2023	Yes	9 June 2023	0
Harjinder Gahir	May 2023	Yes	24 May 2023	0
Bally Gill	May 2023	Yes	13 November 2023	0
Christine Hulme	May 2023	Yes	25 May 2023	0
Adil Iftakhar	May 2023	Yes	28 September 2023	1
Mark Instone	May 2023	Yes	24 May 2023	0
Paul Kelly	May 2023	Yes	24 August 2023	0
Nadeem Khawar	May 2023	Yes	26 July 2023	1
Gurcharan Manku	May 2023	Yes	6 July 2023	0
Pavitar Kaur Mann	May 2023	Yes	25 May 2023	2
Fiza Matloob	May 2023	Yes	8 February 2024	0
Maroof Mohammad	May 2023	Yes	25 May 2023	0
Subhash Mohindra	May 2023	Yes	31 May 2023	0
Chandra Muvvala	May 2023	Yes	22 November 2023	0
Asim Naveed	May 2023	Yes	28 July 2023	1
Mohammed Nazir	May 2023	Yes	25 May 2023	0
Frank O'Kelly	May 2023	Yes	8 February 2023	4
Dilbagh Parmar	May 2023	Yes	25 May 2023	0
Naveeda Qaseem	May 2023	Yes	25 May 2023	0
Neel Rana	May 2023	Yes	23 May 2023	0
Jamila Sabah	May 2023	Yes	6 June 2023	0
Waqas Sabah	May 2023	Yes	12 February 2024	0
Zafar Satti	May 2023	Yes	28 July 2023	2
Ishrat Shah	May 2023	Yes	13 November 2023	1
Mabu Shaik	May 2023	Yes	23 May 2023	1
Dexter Smith	May 2023	Yes	14 July 2023	0
Robert Stedmond	May 2023	Yes	17 October 2023	1
Dhruv Tomar	May 2023	Yes	9 June 2023	1
Anna Wright	May 2023	Yes	8 February 2024	0
Rifaqat Zarait	May 2023	Yes	17 October 2023	1

SUMMARY OF MEMBERS' REGISTER OF GIFTS & HOSPITALITY 2023/24

Number of Gifts & Hospitality Declared since May 2023 (by value)				
COUNCILLOR	Under £50	£50 to £500	£500+	Total
Amjad Abbasi	0	0	0	0
Ejaz Ahmed	0	0	0	0
Iftakhar Ahmed	0	0	0	0
Zaffar Ajaib	0	0	0	0
Sabia Akram	0	0	0	0
Rob Anderson	0	0	0	0
Puja Bedi	0	0	0	0
Martin Carter	0	0	0	0
Wal Chahal	0	0	0	0
Haqeeq Dar	0	0	0	0
Siobhan Dauti	0	0	0	0
Balwinder Dhillon	0	0	0	0
Andrea Escott	0	0	0	0
Harjinder Gahir	0	0	0	0
Bally Gill	0	0	0	0
Christine Hulme	0	0	0	0
Adil Iftakhar	0	0	0	0
Mark Instone	0	0	0	0
Paul Kelly	0	0	0	0
Nadeem Khawar	0	0	0	0
Gurcharan Manku	0	0	0	0
Pavitar Kaur Mann	0	0	0	0
Fiza Matloob	0	0	0	0
Maroof Mohammad	0	0	0	0
Subhash Mohindra	0	0	0	0
Chandra Muvvala	0	1	0	1
Asim Naveed	0	0	0	0
Mohammed Nazir	0	0	0	0
Frank O'Kelly	0	0	0	0
Dilbagh Parmar	0	0	0	0
Naveeda Qaseem	0	0	0	0
Neel Rana	0	0	0	0
Jamila Sabah	0	0	0	0
Waqas Sabah	0	0	0	0
Zafar Satti	0	0	0	0
Ishrat Shah	0	0	0	0
Mabu Shaik	0	0	0	0
Dexter Smith	0	0	0	0
Robert Stedmond	0	0	0	0
Dhruv Tomar	0	0	0	0
Anna Wright	0	0	0	0
Rifaqat Zarait	0	0	0	0

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