

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
Haqeeq 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

APPENDIX B**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