

Audit & Governance Committee
10 July 2024

**Officers and Employees Annual Gifts and Hospitality Report
2023/24**

Purpose of the report:

The report applies to officers and employees of the Council only, it does not apply to Members (councillors).

The report presents the annual gifts and hospitality report of the Council to the Audit and Governance Committee to provide transparency and accountability.

The report summarises the gifts and hospitality activity over the last year and analyses the effectiveness of the Council's process and system.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Review the contents of the Annual Gifts and Hospitality report to satisfy themselves that the governance arrangements are operating effectively; and
2. Make any recommendations for improvement.

Introduction:

1. The Council is required to have an effective gifts and hospitality policy and arrangement in place. It was recommended by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny as an improvement the Council should make in its governance arrangements.

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2. As part of its governance arrangements the Council must ensure that effective arrangements for logging and reporting any gifts and hospitality offered and accepted, or declined, by officers are in place and are scrutinised regularly by the appropriate governance groups.

3. An effective and positive culture of declaring any offers of gifts and hospitality has the following advantages:

- Detects and deters wrongdoing.
- Provides information to managers so they can make decisions and contain the risk.
- Demonstrates to stakeholders that Surrey County council is serious about good governance.
- Reduces the chance of anonymous or malicious leaks.
- Reduces the chance of Legal claims against the Council; and
- Clear declarations of gifts and hospitality are likely to help with a defence under the Bribery Act 2010.

4. The annual report is attached at Annex A for the Committee's consideration.

5. The Governance Panel, The Risk Governance Group and the Whistleblowing monitoring group, which meets quarterly, have previously considered the report. These are informal meetings of the officers within the Council to discuss operation matters of governance, one being the statutory officer meeting.

Implications

6. **Financial**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Continued improvements in governance will support the delivery of the council's objectives.

7. **Equalities**

There are no direct equalities implications of this report.

8. **Risk management**

Transparent declarations of gifts and hospitality support the council's commitment to good governance and the effective delivery of services and achievement of objectives.

Conclusions

9. The report on gifts and hospitality in the financial year 2023/24 is to provide Committee with the details of what has been declared by officers as accepted or declined. In addition, scrutiny is provided on sponsorship of the Stars in Surrey awards ceremony.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

10. The report compiles with Council Officer Code of Conduct as set out in the Council Constitution under Part 6 Codes and Protocols. There are no immediate legal implications associated with this report.

Next steps:

11. Any actions and recommendations from the Audit & Governance Committee will be considered for future reports.

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Sources/background papers:
Gifts and Hospitality Policy (amended in 2024)

Annexes/Appendices:
Annex A - Governance Report - HR Governance Report - Annual Report on Gifts and Hospitality Activity FY2023/24

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