

Council

On 19 January 2004

Report title: Register of Gifts and Hospitality

Report of: Chair of Standards Committee

1. Purpose

To notify Members of Standards Committee's approach to making the Register of Gifts and Hospitality more widely available than at present and to seek the Council's agreement to this.

2. Recommendations

That Council agree to the Standards Committee's proposal to place the Authority's Register of Gifts and Hospitality on to the Council's official website and include for this purpose all new entries from 1 January 2004.

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3. Executive summary

3.1

At its meeting of 1 December 2003, Standards Committee agreed:-

- (i) That the Register of Gifts and Hospitality (RGH) should be made available on the Council's website, showing all new entries received from 1st January 2004
- (ii) That 'nil entries' would not be shown in publicly available versions of the RGH.
- (iii) An additional briefing update would be given to all Members, including co-opted Members, immediately before the Council meeting of 19th January 2004

3.2 Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development

This decision is in line with the Council's policy on openness and supports the Government's policy of increasing the trust of the public in local government.

4. Access to information:

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

5. Report

PLACING THE REGISTER OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY ON THE WEBSITE

1. PURPOSE OF RGH

The Register of Gifts and Hospitality (“RGH”) is kept by the Monitoring Officer of the Council. All members and voting co-opted members of the Council must inform the Monitoring Officer of the details of gifts and hospitalities received in the course of carrying out their duties as members. Only those gifts and hospitalities worth more than £25 need be notified in this way. The purpose of the RGH is to help prevent fraud and corruption in local government, increase public confidence and give members protection against accusations about having hidden financial reasons for making decisions, or arguing in favour of making decisions, in a particular way.

2. CURRENT ACCESS TO RGH

The RGH is currently kept in hard-copy form in the Civic Centre. It is accessible there, and only there, by appointment, necessarily during normal working hours -viz. when not only Officers but also the working public, are normally at work.

The prime reason for placing the RGH on to the website is to improve accessibility, not only as a matter of democratic principle, but also for those who currently find it difficult or impossible to inspect the RGH. The target group for the latter includes:

- those who are at work, or otherwise occupied, during normal working hours;
- those for whom transport links to the Civic Centre are lengthy or convoluted;
- the housebound;
- the elderly;
- the disabled.

A record is kept of each occasion on which the RGH is inspected. Since being made publicly available, in mid-2002, it has been inspected zero times.

3. BASIC PRINCIPLES

Besides this main reason for accessibility, there are also other basic principles involved, including :

- Haringey to be a leader in public standards
- Openness and transparency
- Accountability
- Gaining the public’s trust
- Promotion of the Code of Conduct

The decision to place RGH onto the website would, from the point of view of the public as a whole, produce positive benefits not only in respect of access but also when measured against these basic principles.

4. STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S DECISIONS

The Standards Committee is clear in its belief that it would be right to place RGH on to the website and has therefore decided to propose this to the Council, for all new entries received from the 1st January 2004.

(Since Members have 28 days in which to register any Gift or item of Hospitality, it is expected that the new entries would "go live" on the website with effect from the end of January 2004.)

The Standards Committee recognises that Members, including Co-opted Members, might find an additional briefing update on their duties to register gifts and hospitalities helpful and has therefore agreed for a briefing session to be held immediately before this Council meeting.

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

The publication of the RGH on the Council's website would be consistent with the principles underlying the new ethical framework ushered in by the Local Government Act 2000 and those outlined by the Nolan Report which preceded it.

All members have been consulted about their views on this proposal, via a letter sent out by the Chair of the Standards Committee on 15 October 2003. No communications from members or co-opted members expressing opposition to this proposal have been received.