

	Audit and Standards Advisory Committee 16 June 2025
	Report from the Corporate Director of Finance & Resources
	Lead Member - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources (Councillor Mili Patel)
Standards Report (including quarterly update on gifts and hospitality)	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Not applicable
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	Two Appendix A: Gifts & Hospitality Register (Qtr. 1) Appendix B: Change to the provisions of the Members Code of Conduct concerning gifts and hospitality – <i>this will be circulated as To Follow</i>
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Marsha Henry, Director of Law 020 8937 4078 Marsha.henry@brent.gov.uk . Biancia Robinson, Principal Constitutional, Governance & Finance Lawyer 0208 937 1544 Biancia.robinson@brent.gov.uk .

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Audit and Standards Advisory Committee on gifts and hospitality registered by Members and a recent standards decision made King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee note the contents of the report, and specifically note the change to the provisions of the Members Code of Conduct concerning gifts and hospitality (G&H).

3.0 Detail

Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1. The reviewing and maintenance of high standards of member conduct supports the delivery of the borough plan by promoting confidence in the operation and good governance of the council.

Gifts & Hospitality

- 3.2 Members are required to register gifts and hospitality received in an official capacity worth an estimated value of at least £50. This includes a series of gifts and hospitality from the same person that add up to an estimated value of at least £50 in a municipal year.
- 3.3 Gifts and hospitality received by Members are published on the Council's website and open to inspection at the Brent Civic Centre.
- 3.4 For the first quarter of 2025/26 there have been five councillors who have declared gifts and hospitality as being received, these are set out in further detail in Appendix A, together with the details of the receiving Councillor. The Committee will note two gifts and hospitality received for quarter 4 of 2024/25. These are denoted in italics for ease of reference.
- 3.5 The Committee will recall that hospitality accepted by the Mayor in their civic role are recorded separately and published on the Council's website.

Members Code of Conduct, review of Gifts & Hospitality (G&H) provisions

- 3.6 At its meeting on the 4.12.24, the Committee considered the council's external auditors, Value for Money (VFM) report relating to the 2023/24 accounts. This report included the recommendation that "*the council should consider strengthening*" the Members Code of Conduct (the Code) concerning gifts and hospitality (G&H) "*further by enhancing the Gifts & Hospitality register to include more information for "exceptional items to ensure transparency"*."
- 3.7 The Committee will note, it is not sufficient that Members simply register G&H received, they should think carefully about whether it is proper to accept any G&H. This is included in the standards training when councillors are inducted and the Monitoring Officer Advice Note (MOAN) provided to Members in 2023 and again via the Members bulletin.
- 3.8 Officers have reviewed the Code and following discussion at the Constitutional Working Group (CWG) it was agreed to amend the gifts and hospitality

provisions of the Code to require members accepting any gift or hospitality valued as £500 or more to provide reasons to the Monitoring Officer as to why they consider it appropriate to accept the gift or hospitality. This agreement was approved by Full Council on the 14 May 2025.

- 3.9 For the Committee's information a copy of the amendment to the Members Code of Conduct is set out in further detail in Appendix B.

Member Training Attendance

- 3.10 At this Committee's request reports updating it on the attendance records for Member's in relation to mandatory training sessions has become a standard reporting item. Refresher mandatory training for all members is currently underway. All refresher training is due to conclude mid – July. Officers will update the Committee at its next meeting with respect to the attendance record for Members in relation to refresher mandatory training sessions

- 3.11 The Committee will know that:

- a) It is a requirement of the Members' Code of Conduct that all members' *"must attend mandatory training sessions on this Code or Members' standards in general, and in accordance with the Planning Code of Practice and Licensing Code of Practice"*.
- b) The schedule for all mandatory sessions is ordinarily published and approved in the Council calendar at the May Annual Council meeting.
- c) All internal training sessions attended by Members are published on the Council's Website and on individual Member profile pages.
- d) For face-to-face training sessions, reminders are sent via email, calendar invitations, and text messages and, on some occasions, direct telephone calls to Members. The same reminder process is employed for re-run(s) of sessions, where applicable, to take account of personal circumstances like work commitments and childcare arrangements etc.
- e) During 2025 the Committee will receive regular updates on Members who have not completed the mandatory training sessions.

King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough - Standards Decision

- 3.12 King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Standards Committee has recommended that a councillor be removed from its Planning Committee after emails he sent to a fellow committee member during a meeting he could not attend created the "perception of undue influence".
- 3.13 Independent Councillor Terry Parish was unable to attend the meeting as he was recovering from a car accident, according to a report from the Local Democracy Reporting Service (<https://www.lynnnews.co.uk/news/former-planning-chairman-to-face-standards-hearing-after-ema-9414954/>).

- 3.14 According to the report, Councillor Parish, who was previously the leader of the council, emailed his deputy, Councillor Sue Lintern, a series of messages before and during the meeting, including a message that read: "No deferral. REFUSE IT."
- 3.15 A complaint was later lodged against the member over his conduct alleging that the emails may have influenced, or attempted to influence, Councillor Lintern's decision-making.
- 3.16 The council's standards committee considered an investigator's findings regarding the complaint identifying a set of relevant obligations on councillors within the Planning Code, which included section 1.4 (openness and transparency) and section 3 (regarding impartiality and integrity of decision-making). It also highlighted parts of the council's Code of Conduct concerning the 'General Principles', impartiality, disrepute and the Nolan principles.
- 3.17 The investigator upheld the complaint, finding that while Councillor Parish did not explicitly instruct Councillor Lintern how to act, and while there was no direct evidence that the emails altered any decision, the nature and timing of those emails could be interpreted as attempts to unduly influence the decision-making process. The report said the behaviour raised concerns regarding impartiality, integrity, and fairness and transparency in decision-making.
- 3.18 At the hearing, Councillor Parish told the standards panel that he had not intended to apply any influence to Councillor Lintern but only to communicate his opinions. He noted that this was a misjudgement that had only occurred due to exceptional circumstances, and he regretted it.
- 3.19 The panel found the councillor had breached the Code of Conduct and the Planning Code, finding that the emails sent to Councillor Lintern "create the perception of undue influence".
- 3.20 The panel specifically found the emails were inconsistent with section 1.4 of the Code of Good Practice for Planning, section 5.1 of the Code of Conduct regarding disrepute and the Nolan principles of openness. Further, it concluded that the Nolan Principle of respect had been breached "in that the emails failed to respect Councillor Lintern and the remainder of the Planning Committee".
- 3.21 The panel recommended that Councillor Parish's group leader remove the councillor from the Planning Committee. "At the same time, the panel recognised the wider contributions of Councillor Parish to Council business," minutes of the standards hearing reported. The panel also balanced its decision against mitigating factors, including Councillor Parish's circumstances at the time, his apology and acknowledgement that he should not have sent the emails.

4.0 Financial Considerations

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising out of this report.

5.0 Legal Considerations

5.1 Pursuant to the Localism Act 2011, the Council has to have arrangements in place to deal with any allegations of failure to comply with the code of conduct and must appoint an Independent Person whose views are sought and taken into account by the council before it makes its decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate.

5.2 The Council, individual Members and co-opted Members are required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct in accordance with s27 of the Localism Act 2011.

The attendance at mandatory training sessions is a means to achieve this and a requirement pursuant to the Brent Members' Code of Conduct as set out in Part 5, of the council's Constitution.

6.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Considerations

6.1 There are no equality implications arising out of this report.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

7.1 As set out in the body of the report.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

8.1 Not applicable.

9.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 None.

10.0 Communication Considerations

9.1 None.

Report sign off:

Minesh Patel

Corporate Director, Finance & Resources