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Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority
Audit and Standards Committee
28 October 2026

Review of Protocol of Gifts and Hospitality

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Simon Hardiman, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Germaine Worker, Head of HR and Administration, on 01743 260210.

1 Purpose of Report

This report requests the Committee approve the Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality (attached as an appendix), following the annual review conducted by officers.

2 Recommendations

Members are asked to consider the Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality, attached as an appendix, and to approve the Policy (with or without amendment).

3 Background

The Fire Authority's Protocol on Gifts and Hospitality provides the governance framework for Members and Independent Persons when gifts or hospitality are offered, accepted, declined or received in connection with their official role. The Protocol supports the principles of openness, integrity and accountability, helps safeguard public confidence, and reduces the risk of actual or perceived conflicts of interest or improper influence.

As part of the Authority's annual review arrangements, officers have reviewed and updated the Protocol to ensure that it remains clear, proportionate and practical, and reflects current expectations relating to public perception, procurement activity, registration and reporting, equality and diversity, and oversight by the Monitoring Officer.

4 Summary of changes made to the Protocol of Gifts

Having carried out their review, officers have made a number of changes, which are listed below:

The Protocol has been reviewed and strengthened to improve clarity, transparency and practical application for Members and Independent Persons. The introduction has been expanded to include a clear purpose statement and to clarify that the Protocol applies when Members and Independent Persons are acting in, or in connection with, their official role.

The guidance has been strengthened by adding a public perception test to support decision-making before accepting any gift or hospitality. The general caution and criminal law sections have also been modernised to make the risks clearer, including the potential for inappropriate gifts or hospitality to affect, or be perceived to affect, a Member's judgement.

Additional ethical and governance safeguards have been included. The Protocol now refers expressly to the Seven Principles of Public Life and provides clearer wording on actual and perceived conflicts of interest. Further procurement-specific wording has been added to make clear that gifts or hospitality should not normally be accepted where a procurement, tendering, commissioning, grant or contract management process is live, planned or reasonably foreseeable.

The registration and reporting requirements have been made more practical and auditable. A £25 registration threshold has been added, alongside a requirement to record lower-value gifts or hospitality where there may be a perception of obligation, influence or reduced public confidence. A reporting timescale has also been added, requiring accepted, declined or inappropriate gifts and hospitality to be reported as soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, within 28 days. The guidance now also advises Members to seek advice before accepting a gift or hospitality where there is any doubt.

The arrangements for declined gifts and hospitality have been strengthened by making clear that declined offers should be recorded to protect both the Member and the Fire Authority from any later allegation or perception of impropriety.

The equality and diversity section has been widened to recognise that cultural, religious and other personal circumstances may affect how gifts or hospitality are offered or received. The revised wording makes clear that where something is accepted for these reasons, the Monitoring Officer should be advised so the matter can be recorded and any necessary action agreed.

The enforcement and advice sections have been updated for clarity and inclusivity. The responsibility for overseeing compliance now sits clearly with the Audit and Standards Committee, and dated office-holder wording has been replaced with inclusive wording referring to the Monitoring Officer or their Deputy.

The forms at Appendices A and B have also been updated. Both now include space for the Monitoring Officer to record the outcome of their review and any decision or action required. The return point for declarations has also been updated so completed forms are returned to the Monitoring Officer, with a copy to the Executive Support Team Leader.

5 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report or from the approval and implementation of the revised Protocol. Any administrative activity associated with providing advice, maintaining the register and reviewing declarations will be managed within existing officer resources and approved budgets.

6 Legal Comment

The revised Protocol supports the Authority's statutory duty under the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and complements the Members' Code of Conduct, including the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. It also reinforces compliance with the Bribery Act 2010 by making clear that gifts or hospitality must not be offered, solicited or accepted as an inducement or reward for improper performance.

The strengthened arrangements for declaring, recording and reviewing gifts and hospitality provide a proportionate framework for managing actual or perceived conflicts of interest and protecting public confidence. In addition, the Protocol makes clear that registration in accordance with the Protocol does not absolve the Member from disclosing and/or registering applicable interests.

Subject to consistent application and appropriate advice from the Monitoring Officer where doubt arises, no additional legal implications have been identified.

7 Appendix

Draft Protocol for Gifts and Hospitality

8 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.