Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO: **Ethics and Standards Committee**

DATE: **25 January 2023**

LOCATION: **Hybrid**

TITLE: Harmonisation of gifts/hospitality thresholds across all Welsh Authorities

Background

The Code of Conduct permits each Council to set a value above which councillors must declare that they have been offered gifts/hospitality (irrespective of whether it is accepted or refused).

The Ceredigion County Council Code of Conduct for Members is shown here: [SI Template (ceredigion.gov.uk)](http://ceredigion.gov.uk)

Some years ago an exercise was undertaken to compare the different thresholds amongst Welsh Councils (although not all authorities responded).

The results are shown below:

Value (£)	Total	Councils
50	2	Neath & Port Talbot, Vale of Glamorgan
25	12	Caerphilly, Camarthenshire, Conwy, Denbighshire, MAWW FRA, Monmouthshire, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, SWFRA, Swansea, Torfaen, Wrexham
21	1	Ceredigion
20	2	Anglesey, Bridgend
10	3	Blaenau Gwent, Flintshire, Gwynedd
0	1	Merthyr

Blaenau Gwent-now £20

Members will recall that the Independent Review of the Ethical standards framework in Wales report by Richard Penn (2021) stated:
"The Code does not specify any threshold for declarations of any gift, hospitality, material benefit or advantage. The threshold should be specified in the Code to ensure consistency across Wales."

https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-10/independent-review-of-the-ethical-standards-framework-in-wales.pdf

Consideration is now being given amongst Monitoring Officers in Wales to seek Standards Committees views on whether it is appropriate to voluntarily align thresholds thereby

prefiguring, and rendering unnecessary, any legislative change by Welsh Government.

The most common value was then and remains £25.

The Ceredigion County Council   limit has been £21 since 2008, as shown in the extract below:

Code of Conduct 2016:

"Ceredigion County Council resolved on 17 April 2008 to specify a value of £21."

By making such a change voluntarily authorities may be able to demonstrate   that authorities are adopting the recommendations within the Penn review where possible and taking ownership of the issues. This change would remove the "post code lottery"   of differences between individual councils which make for inconsistency.

The disadvantages might be :
  1) Loss of local choice
  2) The risk that we make a change only for WG to legislate anyway thereby requiring another change

Current Position

Consideration is being given amongst Monitoring Officers in Wales whether   it is appropriate to seek the views of Standards Committees upon agreeing a common threshold figure amongst all Welsh authorities for consistency.

Many authorities have shown an interest in a unified approach.
The views of Standards Committee is being sought as to whether there is any support for such a move, and what the common value should be.

As the Ceredigion County Council level (£21) is currently less that the common denominator (£25), the views of the Committee is sought as to the merits in agreeing an in-principle view on increasing the Ceredigion County Council threshold from £21 to £25.

RECOMMENDATION (S):

That the Ethics and Standards Committee consider:

1) whether to support the principle that the gift/hospitality threshold should be consistent amongst all Welsh authorities

2) whether to support an in-principle increase of the Ceredigion County Council threshold from £21 to £25.

3)whether to support a potential alternative in-principle change of the Ceredigion County Council threshold of £21 -upwards or downwards

4) whether all offers of gifts/hospitality should be declared even if refused and regardless of the threshold level

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

- Consistency amongst Welsh Authorities
- Pre-empt and take ownership of the Penn report recommendation and any subsequent Welsh Government legislation

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Date of Report: 22 December 2022
Acronyms: