

In 2017 the organisers of the Coffee Morning applied for a grant of £500 from the Parish Council. This was approved in January 2018 and payment made. The minutes of that meeting state that any unused grant money should be returned to the Council. It has been alleged that the funds were acquired by deception, therefore, fraud as it would have been apparent after a few months that the Coffee Morning was self-supporting. It has been suggested that the Parish Council was complicit in that fraud and negligent with tax payers' money for not monitoring the income and expenditure of the Coffee Morning on a month by month basis, and following up on the condition that the grant would be repaid if it was not required.

The Parish Council has sought legal advice and consulted with our Independent Auditor and the Director of Law and Democracy/Deputy Monitoring Officer of Thanet District Council. It was explained that if there is a possible breach of the Code of Conduct then there are certain criteria that have to be met as to whether the complaint will be referred to a Standards Assessment Sub-committee. One of the criteria is whether the issue/breach is more than 3 months old. Therefore, under the procedures this matter would be too old to investigate. The Monitoring Officer found no evidence of fraud or a breach of the Code of Conduct and advised that if there is a wish to pursue this further then contact can be made with her directly and the matter would be dealt with through the proper channels.

Investigations have not revealed any fraud or otherwise on the part of the Council in relation to the grant. The Council Guidelines and Grant Scheme Policy in place at the material time were virtually identical to our current; there is no mention of monies being returned to the Council. Additionally, the grant paperwork does not stipulate what the money can or cannot be spent on. At 2017 year-end the balance of the Coffee Morning account was approximately £300. Receipts examined support capital expenditure of £136.79 and £398 rental of the Village Hall from December 2017 to December 2018.

The Internal Auditor said that it is not feasible for a Parish Council to monitor the spending of a grant to a voluntary organisation on a month by month basis, that a Clerk/RFO has more important things to attend to (the January 2018 meeting was the penultimate of the then Clerk). Also, any issue should have been raised during the public inspection of accounts for 2017-2018.