



EXPENDITURE ON HOSPITALITY AND OFFICIAL GIFTS

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ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXPENDITURE ON HOSPITALITY AND OFFICIAL GIFTS

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this notice is to outline the principles and requirements governing the provision of hospitality, official gifts and entertainment, and to provide advice and guidance on the procedures to be followed.
- 1.2 This policy applies to all staff and Members.

2. General Principles

- 2.1 As the expenditure of ratepayers' money on official hospitality is a sensitive matter that can lead to public criticism, care must be taken to ensure that care is taken to act appropriately at all times to avoid exposing staff or Members to allegations of extravagance or impropriety.
- 2.2 Expenditure on official hospitality should be incurred only where it can be shown to be in direct support of the Council's business. Managers should always consider the justification for any hospitality and should exercise economy.
- 2.3 Staff should not use public resources for personal benefit.
- 2.4 Any breach of the rules of conduct can lead to disciplinary action and in some circumstances can be a criminal offence.

3. Fundamental Principles

- 3.1 Under the Prevention of Corruption Acts of 1906 and 1916 it is an offence for an officer in his/her official capacity:
 - i. to corruptly accept any gift or consideration as an inducement or reward for doing, or refraining from doing, anything in that capacity; or
 - ii. to show favour or disfavour to any person; or
 - iii. to receive money, gifts or consideration from a person or organisation holding or seeking to obtain a Government contract.

All of these are deemed by the Courts to have been received corruptly unless it is proven otherwise.

4. Guidelines

- 4.1 As a general rule sections or departments initiating the hospitality will fund this from their hospitality budget. Budget holders will therefore be responsible for the provision of all hospitality.
- 4.2 The provision of hospitality outside of normal housekeeping should be conducted in line with the Council's Financial Regulations.
- 4.3 Hospitality where deemed appropriate should normally be a charge on Council funds only where one or more persons present are not members of the host's own staff. However, where the provision of modest refreshments (tea/coffee and finger lunches) enables the business of large meetings to continue uninterrupted, the cost may be borne by the Council.

5. Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

5.1 Hospitality offered to visitors from outside the Council

The Council will normally meet expenditure for the provision of meals to visitors, or for working lunches where a benefit will accrue to the Council, or where such an occasion allows for the conduct of urgent business. In such circumstances, expenditure may be authorised within the following guidelines:

- iv. The number of people invited should be kept to a minimum;
- v. Council establishments should be utilised wherever possible. Where this is not practicable, hotels, restaurants, or other venues used should be appropriate to the purpose and should be compared with other suitable venues in terms of facilities and cost;
- vi. Any meal should be on a modest scale;
- vii. where no service charge is included, a tip of up to 10% may be added to the bill;
- viii. No spouses or guests of Council staff are eligible to receive official hospitality other than in exceptional circumstances and with the specific agreement of the responsible Director or Chief Executive; and
- ix. Council funds must not be used for visits to theatres or other public entertainments.

5.2 Working lunches and refreshments for official committees and ad hoc meetings

The provision of lunch at the expense of the Council will be acceptable only where it is impossible to accommodate urgent meetings other than at lunch time.

The nature of the lunch should be appropriate to the purpose, with costs kept to a minimum.

If morning or afternoon breaks are warranted, light refreshments (tea/coffee/biscuits/scones) may be provided, at the Council's expense and at the discretion of the relevant approving officer.

5.3 Hospitality offered during training courses, conferences and workshops:

An appropriate level of hospitality in line with sections 2 and 3 of this policy may be offered to participants in training courses, both residential and non-residential. This facility may also be extended to cover conferences, seminars, approved team-building sessions, workshops, etc.

5.4 Drinking and Driving

As the Council must set an example in terms of preventing drinking and driving, it might be perceived as being at fault if an attendee at an event was found to be driving with an alcohol level in excess of the legal limit. An adequate selection and supply of soft drinks should therefore always be made available at relevant functions and events.

5.5 Expenditure on Official Gifts

Official gifts, given by or on behalf of the Council should not be regarded as part of the normal conduct of Council business and should involve only modest expense.

6. Receiving of Gifts and Hospitality:

6.1 Staff and Members should only accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Council in the community. Offers to attend purely social or sporting functions should be accepted only when they are part of the life of the community or where the Council should be seen to be represented. They must be properly authorised by the relevant Director, Assistant Director or the Chief Executive.

6.2 In line with governing best practice, all hospitality received which is in excess of £15 should be recorded by the recipient in the Hospitality Register held in the Chief Executive's Office.

6.3 When hospitality has to be declined, those making the offer should be courteously but firmly informed of the procedures and standards operating within the Council.

6.4 Employees should not accept significant personal gifts from contractors, members of the public and outside suppliers, but insignificant items of token value such as pens, diaries, etc. can be retained by employees. The recommendation of the Local Government Auditor is that gifts with a value of less than **£15** be considered de minimis. Any offers of gifts with a value in excess of this should be refused.

6.5 More expensive or substantial items, valued at **£15** or more and gifts of lottery tickets, cash, gift vouchers or gift cheques, cannot on any account be accepted. All gifts offered (apart from those which are trivial or inexpensive), even if they are declined/returned need to be recorded in the register.

- 6.6 When considering whether or not to accept authorised hospitality, employees should be particularly sensitive as to its timing in relation to decisions which the Council may be taking affecting those providing the hospitality, for instance, during a tendering period of a contract for which the provider may be bidding.
- 6.7 Acceptance by employees of hospitality through attendance at relevant conferences and courses is acceptable where:
- It is clear that the hospitality is corporate rather than personal.
 - Where the Council is satisfied that no conflict of interest will arise and purchasing decisions are not compromised.

7. Summary

- 7.1 The advice contained in this notice is designed to help and inform the individual judgements where the provision of official gifts and hospitality arises. More importantly, the associated rules and requirements, **which are effective from 1 June 2009**, are intended to protect both the individual and the Council from any charges of impropriety.
- 7.2 If you have any concerns or seek further advice on this area, please contact the Director of Corporate Services.