

GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY CODE OF PRACTICE FOR MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

1. General

- i. The principles set out in this code apply equally to gifts and hospitality given to relatives of Members and Officer.
- ii. This code is being issued in order to enable Members and Officers to decide on the circumstances and the manner in which gifts and hospitality may be accepted. This code will be taken into consideration should a question arise as to whether any gift or hospitality was properly accepted. If Members and Officers are in any doubt as to whether they might accept a gift or hospitality they should decline it. This code is intended to supplement the advice given in the National Code of Local Government Conduct and to replace and advice of guidance previously issued by the Council.
- iii. Failure by Officers to comply with this code may be subject to the Authority's disciplinary procedures.

2. Legal Position

- i. With regard to Members, paragraphs 27-29 of the National Code of Local Government Conduct issued by the Secretary of State pursuant to S.31 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 contain advice on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality. The Code is reproduced in full in the Standing Orders booklet issued to all members. Failure to comply with the Code may be taken as evidence of maladministration by the Ombudsman on complaint being made.
- ii. With regard to Officers, Section 117(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that an Officer of a Local Authority shall not, under the colour of his or her office of employment, accept any fee or reward whatsoever other than his or her proper remuneration. The expression 'any fee or reward' includes such things as unauthorised commissions, gifts or presents. Any person who contravenes this commits a criminal offence and is liable to disciplinary proceedings.
- iii. The Prevention of Corruption Acts (and more specifically the Public Bodies Corrupt Practices Act 1889) make it an offence for any person "corruptly" to solicit or receive any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage as an inducement or reward for any member, officer or servant of a Public body doing, or forbearing to do, anything with which the Public body is concerned. There is a presumption that if any money or gift is paid or given by a person holding or seeking to obtain a contract with the Council, then that payment or gift is corrupt unless the contrary is proved. It should also be noted that a person acts "corruptly" if the fee or reward is given or solicited deliberately and as part of a bargain for a favour (including past favours). Members and officers should bear this in mind in applying the Code of Practice on Gifts and Hospitality and recording their reasons for acceptance of any hospitality.

3. Gifts

- i. The acceptance of gifts is a dangerous practice. As a general rule any offers of gifts, especially from organisations or persons who do work for, or might provide goods or services to the Council, or who need some decision from the Council (eg on planning application) should be tactfully refused.
- ii. Exceptions to this general rule would include modest gifts of a promotional character, including such things as calendars, diaries, articles for use in the office, etc, or a small gift of low value on the conclusion of a courtesy visit to a factory or firm.
- iii. Gifts outside of this description must be politely and firmly refused. If you find refusal difficult you should draw attention to the Council's policy by way of explanation for your refusal. Where such gifts are sent or simply left, they should, if the sender can be identified, be returned. Otherwise the gifts should be recorded and made secure. Arrangements will then be made for them to be officially appropriated to the benefit of the Council or charity. Officers should always advise the appropriate Head of Service or Director if a 'larger' gift is offered at any time. Each Department should make arrangements to record such offers.
- iv. It is important that the Council is entitled to be the beneficiary of 'preferential' trading terms NOT individuals. Where possible any such inducement should be translated into cash discounts available at the Authority.

4. Hospitality

- i. When to accept hospitality is very much a matter of judgement given the particular circumstances.
- ii. These guidelines are directed at any hospitality offered by firms or contractors and not hospitality offered when a Member or Officer is attending a function organised by a local authority or professional body.
- iii. You must exercise the utmost discretion in accepting 'outside' hospitality of any kind.
- iv. In general terms it will usually be more acceptable to join in hospitality offered to a group than to accept something unique to yourself. Contact established at a social level can often be helpful in pursuing the Council's interest. What is important is to avoid any suggestion of improper influence and to avoid giving others the opportunity reasonably to impute improper influence.
- v. Meals provided to allow parties to discuss business, or following, or prior to, such a discussion are usually acceptable. A useful test will often be whether you would provide refreshments if the venue were reversed. Examples of hospitality which is likely to be unacceptable would be paid holidays, complimentary tickets to sporting events, use of company flats or hotel suites, or special concessionary rates which

are not openly, and as a matter of practice, available equally to other organisations.

- vi. Any hospitality offered should be notified to the Chief Executive in the case of Members and Directors, to the appropriate Director in the case of Heads of Service and staff reporting direct to Directors, and to the appropriate Head of Service in the case of other staff and recorded in the registers kept by them for that purpose. In the case of Officers, the acceptance of any hospitality should (wherever possible) first be authorised by the appropriate Director or Head of Service or (in the case of a Director) by the Chief Executive. If an offer of hospitality is accepted, the reason why it is appropriate to accept should be recorded in the register.
- vii. The hospitality registers will be made available to the public for scrutiny on request. The registers will be inspected annually on behalf of the Monitoring Officer and may be reported to the Standards Committee.