



The Commission for
Victims & Survivors

Guidelines on the Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

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Date Approved	
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Date of Review	Amendments
September 2019	No changes to policy content.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of these guidelines is to outline for staff 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 by all staff in the Commission for Victims and Survivors (the Commission) where such expenditure is likely to be incurred.

2. General Principles

- 2.1. For the provision of hospitality by the Commission, it is acknowledged that in some instances cultivating and maintaining contacts with outside groups is essential, however, as with all public expenditure, provision of hospitality expenditure should be value for money and incurred in accordance with the principles of regularity and propriety. The 'Seven Principles of Public Life' (often referred to as the Nolan Principles), which were endorsed in Spending Public money: Governance and Audit Issues" (March 1996), capture the key characteristics of propriety (**see Annex A**).
- 2.2. As the expenditure of taxpayers' money on official hospitality is a sensitive matter which can lead to public criticism, care must be taken to avoid exposing the individual or the Commission to allegations of extravagance or impropriety. Staff must not use public resources for personal benefit.
- 2.3. Expenditure on official hospitality should only be incurred where it can be shown to be in direct support of the Commission's business. To this end, and bearing in mind the varied nature of the Commission's activities and working patterns, it is recognised that such expenditure may arise more frequently in some areas of the Commission than in others. The scale of hospitality should be appropriate to the needs of the occasion and the status of the guests.
- 2.4. Managers should always consider the justification for (and the form and extent of) any hospitality to be offered and should exercise economy in incurring expenditure for this purpose. It is important to note that approval must be obtained at the appropriate level prior to hospitality being offered or provided. Final decisions will lie with the Commission's Accounting Officer.
- 2.5. Staff must not use public resources for personal benefit, or receive benefits of any kind from a third party which might reasonably be seen to compromise their personal judgement, integrity or impartiality.

3. Situations Not Covered By Guidelines

- 3.1. It is recognised that there may be cases where, in the interest of the Commission, flexibility in interpretation of the strict rules may be necessary. In such instances, approval must be obtained in writing from the Accounting Officer which clearly details:-
 - Why the request falls outside the boundaries of what is normally allowable
 - Why it is considered necessary to provide or receive such Hospitality
 - How it will directly benefit the Commission
 - The expected consequences of the request being refused

4. Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality Offered

Gifts and Hospitality Register

- 4.1. The Commission will maintain a 'Register of Gifts and Hospitality' recording all gifts and hospitality offered to and accepted or rejected by Commission staff, their spouses, partners etc. It will also detail all hospitality provided by the Commission.
- 4.2. A sample template for the 'Gifts and Hospitality Register Received' is included at **Annex B**. The Accounting Officer will be responsible for monitoring the Register on a monthly basis.
- 4.3. Each 'Gifts and Hospitality Register' should record expensive gifts and/or hospitality that have been accepted or rejected. It is not necessary to include inexpensive gifts on the Register (such as calendars, pens, diaries), however working lunches should be included to ensure they do not become a regular occurrence
- 4.4. Only Gifts and Hospitality with a value of more than £10 per person will recorded on the Register.
- 4.5. Each 'Gifts and Hospitality Register' will be open to Internal Audit inspections. In addition, the registers are subject to Freedom of Information (FOI) queries.
- 4.6. The Commission will publish each 'Gifts and Hospitality Register' detailing gifts and hospitality provided or received. These registers will be published monthly on the Commission's website, and FOI requesters will be referred to the published information. All staff should bear this in mind when deciding on the acceptance of any gift or hospitality.

5. Requirements

- 5.1. Hospitality should be in the form of food and refreshments appropriate to the occasion. There should normally only be a charge on public funds where two or more persons present are not members of Commission staff. However, where the provision of tea/coffee and biscuits/scones enables the business of large meetings to continue, there may be a charge on public funds where the alternative would be an unacceptable interruption of business.
- 5.2. The Accounting Officer may further delegate authority for approving expenditure. Authority for approving expenditure on refreshments for committees, meetings etc may be delegated as appropriate to the Head of Corporate Services, Head of Communications and Engagement or the Head of Research and Policy Development.
- 5.3. See **Annex C** for detailed guidance on the provision of Gifts and Hospitality.
- 5.4. Full details specifying the purpose of each function, the number of guests and Commission officials attending, together with the itemised costs of refreshments, room hire, etc should be shown on the hospitality approval form (**See Annex D**).
- 5.5. Approval must be obtained on this form prior to the event taking place and the names of all proposed/anticipated attendees must be listed on the form or an attached sheet. This information must be held with the original invoice.
- 5.6. Official hospitality should be contained within approved budgets.

6. Drinking and Driving

- 6.1. Staff will recognise the need to set an example in terms of preventing drinking and driving. To this end, and bearing in mind the possibility that the Commission 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, the following guidelines should be followed at relevant functions/events:
 - a) consideration should be given to providing low alcohol alternatives to alcoholic drinks; and
 - b) an adequate selection and supply of soft drinks should always be made available.

7. Expenditure on Official Gifts

- 7.1. The regulations governing expenditure on official gifts are contained in Section 34.1 of Government Accounting (NI). Official gifts should not be regarded as part of the normal conduct of Commission business and should involve only modest expense.
- 7.2. The Commission's Accounting Officer may approve the purchase of corporate gifts up to the value of £100 using the Gifts Approval Form (**See Annex E**).
- 7.3. For gifts over £100, a case should be made, with the approval of the Accounting Officer, to The Executive Office who will consider the proposal and pursue clearance with DFP Supply.
- 7.4. See **Annex F** for letter to return gifts and hospitality for which approval has not been given.

8. Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

- 8.1. See **Annex G** for detailed guidance on the acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality and **Annex H** for acceptance of gifts approval form.
- 8.2. Only Gifts and Hospitality with a value of more than £10 per person will be recorded on the Register.

9. Forum Expenditure

- 9.1. The work of the Forum is integral to the Commission and the requirements of the Forum membership and the Forum as a whole are unique.
- 9.2. Expenditure on hospitality (residential or non-residential) **will not** be recorded on the central Gifts and Hospitality Register as approval for this is covered by the Forum Business Case which has received prior Departmental approval.
- 9.3. Expenditure on hospitality (residential or non-residential) which is provided to members of Commission staff **will be** recorded on the central Gifts and Hospitality Register.
- 9.4. Expenditure on, or acceptance of Gifts related to Forum activity for members or Commission staff will be required to follow these guidelines and the appropriate approval is required to be sought.

10. Roles and Responsibilities in Relation to the Acceptance and/or Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

- 10.1. Employees must not use public resources for personal benefit or receive benefits in kind from a third party which may be seen to compromise their judgement or integrity. Care should be taken to avoid actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interests when employing consultants and procuring goods and services.
- 10.2. Line Managers should be satisfied that any expenditure on gifts and hospitality incurred is in the best interest of the Commission, provides value for money and complies with current policies and guidelines. Line Managers should ensure that all staff comply with current guidance on both the acceptance of and provision of hospitality.
- 10.3. Approving and Authorising Officers are reminded of their responsibility for ensuring adherence to the guidelines. It is important that the Accounting Officer has a defence against charges that the level of gifts and hospitality accepted or provided is excessive or that the Commission's staff are being entertained at the taxpayer's expense. Where there is doubt about any particular event, Approving Officers should seek advice or err on the side of caution and reject the request.
- 10.4. Officers authorising payments are reminded of their responsibility to ensure that the gifts and hospitality extended be properly approved.
- 10.5. The Accounting Officer has an advisory role on gifts and hospitality in the Commission, ensuring that guidelines are in place in respect of the provision of gifts or hospitality, and that any possible conflicts of interest are identified and that appropriate action is taken to resolve them.
- 10.6. The Audit and Risk Committee will receive a quarterly update on the Gifts and Hospitality Register, including any extraordinary or unusual expenditure on or receipt of gifts and hospitality.
- 10.7. Internal Audit has a role in the monitoring of compliance against policy and guidance. Additionally Internal Audit is available to provide advice and guidance on matters relating to the acceptance or provision of gifts and hospitality.

11. Summary

- 11.1. The advice contained in these Guidelines is designed to help and inform the individual judgements to be made by staff where the provision of official gifts and hospitality arises.
- 11.2. More importantly, the associated rules and requirements, are intended to protect both the individual and the Commission in general from any charges of impropriety.
- 11.3. As with the acceptance of gifts and hospitality, the basic rule is that staff should be guided by the appropriate standards of conduct expected of a member of Commission Staff as set out in the Commission's Code of Conduct (Annex I).

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

Below is a section from the First Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. These “Seven Principles of Public Life” capture the key characteristics of propriety and is a reminder that issues of propriety and corporate governance are clearly linked.

Selflessness Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests in relation to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests.

Leadership Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Guidance for the Provision of Gifts and Hospitality

ANNEX C

Type of Event Requiring Gift/Hospitality	Circumstances where Gift/Hospitality may be provided at public expenses	Description of Gift/Hospitality	Authorisation or Special Requirements and action to be taken
Meetings	Meetings (on Commission premises) expected to last more than one hour and extending over a break, where attendees from outside the Commission are included.	Tea/Coffee and biscuits	<p>Prior approval not needed if less than 12 people are attending.</p> <p>Prior approval needed if 12 or more people are attending</p> <p>Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if external catering over £10 per person.</p>
Working Lunches	Meetings (on Commission premises) expected to last more than one hour and extending over the lunch break, where attendees from outside the Commission are included.	Tea/Coffee and sandwiches	<p>Prior approval required by Accounting Officer or delegated persons.</p> <p>For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner.</p> <p>Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if over £10 per person.</p>

Type of Event Requiring Gift/Hospitality	Circumstances where Gift/Hospitality may be provided at public expenses	Description of Gift/Hospitality	Authorisation or Special Requirements and action to be taken
Training Courses/Workshops/Away days/Seminars/Conferences etc	Residential Non-Residential Residential/Non-residential	Meals and light refreshments to be provided for delegates. Beverages (including alcohol) are permissible with evening meals up to a recommended limit of one third of the total cost of the meal. Lunch may be provided where it facilitates the running of the course or where alternative provision is not available. Unless part of a fixed package, beverages (with the exception of tea/coffee) should not normally be provided with lunches. Refreshments provided morning or afternoon should be limited to tea, coffee and biscuits or scones.	Prior approval required by Accounting Officer or delegated persons. For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner. Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if over £10 per person.
Entertaining Guests (lunchtime)	Where it is necessary to entertain visitors at lunchtime.	The total cost per head including refreshments and any service charge or tip must not exceed £30. Alcoholic beverages should not normally be provided with lunch. Refreshments must not exceed one third of the total bill. Receipts to cover the expenditure must be obtained.	Prior approval required by Accounting Officer or delegated persons. For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner. Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if over £10 per person.

Type of Event Requiring Gift/Hospitality	Circumstances where Gift/Hospitality may be provided at public expenses	Description of Gift/Hospitality	Authorisation or Special Requirements and action to be taken
Entertaining Guests (in the evening)	<p>Where it is necessary to entertain visitors in the evening.</p> <p><i>Note: When considering the entertainment of visitors, regard should be given to keeping as low as possible the number of public sector visitors; and the Commission should not normally bear the cost of hospitality for public sector visitors except where they form a minor and necessary part of the guest list.</i></p>	<p>The total cost per head including refreshments and any service charge or tip must not exceed £30.</p> <p>Where the hospitality takes the form of an evening meal, the element for refreshments (including alcoholic and soft beverages) should not normally exceed a third of the total bill.</p> <p>If no service charge is included in the bill, a tip of 10% would be reasonable, but this should be contained within the maximum cost per head specified above.</p> <p>Receipts to cover the expenditure must be obtained.</p>	<p>Prior approval required by Accounting Officer or delegated persons.</p> <p>For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner.</p> <p>Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if over £10 per person.</p>
Expenditure on official gifts	<p>Where it is appropriate to provide a corporate gift to an individual, or organisation e.g. Visitors from a Foreign Government Organisation. Any gifts should involve modest expense and should not be regarded as part of the normal conduct of Commission business.</p>	<p>Gift should not usually exceed £100 (including VAT).</p>	<p>Prior approval required by Accounting Officer or delegated persons.</p> <p>For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner.</p> <p>Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register'.</p> <p>If any gift exceeds £100 (including VAT) a case should be made, to pursue through DFP.</p>



APPROVAL FOR PROVIDING HOSPITALITY

Type of Hospitality	Hospitality offered to visitors from outside the Commission	
	Working lunches and refreshments for official committees and other ad hoc meetings	
	Hospitality offered during training courses, conferences, workshops etc	
Date of Event		
Purpose of Event		
Names of proposed/anticipated attendees (attach separate sheet if necessary)		
Total Estimated/actual cost including VAT	£	
Refreshments (provide detail)	£	
Room Hire (provide detail)	£	
Other (provide detail)	£	

Approval by

Gifts & Hospitality Register updated YES or NO (if more than £10 pp)

Name _____

Name _____

Job Title _____

Job Title _____

Date _____

Date _____

APPROVAL MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE THE EVENT TAKES PLACE



APPROVAL FOR EXPENDITURE ON GIFTS

Please provide details below;

Name of person(s) receiving Gift	
Type of Gift and date on which it is to be given	
Reason for giving Gift	
Offer of Gift/Hospitality accepted?	YES or NO
Cost including VAT	£

Approval by

Name _____

Job Title _____

Date _____

Gifts & Hospitality Register updated **YES or NO**

Name _____

Job Title _____

Date _____

APPROVAL MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE GIFT IS PURCHASED/PROVIDED

INSERT ONTO HEADED PAPER

Name
Address

Date

Dear

The Commission for Victims and Survivors operates a Gifts and Hospitality Policy to ensure high standards of propriety in the conduct of its business.

On account of public confidence, perception is as important as reality and because of this I am obliged to return your offer of INSERT: *Name of gift / hospitality*.

This is not in any way meant to offend or to imply that your [gift/hospitality] was offered in anything but the utmost good faith, but is designed to protect both individual members of staff and the Commission for Victims and Survivors.

I hope you will accept our response in that spirit and that we can look forward to continued effective working relationships.

Yours sincerely

Name
Job Title

Guidance on Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality

ANNEX G

Hospitality Offered	Appropriate to Accept?	Prior Approval Required?	Further Action Necessary
Modest conventional hospitality (e.g. Working lunch).	Yes		
More formal lunch or dinner, by prior invitation	Yes subject to approval	Approval required by Accounting Officer. For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner.	Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if more than £10 per person. Ensure that the Commission will not be over-represented at the function concerned.
Hospitality offered to a team	Yes subject to approval	Approval required by Accounting Officer.	Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if more than £10 per person.
Commemorative event or trade promotion organized by contractor, consultant or supplier with a meal.	Yes subject to approval	Approval required by Accounting Officer.	Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if more than £10 per person.
Annual dinner of Professional Institute or Association (a) Where officer is a guest of the Institute or Association; and (b) Where officer is the guest of a particular consultant, contractor or supplier:	Yes subject to approval Yes subject to approval	Approval required by Accounting Officer. For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner.	Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register' if more than £10 per person..
Cultural or sporting events as a guest.	No	Not applicable	Should be refused or returned. Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register'.

Hospitality Offered	Appropriate to Accept?	Prior Approval Required?	Further Action Necessary
Overseas visits to inspect manufacturers products	Yes subject to approval	Approval required by Accounting Officer. For Accounting Officer approval required from Commissioner.	Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register'. Travel and accommodation to be paid by the Commission. Acceptance of modest hospitality permitted.
Occasional seasonal or modest gifts, (e.g. company calendars, diaries, inexpensive pens or stationary sets. (Value should not exceed £50)	Yes	No	None
Expensive gifts (Value of more than £50, including gifts of lottery tickets, cash, gift vouchers or gift cheques)	No	Not applicable	Should be refused or returned. Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register'.
Trade or Discount Cards, or Air Miles through which an individual Officer might personally benefit from the purchase of goods or services at a reduced rate.	No	Not applicable	Should be refused or returned. Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register'.
Trade or Discount Cards, or Air Miles through which an individual Officer might personally benefit from the purchase of goods or services at a reduced rate.	No	Not applicable	Should be refused or returned. Record in 'Gifts & Hospitality Register'.



APPROVAL FOR ACCEPTANCE OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

Please provide details below; *delete as appropriate

Name of person(s) receiving Gift/Hospitality*	
Type of Gift/Hospitality* and date on which it is to be received	
Provider of Gift/Hospitality*	
Why was offer of Gift/Hospitality* made?	
Offer of Gift/Hospitality* accepted?	YES or NO
Reason why approval has/has not* been granted	
Has Gift/Hospitality been returned, used or disposed of?	
Estimated/actual cost including VAT	£

Approval by

Name _____

Job Title _____

Date _____

Gifts & Hospitality Register updated **YES or NO**

Name _____

Job Title _____

Date _____

APPROVAL MUST BE OBTAINED BEFORE GIFT IS RECEIVED/ACCEPTED