

# Gifts and Hospitality Policy for Employees

A guide for Council employees regarding gifts and  
hospitality received in the course of their duties

[www.colchester.gov.uk](http://www.colchester.gov.uk)

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 These guidelines are here to help employees decide whether or not they should accept offers of gifts or hospitality. In local government you need to be very careful to ensure that the public confidence in your own and the Council's integrity cannot be damaged in any way by your actions.
- 1.2 **If you have any doubts about an offer of a gift or form of hospitality you must refuse and seek the advice of your manager, Assistant Director or the Monitoring Officer.**

## 2. Gifts

- 2.1 You must be **very careful** when accepting gifts – in some circumstances you could break the law. The general rule is to politely and tactfully refuse offers of gifts from people or organisations who do or might provide work, goods or services to the Council or who seek some decision from the Council – for example, in respect of planning permission.
- 2.2 Gifts of the following type **may** be accepted:
- **Modest** gifts of a promotional character such as calendars, diaries, articles for use in the office.
  - A **small** gift received at Christmas or on the conclusion of a courtesy visit to a factory or firm, or gifts which are presented at civic or ceremonial occasions.
- 2.3 You must appreciate that these exceptions apply only to **modest gifts** and an expensive gift must not be accepted. Again, if you are **in doubt, refuse** the gift and **seek advice** from your manager or Assistant Director.
- 2.4 Gifts which are intended for the Council as a corporate body or intended for a service area can be accepted but you **must not** retain these. Such gifts must be given to the Assistant Director for the service area concerned or the Chief Executive as appropriate.

## 3. Hospitality

- 3.1 You must use your judgement when accepting an offer of hospitality. You should ask yourself whether members of the public, knowing the facts of the situation,

could reasonably think that you might be influenced by the hospitality offered. If the answer is yes, the hospitality should be declined. You should consider:

- the person or organisation offering the hospitality;
- the scale and nature of the hospitality; and
- the timing of the hospitality in relation to decisions to be made by the Council.

3.2 Some **examples** of situations and circumstances where hospitality might be **acceptable** are:

- Routine meals at establishments used by the local business community, to discuss business, prior to or following such a discussion. A useful test will often be whether you would provide similar hospitality if the situation was reversed.
- Customary lunches and dinners given at conferences where there are numerous guests and where invitations are formally received and accepted in advance of the conference.
- Courtesy invitations by major companies providing services to the Council, e.g. Bankers, Insurers etc.
- Invitations to join other company guests at sponsored cultural, sporting events or other public performances and openings of other special occasions.
- Civic and ceremonial occasions when accompanying the Mayor.

3.3 Some **examples** of situations and circumstances where hospitality is **unacceptable** are:

- Paid or concessionary holidays or travel.
- Other concessionary rates which are not openly and as a matter of practice, available equally to other organisations.
- Offers of hotel and/or theatre tickets in London (except in circumstances described in 3.2 above).
- The use of company flats or hotel suites.
- Extravagant meals at exclusive venues.
- Frequent hospitality from one source.

3.4 In general, it is usually more acceptable for you to accept hospitality when it is offered to a group rather than something which unique to yourself. You should take greater care if you are offered hospitality when the person or organisation has current dealings with the Council, or such dealings are in prospect.

## 4. Recording Gifts and Hospitality

4.1 **All** gifts and hospitality which you accept **must** be recorded as soon as possible in the online Gifts and Hospitality Register which can be accessed via COLIN. Any gift or hospitality must be countersigned by your manager. The register is

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inspected regularly by the Monitoring Officer. The register is subject to regular audit by the Council's auditors.

**Access the register:** [Click Here](#)

**It is your personal responsibility for ensuring that your acceptance of hospitality and/or gifts is entered in the record. Any inappropriate receipt of any gift or hospitality could lead to disciplinary action.**



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council's Members' Code of Conduct requires Members and Co-opted Members to include on their Notice of Registerable Interests details of any gift or hospitality received as part of their official duties which may be over the value of fifty pounds. It is also a breach of the Code for a Member to use their position as a Councillor improperly to confer on or secure for themselves or any other person an advantage or disadvantage.
- 1.2 The following guidance aims to assist Members and Co-opted Members in complying with the Members' Code of Conduct but it also goes beyond these basic provisions and seeks to provide wider guidance so Members can avoid situations where their integrity may be caused to be questioned as a result of gifts and hospitality.

## **2. The Legal Position**

- 2.1 The Bribery Act 2010 makes it an offence to offer, promise or give a bribe. The Act also makes it an offence to request, agree to receive, or accept a bribe.

- 2.2 The Act also creates a separate offence of bribing a foreign public official with the intention of obtaining or retaining business or an advantage in the conduct of business. A corporate offence is committed where a commercial organisation fails to prevent bribery that is intended to obtain or retain business, or an advantage in the conduct of business, for the organisation.

### **3. General Advice**

- 3.1 Members are advised to treat with extreme caution any offer or gift, favour or hospitality that is made personally to them. The person or organisation making the offer may be doing business or seeking to do business with the Council or may be applying to the Council for some sort of decision in respect of which it is imperative that the Member's independence should not be compromised e.g. planning approval.

### **4. Gifts**

The following rules should be applied:

- 4.1 Other than the exceptions listed in 4.3 and 4.4 below, a Member should refuse any gift offered to them or to an immediate relative of the Member, by any person who has or may seek to have dealings with the Council. Members must notify the Monitoring Officer of all such refusals as soon as reasonably practicable regardless of the value of the offered gift (unless the gift falls within 4.3 or 4.4 below). The Monitoring Officer will maintain a record for this purpose.
- 4.2 Members should note that the Members' Code of Conduct requires all gifts and hospitality which exceed fifty pounds in value to be entered on the Members Notice of Registerable Interests which is published on the Council's website. Any gifts or hospitality must be registered within twenty eight days of receipt.

The exceptions where it may be appropriate to accept a gift are:

- 4.3 The gift is of purely token, promotional advertising value given to a wide range of people, e.g. pens, key rings and other promotional items. As such promotional gifts will usually be less than fifty pounds in value generally there will be no need to register but in cases of doubt Members should err on the side of caution and register the gift.
- 4.4 A small gift where refusal would cause needless offence and the giver is not currently seeking a decision or business from the Council. Again, because such gifts would be of a small value generally there will be no need to register but in cases of doubt Members should err on the side of caution and register the gift.
- 4.5 A gift to the Council. This is particularly relevant to the Mayor or Deputy Mayor who may receive gifts on behalf of the Council. A separate record of such gifts is maintained by the Mayor's Secretary. Gifts made to the Mayor's charities need not be recorded.
- 4.6 Gifts given as prizes at exhibitions, conferences, seminars etc. as part of a free raffle or draw may be accepted but they belong to the Council and should be registered with the Monitoring Officer as soon as reasonably practicable (notwithstanding that their value may be less than the fifty pounds specified in the Members Code of Conduct). The



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Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chairman of the Governance Committee will determine whether it is appropriate to retain the gift in question.

- 4.7 Whilst it may be acceptable to accept a token or small gift on one occasion Members should refuse repeated gifts, even if these are individually not of a significant value.
- 4.8 Cash or monetary gifts should always be refused without exception and the refusal notified to the Monitoring Officer as set out in paragraph 4.2 above.

## **5. Hospitality**

- 5.1 Increasingly private companies offer hospitality e.g. free drinks, tickets to shows or hotel accommodation to persons with whom they do business or with whom they hope to do business in the future. Such hospitality could convey the impression that Members' judgement would be influenced. It would however be too rigid to say that no hospitality can be accepted. Members are reminded that any hospitality which exceeds fifty pounds is required by the Members Code of Conduct to be registered. However, Members may wish to notify the Monitoring Officer of hospitality offered but refused and hospitality which is less than the fifty pounds limit specified in the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 5.2 Examples of hospitality which may be acceptable follow, but much may depend on the particular circumstances, e.g. who is providing the hospitality, why the Member is there and the nature of the dealings between the Council, the Member and the provider of the hospitality:
  - A working meal provided to allow parties to discuss or to continue to discuss business. (A useful test will often be whether you would provide similar hospitality if the situation was reversed).
  - An invitation to attend a dinner or function of a Society, Institute or other non-commercial body with whom the Council has contact.
  - Invitations to attend functions where the Member represents the Council (opening ceremonies, public speaking events, conferences)
  - An invitation to attend an event which is categorised as a Civic function or reception
  - Civic hospitality provided by another Public Authority.
- 5.3 The following are examples of unacceptable hospitality:
  - Holidays, including accommodation and travel arrangements
  - Offers of theatre tickets for the Member and their family or free travel
  - Personal invitations for evenings out with representatives from a company or firm who have dealings with the council or who are likely to have dealings in the future.

Members are advised to err on the side of caution and if in any doubt as to the integrity of the offer / invite, the Member should consult the Monitoring Officer or refuse.

## **6. Declaration of Gifts or Hospitality at Meetings**

- 6.1 The Members Code of Conduct requires that any gift or hospitality received and recorded on a Members' Notice of Registerable Interest must be declared by that Member at any meeting for a period of three years from the date of receipt of the gift or

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hospitality whenever the matter under decision relates to the provider of the gift or hospitality concerned.

**7. Further advice**

- 7.1 If any Member has any concerns regarding this Guidance, they must seek advice from the Monitoring Officer.