

Guidance on Hospitality

[Final 30.01.2003]

1. The following guidelines are intended to provide a framework within which the Assembly secretariat may provide hospitality to visitors, business colleagues and staff in a manner that is both appropriate and robust if placed under public scrutiny. In addition the guidance addresses situations where members of the Assembly secretariat may find themselves in receipt of hospitality (Annex A).
2. The principles to be applied to hospitality are¹:
 - Hospitality should be in the direct interest of the Assembly;
 - The level of hospitality offered should be appropriate; and,
 - Expenditure must be able to withstand both internal and external scrutiny.

General Secretariat Hospitality

3. In general, day-to-day decisions on the manner in which hospitality is provided and to whom it is extended is matter of discretion for staff at Principal Clerk/Head of Function level, with the ultimate responsibility for the hospitality offered within a directorate resting with the Director. Each occasion of hospitality should be noted and recorded in the hospitality record book held by each Principal Clerk/Head of Function and Directors are asked to review this record periodically to ensure that they are aware of, and can justify, all hospitality offered within their division. The following guidelines are provided to advise these decisions:
 - The provision of refreshments for business meetings and working lunches is part of normal Assembly business practice and is not considered hospitality. Business refreshments are addressed in Annex B of this paper.
 - When deciding the number of Assembly representatives (excluding Members) that should participate in a hospitality function a ratio of one Assembly representative to each visitor should not normally be exceeded. It is acknowledged that there may be occasions when a higher ratio of Assembly representatives may be appropriate, provided that the arrangements are approved in advance by the responsible Director and formally noted in the hospitality record book.

¹ DAO(DFP) 17/97 Hospitality

- Lunchtime hospitality extended to visitors to Parliament Buildings should normally be delivered using in-house facilities, only in exceptional circumstances should an alternative venue be used, e.g. in-house facilities are fully committed.

- When extending hospitality in the evening consideration should again be given to using in-house facilities but any decision will ultimately be based on the nature of the visit and the level of formality sought.

- All in-house hospitality should be invoiced to the appropriate cost centre. Bills for in-house hospitality should not be settled using Assembly procurement cards.

- When providing hospitality consideration should be given to costs and as a general rule hospitality (excluding alcohol) should normally not exceed:

At lunchtime	£15-20 per person*
In the evening	£25-30 per person*

** the average cost per person on any one occasion, i.e. if 4 people attend a lunch, the total food bill should not exceed £80 or in the case of an evening meal £120.*

- Where appropriate, alcoholic drinks may be provided, within the following guidelines:

At lunchtime	One pre-lunch drink per person One glass of wine per person
In the evening	One pre-dinner drink per person ½ bottle of wine per person (cost of wine not to exceed 33% of total bill)

Queries and Advice

4. The manner in which hospitality is provided and to whom it is extended is a matter for discretion for staff at Director or Principal Clerk level or above. However staff wishing clarification or advice may contact the Head of Finance in the first instance.

Annex A

Receipt of Hospitality

When considering an invitation of hospitality from an individual or organisation staff must consider whether by accepting the invitation they are in anyway placing themselves in a position that might compromise the integrity of the Assembly or the impartiality of the Secretariat.

- **Other Parliamentary Bodies**

When visiting or meeting colleagues from other Parliaments staff may accept the hospitality extended to them.

- **Government Departments and other Public Sector Organisations**

In general hospitality may be accepted, however staff must consider if there is any potential for conflicts of interest, e.g. invitations from special interest group who may wish to have influence on Committee decisions.

- **Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly**

With the exception of instances which could be described as business refreshments (see Annex B) staff should not accept hospitality from Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, or their staff.

- **Political Parties**

Staff may not accept hospitality from any Political Party, regardless of whether they have any have sitting Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, or their staff.

- **Commercial Organisations**

Staff must, at all times, exercise discretion when accepting hospitality from suppliers, retailers and consultants. It is appropriate to accept invitations to public events and business functions if a business benefit can be demonstrated, however staff are advised to discuss all invitations with their line managers.

Staff must not accept hospitality invitations from an organisation that they believe may have an opportunity to establish a commercial relationship with the Assembly business during the forward 12 months. If a member of staff, in discussion with their line manager, believes there is a business benefit in accepting the invitation that would override this restriction they must seek prior approval from the Head of Procurement before accepting.

Annex B

Provision of Business Refreshments

The provision of refreshments for business meetings and working lunches is part of normal Assembly business practice and is not considered hospitality. In general, day-to-day decisions on refreshments are a matter of discretion for staff at Principal Clerk/Head of Function level, with the ultimate responsibility within a directorate resting with the Director. This Annex sets guidelines that to be followed when deciding whether or not to provide refreshments.

- ***Routine Divisional or Directorate meetings***

Refreshments should not normally be provided unless the meeting corresponds with normal coffee times, in which case managers may wish to provide refreshments in lieu of the normal coffee break.

- ***Special Directorate meeting or Team Briefings***

Refreshments may be provided if the Director considers it appropriate.

- ***Inter-Directorate/Senior Management Meetings***

Refreshments will normally be provided.

- ***Working Lunches***

Provision of working lunches is a decision for staff at Director Level. A working lunch should only be provided when business requires that a meeting continues through the normal lunch break and consequently staff take only a short break for personal comfort. Working lunches should be provided in situ and do not include the use of in-house catering facilities such as the Members Dining Room or Brassiere.

- ***Training using facilities within Parliament Buildings***

Mid-morning and mid-afternoon refreshments will normally be provided. A working lunch should only be provided if the criteria set out a 4 above are met.

- ***Training using facilities outside Parliament Buildings***

Refreshments will normally be provided.

- ***Alcohol***

Alcoholic drinks should not normally be provided with business refreshments, however should circumstances arise where a Director believes that it is appropriate to provide alcohol this must be agreed in advance with their appropriate member of the Senior Management Team and the Clerk to the Assembly.