



Aberdeenshire *housing partnership*

Gifts and Hospitality Policy

FEBRUARY 2005

The principle of integrity requires that Board members and staff should not place themselves under obligation that might influence, or be perceived to influence, the conduct of their duties.

The following policy should provide Board members and staff with appropriate ways of dealing with the situations they may find themselves in regarding hospitality and gifts.

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Gifts and Hospitality Policy

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 All Board members and staff of the Partnership are required to maintain a high standard of conduct in respect of the acceptance of gifts, rewards or hospitality of any kind. It is normally clear whether an offer of hospitality, or the like, from another party might be regarded as excessive or unreasonable and the conduct of Board members and staff in this respect should be equally clear.
- 1.2 The intention of the policy is to ensure that the Partnership can demonstrate that no undue influence has been applied or could be said to have been applied by any tenant, supplier or anyone else dealing with the Partnership. The Partnership should be able to show that all decisions are reached in accordance with its governing Memorandum and Articles. Any consideration of whether or not the principles of the policy have been breached will be determined by reference to this principle.
- 1.3 Any breach of this policy could lead to disciplinary action and may constitute gross misconduct.
- 1.4 Board members and staff shall not use their authority or office for personal gain and shall seek to uphold and enhance the standing of the Partnership by:
 - Maintaining an unimpeachable standards of honesty and integrity in all their businesses relationships;
 - Complying with the letter and spirit of the law, and contractual obligations
 - Rejecting any business practice that might be deemed improper
 - At all times in their business relationships acting to maintain the interests and good reputation of the Partnership
- 1.5 As a general rule a member of the Board, or a member of Staff, should never accept gifts other than those of a minor nature, nor allow extravagance in any entertainment received or given. Extreme caution should be exercised where an offer of gift, favour or hospitality is made and the following policy should be adhered to when any such offer is received.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 This policy sets out the standards of conduct in relation to the acceptance of gifts and hospitality. "Gifts" and "Hospitality" can refer to a wide range of activities but for current purposes can broadly be considered as:
 - A gift of money, goods or services or combination of these.
 - A loan of money, goods or services or combination of these.
 - The receipt of beneficial terms that are not generally available regarding the purchase or lease of goods or services.

'Goods' include vehicles or any type of equipment. 'Services' includes invitations to events, travel, accommodation or work carried out.

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3. Scope of Policy

- 3.1 The policy applies to all staff of the Partnership and members of the Board in respect of their Partnership responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the Management Team to ensure that this policy is followed by all employees.
- 3.2 Staff should be aware that disciplinary action may be taken where there is a breach of this policy.
- 3.3 Specific issues may arise where there are opportunities for the Partnership or individuals to enter into cooperative arrangements with local bodies including other registered social landlords. Where such opportunities are considered, the following guidelines should be observed to ensure that the spirit of this policy is adhered to:
- The cooperative activity should support the overall objectives and priorities of the Partnership.
 - These activities should show tangible benefits to the Partnership and its charitable objectives
 - The work should support the activities and decisions of the Partnership
 - The overall aim of the agreement should be considered and take account of the need for probity and transparency

Any gifts or hospitality obtained or given should be documented in the Gifts and Hospitality Register where appropriate.

4. Hospitality Offered to Board Members/Staff Members

- 4.1 The receipt of hospitality should only be accepted when it is clearly in the Partnership's interest. It is essential that any suggestion of improper influence should be avoided. Hospitality may only be accepted from contractors where it is clear that acceptance cannot be misconstrued. Board and staff members should take care when accepting hospitality during tendering processes. The clear rule of thumb is that when in doubt politely refuse.
- 4.2 Board members should notify the Chair or the Chief Executive before any acceptance of hospitality when offered due to their role as a Board member of Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership. Staff should inform their line manager of any offers of hospitality.
- 4.3 The following examples give general guidance on acceptable and unacceptable hospitality:

Generally Acceptable

- A working lunch provided to allow the parties to discuss business, though it should be remembered that lavish provision could well raise questions
- Attendance in an official capacity at functions to which invitations have also been sent to representatives of other organisations
- Attendance in an official capacity at functions arranged by public utilities and public authorities

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- An invitation to join other company guests at events involving hospitality e.g. football tickets with meal before or after (although caution should be exercised over the frequency of such acceptances)

Generally Unacceptable

- The provision of holiday or weekend hospitality
- The use of a company flat or hotel suite
- An invitation to join other company guests at events involving lavish hospitality e.g. golfing weekend
- When a matter such as arbitration arises from a contract, any offer of hospitality should be refused even if, in normal circumstances, it would come within the acceptable category

For example: there would be no objection to acceptance of an invitation to the annual dinner of a large trade organisation or a similar body with which the Board or staff member is much in day to day contact; or an occasion where a firm arranges hospitality for a wide spectrum of their customers and there is no element of personal gain (examples of personal gain would be the provision of tickets to golf tournaments, football matches etc.); or of modest working lunches in the course of official visits providing the frequency is reasonable.

5. Gifts Offered to Board Members/Staff Members

5.1 It is important to be careful when gifts are offered by organisations (or their representatives) which are able to provide work, goods or services to the Partnership or which seek authority from the Partnership to carry out their businesses. In general, therefore, a board or staff member should politely refuse any personal gift offered to them or any member of their family as defined in the Partnership's code of conduct by any person or body that has, or seeks to have, dealings with Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership.

5.2 The following examples give general guidance on acceptable and unacceptable gifts:

- Small gifts of a promotional or advertising character, which are often given to a wide range of people, e.g. calendars, diaries, pens, charts and other similar articles.
- Small gifts given on the conclusion of a visit of a type normally given by the organisation concerned, or where contractor wishes to mark the completion of a new building, when such gifts are made to a number of people on the same occasion or as part of a normally accepted practice.
- Small gifts where the refusal would cause needless offence and the giver is not seeking a decision or business from the Partnership but merely wishes to express thanks for advice, help or co-operation received.
- Gifts of alcohol, hampers of food or other articles which could be misinterpreted by the public or assume a more serious importance in any form of future enquiry or investigation, should not be accepted, except when reflecting traditional times of gift giving e.g. Christmas or anniversaries.. If in doubt any such gifts may be accepted and passed on to a charity. In these cases the giver's approval should be sought.

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- Where purchased items include “free gifts”, such a gift should be used for Partnership’s business or donated and used for charity raffles etc
- 5.3 In summary, if a Board or staff member is offered gifts or hospitality, they must decide how to respond, bearing in mind that it is easy for the receipt of gifts, hospitality and entertainment expenses to give rise to misconceptions.

6. Hospitality and Gifts Offered by Board or Staff Members

- 6.1 It may be appropriate on occasions for Board or staff members to host a reception for a number of individuals and for refreshments to be provided from the Partnership’s budget. In such circumstances, the reception should be relevant to the business of the Partnership and all reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that costs are kept to a minimum and that they are appropriate to the occasion.
- 6.2 All gifts given should be small (maximum value £25), should be approved by the Board and recorded in the Gifts and Hospitality Register. The register should record the date of the decision, a description of the gift, the value, who it was given to and their position within their organisation.
- 6.3 Conventional hospitality, provided it is normal and reasonable in the circumstances, may be offered in the normal course of business, or when the Partnership is represented at Conferences. For example an isolated meal would not offend as a rule whereas the offer of regular invitations would be unacceptable. All such hospitality offered must be approved and recorded by the same means as the giving of gifts as above. However, the Chair and Chief Executive may offer conventional hospitality up to the value of £60 (approximate cost of modest working meal for four people) without prior approval but all other details must be completed and recorded as above.
- 6.4 Such hospitality expense claims for lunches, dinners and other similar hospitality must only be made by board or staff members if the subject(s) under discussion relate to the Partnership’s business and not private.

7. Record of Hospitality

- 7.1 Hospitality and gifts, accepted or refused, should be recorded in the Hospitality Register. The recording of the acceptance/refusal of gifts by Board and/or staff members should include details of approx. value, description/type of gift, date received, who provided it, who accepted/refused it, the recipient’s position in the organisation and details of approval sought prior to acceptance/refusal.
- 7.2 The Gifts and Hospitality Register will be reviewed and signed of annual by the Chair of the Partnership.

8. Review

- 8.1 This Policy will be reviewed every three years, or in the light of any legislative changes, or Communities Scotland requirements.