



## Hospitality and Gifts Policy

Document Profile Box	
Document Reference:	QSSD 659
Version:	0002
Ratified by:	Audit Committee
Date ratified:	October 2010
Name of originator/author:	Trust Secretary
Name of responsible committee/individual:	Chief Executive
Date issued:	October 2010
Review date:	October 2011
Target audience:	All NEAS employees
Document owner:	Trust Secretary
Authorised signatory:	

# Contents

<b>Section</b>		<b>Page</b>
1	Introduction	3
2	Key Audience / Scope	3
3	Purpose and Summary	3
4	The Policy	3 – 6
5	Responsibilities	6
6	Monitoring, Compliance and Review	6
7	Dissemination and Implementation	7
8	Standards and Key Performance Indicators	7
9	Equality Impact Assessment Statement	7
10	References	7
11	Associated Documentation	7 - 8
12	Consultation, Approval & Ratification Process	8
13	Review & Revision Arrangements	8
<b>Appendices</b>		
Appendix 1	Version Control Sheet	9

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Service wishes to maintain a position where it operates within the spirit of the Codes of Conduct and Accountability, given the continuing focus on probity and accountability, particularly within the public sector.
- 1.2. It is therefore, considered appropriate for there to be a formal policy on hospitality and gifts, in order that the Directors and employees have a clear framework within which to conduct business with external organisations. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Trust's 'Standards of Business Conduct Policy'.
- 1.3. This policy cannot be definitive but instead indicates the parameters within which staff must exercise judgement, both on expending public money, or receiving gifts and hospitality. It should therefore, assist Directors and employees in determining what would be justified as acceptable and beneficial to conducting their duties.

## 2. KEY AUDIENCE / SCOPE

This policy relates to, and must be adhered to, by all employees of the Trust.

## 3. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 3.1. The ability of a third party to influence a decision is greatly reduced if there is full knowledge of hospitality or gifts offered and received. A register of such will be held at Ambulance Headquarters by the Trust Secretary and will be updated each time a Notification of Gifts and Hospitality form is received from staff.
- 3.2. Whilst the register is held centrally, clearly there may be occasions when staff working at non-Headquarters locations may receive offers of hospitality. To cover this eventuality, hospitality forms will be available via the Trust's intranet (Docuviewer) as appendices to this policy or via the Trust Secretary.
- 3.3. Upon receipt of an offer of hospitality please ensure that a form is completed and returned promptly to your Executive Director for authorisation. He/she will then forward the form to the Trust Secretary for retention within the central register. The form is titled 'Notification of Gifts & Hospitality Received' (AHQ95). This should be completed even if the offer is declined.
- 3.4. This register will be available for inspection as a public document.
- 3.5. *If in doubt, discuss with others and be open.*

## 4. THE POLICY

### Hospitality

- 4.1. The Service expects that in the course of carrying out business, Directors and employees will meet others from the public (non-NHS) and private sectors. When the Service hosts such an occasion and hospitality expense is incurred it must ***clearly be in the Service's benefit*** for the event to take place. **All such expenditure must be authorised by an Executive Director.**

- 4.2. Furthermore there must be no appearance of extravagance, which may lead to criticism of Directors and employees benefiting at the taxpayers' expense. On such an occasion, the number of **"hosts" should be kept to a minimum** and should normally form a **minor element** of the total group.
- 4.3. Hospitality should only be extended to spouses in exceptional circumstances (e.g. retirement or festive occasions).
- 4.4. Hospitality will normally take the form of either **general hospitality** or a **working lunch**.
- ◆ **General Hospitality:** This would cover an occasion where a guest is bought a meal or snack either during or outside normal working hours. Normal expenditure would cover food and, if appropriate, drinks for both the host and guests.
  - ◆ **Working lunch:** This is defined as a meeting, conference or seminar, which necessarily requires the greater part of a normal working day and where the formal business continues over a buffet lunch. Working lunches would normally be taken on the premises. Standard buffet menus only should be used and drinks should normally be non-alcoholic.
- 4.5. Details of all hospitality extended, must be recorded on the 'Notification of Gifts & Hospitality Offered' Form (AHQ 113) and submitted to the Trust Secretary at Ambulance HQ.

### **Management Hospitality**

- 4.6. **As a general rule public funds should not be used for the entertainment and hospitality of Directors and employees.** There are however, certain occasions where in the interests of good management, expenditure is appropriate.
- 4.7. A working lunch would normally be appropriate (though general hospitality may exceptionally be suitable) where senior managers wish to meet and talk informally to staff who are remote from central management, or bring together managers as part of a management development programme.
- 4.8. There may also be occasions where other Health agencies need to exchange views on current issues or distinguished visitors may come to provide expertise or advice to the Service.
- 4.9. Executive Directors must decide the merits or management benefit in each case.

### **Refreshments**

- 4.10. These guidelines do not apply to the provision of tea, coffee and biscuits. This is at the discretion of the appropriate budget manager, and should be in line with the Trust's policy on refreshments.

### **Acceptance of Hospitality**

- 4.11. The following general guidance should be used as a benchmark when exercising judgement on offers of hospitality:

- ◆ Hospitality is **not** the “norm” in any business relationship. In accepting hospitality staff should not allow themselves to reach a position whereby they might be deemed by others to have been influenced in making a business decision as a consequence of accepting such hospitality.
- ◆ Offers of hospitality involving the provision of transport or/and overnight accommodation should only be accepted after approval from the appropriate Director.
- ◆ Staff making visits to inspect equipment or systems in operation in other parts of the country (or overseas) should do so at the Trust’s expense.
- ◆ ***Will the receipt of hospitality improve the effective discharge of duties***, promote the interests of the Service or taxpayer, through for example, improved understanding?
- ◆ ***The hospitality should be a reasonable*** means to that end and:
  - should not be over-frequent;
  - should not, as far as the individual is aware, form part of a pattern of invitations which together could be taken as excessive;
  - should not be disproportionately prolonged or lavish given the nature of the relationship.

4.12. In cases where doubts could arise, individuals should ***consult with either an Executive Director or the Chairman as appropriate.***

- ◆ Before accepting hospitality, the individual should, where possible, have approval from an Executive Director.
- ◆ The individual must consider whether the hospitality is disproportionately lavish:
  - a working lunch (or other meal), invitation to an annual dinner (of an association) are unlikely to be;
  - opera, theatre or sporting events should be given greater consideration. Whether the benefits clearly outweigh the risks is most important.
- ◆ The individual should consider how Parliament or the media may interpret the behaviour and how this would be justified.
- ◆ Are there other alternatives (i.e., should the Service pay the expenses as, if it is of genuine benefit, then this is justifiable)?
- ◆ A rule of thumb to operate could be that the hospitality should be no greater than the person who is offering would give to equivalent employees within their own organisation.

4.13. Details of all hospitality accepted, must be recorded on the ‘Notification of Gifts and Hospitality Received’ Form (AHQ 95) and submitted to the Trust Secretary at Ambulance HQ. Even if the hospitality is declined.

## Gifts

4.14. There is a greater likelihood of a gift being mistaken as an attempt to exert influence.

***Therefore, a gift should normally be refused or returned:***

- *Where the recipient has a direct involvement in decisions affecting the giver*
- *Where they are of significant value, over £50.00*

4.15. As a general rule, there are unlikely to be objections to the acceptance of an isolated gift of a trivial character (e.g., a book token for a lecture) or an inexpensive ephemeral seasonal item such as a calendar or diary.

- ◆ Tokens of gratitude from patients or their relatives should be politely but firmly declined. If however, patients insist on crews accepting such gratuities these should be reported to their Line Manager and then referred to Ambulance Headquarters for charity allocation.
- ◆ Staff should consider carefully before accepting any gifts whether such acceptance could be deemed to have influenced their decisions in relation to business conduct. Any member of staff who is unsure as to whether to accept a gift should consult their Line Manager or appropriate Director.

## 5. **RESPONSIBILITIES**

5.1. The Trust Secretary will ensure that the Hospitality & Gifts register is maintained to formally record details of NEAS staff members receiving hospitality or gifts.

5.2. It is the responsibility of each individual NEAS staff member to report the receipt of any relevant hospitality/gift and also the offer of any such hospitality/gift even if declined, to the Trust Secretary for inclusion in the register.

5.3. In all instances where the Chief Executive has agreed to any member of NEAS staff accepting sponsorship, or other hospitality, this must be recorded in the register together with a copy of the authorising document.

## 6. **MONITORING, COMPLIANCE AND REVIEW**

6.1. Under the Prevention of Corruption Acts, 1906 and 1916, it is an offence for employees to accept any hospitality or gifts as an inducement or reward.

6.2. All members of staff should note that the failure to declare any appropriate hospitality or gifts in the register may lead to disciplinary action by the Trust.

6.3. The register will be reviewed annually and monitored through the completion and receipt of the relevant forms (AHQ 113 & AHQ 95). To ensure this is most effective, articles alerting staff to the Policy will be published on the intranet and in the Bulletin.

6.4. The register will be available for inspection as a public document.

## **7. DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

7.1 This policy is disseminated in the following ways:

- All staff have access via the Trust Quality System.
- Staff without computer access should contact their line manager for information on how to access policies.
- All staff will be notified of new or revised documents via internal communication systems.
- This document will also be included in the Publication Scheme in support of the Freedom of Information (Fol) Act 2000.

7.2 The policy will be implemented and reinforced through:

- Trust Protocols i.e., Standing Orders
- Guidance and access to policies and procedures on the Trust Quality System

## **8. STANDARDS & KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

Efficient implementation and management of this policy will support the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Essential Standards of Quality and Safety, the NHS Litigation Authority (NHS LA) Risk Management Standards and other Trust-wide targets set in the future.

## **9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT STATEMENT**

9.1 The Trust is committed to providing equality of opportunity, not only in its employment practices but also in the services for which it is responsible. As such, this document has been screened, and if necessary an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this document, to identify any potential discriminatory impact. If relevant, recommendations from the assessment have been incorporated into the document and have been considered by the approving committee. The Trust also values and respects the diversity of its employees and the communities it serves. In applying this policy, the Trust will have due regard for the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Provide for good relations between people of diverse groups

9.2. When creating this policy, consideration was given to the impact it might have on patients.

## **10. REFERENCES**

Prevention of Corruption Acts, 1906 and 1916

## **11. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTATION**

The following are related Trust policies and procedures which may prove useful:-

- Standards of Business Conduct (QSSD 161)
- Staff Code of Conduct (QSSD 337)
- Counter Fraud & Corruption Policy (QSSD 661)

## **12. CONSULTATION, APPROVAL AND RATIFICATION PROCESS**

- 12.1 The Trust has arrangements in place to consult with staff and trades unions; through the Policy Review Group and Joint Consultative Committee. All Trust policies are considered by these forums, as appropriate.
- 12.2 The final version of this policy shall be approved by the Audit Committee.

## **13. REVIEW AND REVISION ARRANGMENTS**

- 13.1 This policy will be reviewed by the Trust Secretary at least annually or when appropriate to reflect changes in guidance. The Audit Committee will consider the materiality of any revision made to the document and, subject to its view, approve for dissemination throughout the Trust.



**NORTH EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS TRUST  
NOTIFICATION OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY OFFERED [by third-parties]**

**APPENDIX 1**

NAME: ..... AMBULANCE STATION / BASE: ..... MONTH: .....

Date	Details of Gifts / Hospitality	Estimated Value	Nature of links with Firm (e.g. current negotiations / contracts held)	Comments (inc. details of nominated charity if any)

SIGNATURE OF ACCOUNTABLE DIRECTOR: ..... DATE: .....

<p><b>FOR COMPLETION BY TRUST SECRETARY</b></p> <p>Date Received: .....</p> <p>Date Entered in Register: .....</p>
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AHQ 113

**NORTH EAST AMBULANCE SERVICE NHS TRUST  
NOTIFICATION OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY RECEIVED [or declined by staff]**

**APPENDIX 2**

NAME: ..... AMBULANCE STATION / BASE: ..... MONTH: .....

Date	Details of Gifts / Hospitality	Estimated Value	Nature of links with Firm (e.g. current negotiations / contracts held)	Comments (inc. details of nominated charity if any)

SIGNATURE OF ACCOUNTABLE DIRECTOR: ..... DATE: .....

<p><b>FOR COMPLETION BY TRUST SECRETARY</b></p> <p>Date Received: .....</p> <p>Date Entered in Register: .....</p>
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AHQ 95