

## OFFERS OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY TO OFFICERS

As the two Officers responsible for ensuring compliance with the County Council's Financial regulations and Ethical Framework we have recently updated the protocol covering this important subject and agreed this code with the District Auditor. The code is included in the Council's Constitution and is published on the intranet. The rules are however quite straightforward and both for ease of reference and to ensure that every member of staff is well aware of them we are setting them out below.

- No offer should ever be accepted if there is any possibility that it is an inducement to obtain any form of business from the Council;
- No offer should ever be accepted if it is in the nature of a reward from someone in a commercial or contractual relationship with the Council;
- A gift of small intrinsic value may be accepted from an individual as an expression of gratitude for a personal service but if anything other than a token gift is offered it must be politely refused or returned. There are separate rules for dealing with bequests and legacies.
- Hospitality can be accepted if
  - it is provided in the course of a business meeting
  - it is provided within the programme of a conference for which the Council has paid your registration fee
  - it is the form of an invitation from another public body
  - it can fairly be regarded as a normal element of an established working relationship between the Council and a third party
  - it is at an event sponsored by the Council provided that the invitations are limited in number and only extended to those officers best placed to monitor the event**and** it is locally based (in all cases other than national conferences), modest in nature and does not involve overnight accommodation

We stress three points:

- (1) that any offer of a gift or hospitality should be treated with caution and should never be accepted without careful thought and only after consultation with your line manager.
- (2) that a standard form recording any offer, whether it is accepted or refused, must be completed, countersigned where necessary, and then filed in the Directorate Register maintained by your Director's PA.
- (3) that the unauthorised acceptance of any gift or hospitality will be a breach of your terms and conditions of employment

A specimen of the form mentioned in (2) above is attached and can be downloaded from the internet at [www.devon.gov.uk/part5](http://www.devon.gov.uk/part5). Paper copies can be found with the Directorate Register. A Register is also kept in all offices away from County Hall and these will be forwarded every quarter for your Director to check and initial. We will

review all the Registers ourselves once a year to ensure consistency right across the Council.

We have thought carefully about whether it would be helpful to include in this note examples of what is acceptable and what is not but we have decided against doing this because we think it is best that all staff should approach this matter from the starting point that offers of gifts and hospitality should almost always be refused and can be accepted only in exceptional circumstances. We are of course always willing to try and answer any question you may have or advise on any problem you come across.

John Mills  
Director of Finance  
IT and Trading

Roger Gash  
County Solicitor