



Town Clerk: Caroline Leet

## Gifts and Hospitality Policy

Adopted by full Council on 09 March 2026

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### 1. Introduction and Purpose

Edenbridge Town Council is committed to the highest standards of integrity, transparency and accountability in public life. The Council recognises that the acceptance of gifts or hospitality can, in certain circumstances, create real or perceived conflicts of interest.

This policy sets out the framework governing the offer, acceptance, declaration and recording of gifts and hospitality to ensure compliance with:

- The Bribery Act 2010
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Council's Members' Code of Conduct
- The Council's Standing Orders
- The Council's Financial Regulations
- The Nolan Principles of Public Life

The aim of this policy is not to prevent appropriate civic courtesy, but to ensure that any gifts or hospitality are handled openly and do not compromise, or appear to compromise, the Council's integrity.

### 2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to:

- All Town Councillors
- Co-opted Members
- Council employees and officers
- Volunteers or representatives acting on behalf of the Council

For employees, this policy operates alongside the Council's employment policies and disciplinary procedures.

### 3. Legal and Governance Framework

#### 3.1 Bribery Act 2010

Under the Bribery Act 2010, it is a criminal offence to offer, promise, give, request or accept a bribe. A bribe is defined as a financial or other advantage intended to induce or reward improper performance of a public function.

Whilst modest gifts and hospitality are not unlawful in themselves, the context, intention and perception are critical. The Council must demonstrate that it has adequate procedures in place to prevent bribery.

#### 3.2 Localism Act 2011 and Code of Conduct

Members are required under the Localism Act 2011 and the Council's adopted Code of Conduct to declare certain interests and register gifts and hospitality above the prescribed threshold.

Failure to comply may constitute a breach of the Code.

#### 3.3 Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

Standing Orders require Members and officers to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure transparency in procurement and decision-making. Financial Regulations reinforce duties around probity, proper use of public funds and internal control.

This policy supports those obligations by providing clarity on how offers of gifts or hospitality must be handled.

### 4. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

**Gift** includes any item, benefit or advantage given without payment or at less than its commercial value. Examples include:

- Goods, vouchers, tickets
- Hampers, alcohol, flowers
- Services provided free of charge

**Hospitality** includes:

- Meals and refreshments
- Attendance at events, functions or sporting occasions
- Travel or accommodation provided without cost

**Token or modest hospitality** may include:

- Tea/coffee and light refreshments at meetings
- Low-value promotional items (e.g. pens, diaries)

Token or modest hospitality provided at internal Council meetings, training events, conferences or civic events is generally acceptable where it is incidental to the event and not capable of being interpreted as influencing a decision.

The key distinction is whether the hospitality is routine and proportionate to the occasion, or whether it could reasonably be perceived as seeking to influence Council business.

**Cash or cash equivalents** (e.g. gift cards) must never be accepted.

## 5. General Principles

All persons covered by this policy must apply the following principles:

- i. Gifts or hospitality must never influence, or appear to influence, Council business.
- ii. No gift or hospitality should be accepted from any individual or organisation seeking to obtain or influence a Council decision.
- iii. Gifts and hospitality must not be solicited.
- iv. The perception of the public is paramount — members and officers must consider how acceptance would appear if reported publicly.
- v. If in doubt, the offer should be declined or advice sought from the Proper Officer (Town Clerk).

The guiding question should always be, “Would I be comfortable if this were reported in the local press?”

## 6. Acceptable and Unacceptable Offers

### 6.1 Generally Acceptable (Subject to Recording Requirements)

- Modest refreshments at meetings
- Civic hospitality associated with official duties
- Low-value tokens of appreciation
- Hospitality clearly related to the Council’s work and proportionate in nature

### 6.2 Not Acceptable

- Cash or cash equivalents
- Lavish or excessive hospitality
- Gifts during active procurement or tender processes
- Personal gifts unrelated to official duties
- Repeated offers from the same source

## 7. Registration and Recording

### 7.1 Threshold for Registration

Any gift or hospitality with an estimated value of £10\* or more must be registered.

Best practice also requires that:

- All offers above the threshold must be recorded, whether accepted or declined.
- Repeated low-value offers from the same source may cumulatively require registration.
- Registration must occur within 28 days of the offer or receipt.

### 7.2 Register of Gifts and Hospitality

The Town Clerk shall maintain a Register of Gifts and Hospitality, recording:

- Name of recipient
- Date of offer
- Description of gift/hospitality
- Estimated value
- Name of donor
- Whether accepted or declined
- Reason for acceptance (if applicable)

The register shall be available for public inspection and published periodically on the Council's website

## **8. Declarations at Meetings**

If a Member has received or been offered a gift or hospitality from a person or organisation connected to an item of business under consideration, this must be declared at the meeting in accordance with the Council's adopted Members' Code of Conduct and Standing Orders.

The Member should consider whether this creates a conflict of interest requiring withdrawal from discussion or voting.

## **9. Officers and Employees**

Employees must report gifts or hospitality above the threshold to the Town Clerk. Acceptance of gifts or hospitality contrary to this policy may result in disciplinary action.

## **10. Procurement and Tendering**

No gifts or hospitality may be accepted from:

- Contractors during live tender processes
- Companies seeking contracts with the Council
- Any party where acceptance could compromise procurement integrity

This aligns with Standing Orders governing contracts and Financial Regulations relating to proper financial management.

## **11. Refusal of Gifts**

Where a gift is declined:

- It should be done politely and professionally
- The Council's policy should be explained
- The refusal should still be recorded if above threshold

If returning a gift is impractical (e.g. perishable items), the item may be:

- Donated to a charitable cause, or
- Shared for communal use (with recording)

## **12. Breaches of Policy**

Failure to comply may result in:

- Referral under the Members' Code of Conduct

- Internal disciplinary action (for employees)
- Possible referral to law enforcement if criminal concerns arise

### **13. Review of Policy**

This policy shall be reviewed every four years or sooner if legislative changes require.

Appendix A. Gifts & Hospitality Declaration Form

**Edenbridge Town Council**

This form must be completed where a gift or hospitality with an estimated value of £10 or more has been offered, whether accepted or declined.

1. Name of Councillor / Officer: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Position (if Officer): \_\_\_\_\_

3. Date gift/hospitality offered or received: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Description of gift or hospitality (Include sufficient detail – e.g. meal, tickets, hamper, event invitation): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Name and organisation of donor: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Estimated value: £ \_\_\_\_\_

7. Was the gift/hospitality accepted or declined?

Accepted

Declined

8. If accepted, please state reason:

\_\_\_\_\_

(e.g. civic duty, training event, token hospitality, etc.)

9. Does the donor have (or is likely to have) dealings with the Council?

Yes

No

10. If yes, please provide details: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to the Town Clerk within 28 days of the offer.