

1. Policy Statement

Council is committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity, transparency, accountability, and public trust. This policy outlines Council's mandatory requirements for the provision and receipt of gifts, benefits, entertainment, and hospitality. It ensures that all related activities and expenditures are conducted with probity, and that officers act in a manner that avoids any actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Council officers must not accept or offer gifts or hospitality that may compromise—or be perceived to compromise—their impartiality or influence decision-making. Clear procedures are established to support consistent, ethical conduct across the organisation.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Councillors, Council employees (including permanent, temporary, casual, and contract staff), volunteers, interns, consultants, and any other persons or organisation representing Hinchinbrook Shire Council in an official capacity.

It covers all gifts, benefits, entertainment, and hospitality received or provided in connection with official duties, including tangible items (e.g. hampers, vouchers, tickets) and intangible benefits (e.g. hospitality, discounts, travel).

For the purposes of this policy, attendance at an evening function that forms part of a conference or similar official event does not constitute entertainment or hospitality.

3. Responsibility

Employees and Councillors must:

- Not solicit or accept gifts or benefits that may influence or appear to influence their official duties;
- Declare all gifts and benefits using Council's Gifts and Benefits Declaration Form;
- Refuse any gift that could be seen as a bribe, inducement, or reward for preferential treatment;
- Seek guidance from their supervisor or Governance team if unsure whether a gift should be accepted; and
- Ensure all declared gifts are recorded in the Council's Gifts and Benefits Register.

Managers and Supervisors must:

- Support staff in understanding and applying this policy;
- Review and approve declarations in line with Council's ethical standards; and
- Escalate any concerns about inappropriate offers or potential conflicts of interest.

Governance Team must:

- Maintain the Gifts and Benefits Register;
- Monitor compliance and report breaches to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

4. Definitions

Council business means work required to be performed as part of normal duties.

Public Defensibility activities and decisions are open to reasonable scrutiny and can withstand a 'public defensibility' test in the context of fairness, equity and value for money.



Entertainment and Hospitality refer to a range of benefits that include, but are not restricted to the following:

- Entertaining members of the public to promote a local project; or
- Providing food or beverages to a Council visitor; or
- Providing food or beverages for a conference, course, meeting, seminar, workshop or another forum that is held by Council for its councillors, staff or other persons; and
- Paying for a Councillor or staff member to attend a function as part of their official duties or obligations.

Gift is any item of value (tangible or intangible) received without payment or at a discount not available to the general public. Examples include hampers, vouchers, tickets, or merchandise.

Benefit is a non-tangible advantage or privilege, such as hospitality, access, discounts, or preferential treatment that may be offered in connection with official duties.

Token Gift is a gift of nominal value (e.g. promotional items, pens, calendars) that is not intended to influence decision-making and is generally considered acceptable.

Non-Trivial Hospitality that exceeds a nominal value or includes alcohol, meals, or entertainment beyond light refreshments. Requires prior approval.

Conflict of Interest is a situation where a personal interest could improperly influence—or be perceived to influence—official duties or decisions.

Register of Interests is a formal record maintained by Council to disclose gifts, benefits, and other interests as required under the Local Government Regulation 2012.

Bribe or Inducement is any gift, benefit, or offer intended to improperly influence a decision, action, or outcome. Must be refused and reported immediately.

Official Duties means tasks or responsibilities performed as part of a person's role with Council, whether elected or employed.

Approval Authority is the designated officer (usually a Manager, Director, or CEO) with delegated authority to approve expenditure or acceptance of gifts and hospitality.

5. Policy

5.1 Entertainment and Hospitality Requirements

All Entertainment and Hospitality expenditure must:

- Be incurred for official purposes;
- Be clearly documented with the purpose explicitly stated;
- Be approved by an officer senior to the individual initiating the expenditure;
- Be available for review by internal audit, external audit and the Finance Department and/or any officer or external body identified by the CEO, or delegate;
- Be appropriate and reasonable and able to withstand public scrutiny;
- Comply with budgetary allocations; and
- Be accurately identified and coded to the 'General – Entertainment and Hospitality' natural account (63428).

Supervisors and Managers must have regard to these requirements when approving entertainment and hospitality related expenditure.



The provision of light refreshments and/or lunches at special staff functions or at internal meetings and workshops (including those meetings and workshops that are held for volunteers and visiting dignitaries) are permitted.

5.2 Accepting Hospitality

Offers of hospitality, gifts or invitations, must only be accepted after careful consideration of potential conflict-of-interest implications. Three (3) different types of conflicts of interest can potentially exist in these situations:

- Actual conflict of interest – where a personal interest directly influences official duties;
- Potential conflict of interest – where a personal interest could reasonably be expected to influence duties in the future; or
- Perceived conflict of interest – where others may reasonably believe a personal interest is influencing decisions.

Any offer of entertainment or hospitality or a gift should be declined if it is, or could be perceived as, an incentive or inducement for decision-making or has the potential to compromise the impartiality of the recipient.

However, an entertainment or hospitality benefit may be accepted if all of the following conditions are met:

- Refusal would cause genuine offence or awkwardness; and
- If the offer aligns with standard business custom or cultural practices of the provider/offerrer; and
- The benefit does not influence the Councillor/officer's impartiality (i.e. it has no conflict-of-interest consequences); and
- It is received in the normal course of duty or prior approval has been obtained.

Offers or invitations of hospitality (or gifts) should only be accepted after due consideration of conflict-of-interest implications. It is a requirement for approval to be sought prior to accepting any (non-trivial) hospitality from the immediate Manager of Director.

Hospitality, in many circumstances, is an important part of establishing and deepening corporate and professional relationships.

5.3 Other Considerations and Requirements

- Alcohol may only be provided at an official function with prior approval from the CEO.
- The following types of expenditure also require approval from the CEO:
 - Provision of meals at a private residence;
 - Club membership fees;
 - Domestic travel (within Australia); and
 - Staff-only events where the cost per head exceeds \$20.

In recognition of the dedication and commitment of Council employees to serving the community, Council may host an annual Christmas function. The provision of alcoholic beverages at this event is permitted only with prior approval from the CEO and must comply with the conditions outlined in the Council's Drug and Alcohol Policy and Drug and Alcohol Management Procedure.



6. Legal Parameters

- *Local Government Act 2009;*
- *Local Government Regulation 2012;*
- *Fringe Benefits Tax Assessment Act 1986;*
- *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994;*
- *Crime and Corruptions Act 2001;*
- *Public Records Act 2002;* and
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011.*

7. Associated Documents

- Code of Conduct;
- Administrative Action Complaints Management Policy;
- Public Interest Disclosure Policy;
- Procurement Policy;
- Procurement Procedure;
- Drug and Alcohol Policy; and
- Drug and Alcohol Management Procedure.

DOCUMENT HISTORY AND STATUS					
Action	Name		Position		
Approved by Council	Mary Anne Uren		CEO		
Policy Version	8	Initial Version Adopted	30/05/2023	Current Version Adopted	16/12/2025
Maintained By	Corporate and Community Services			Next Review Date	16/12/2026

