

Guidelines for staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas working with Members

INTRODUCTION

Member-centred service is a core value under *Excellence in Parliamentary Service*, our Strategic Plan 2007-9. Our staff play an important role in supporting Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas in the performance of their duties. They work with Members, in a spirit of mutual respect, to provide effective support and impartial expert advice which is responsive to their needs.

These guidelines and associated behavioural indicators have been prepared to assist our staff in working with Members either directly or through their parliamentary/secretarial assistants. While the Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour continues to be the statutory code within which all staff must work, the guidelines are intended to provide additional assistance to staff in our particular environment.

CORE VALUES

When working with Members we expect our staff to adhere to the following core values:

- **Impartiality:** serving Members of different political persuasions equally and carrying out all responsibilities fairly
- **Professionalism:** demonstrating a high level of competence in performing all duties and dealing with Members in an appropriate fashion
- **Responsiveness:** providing a high standard of service in meeting the needs of Members in a timely fashion, and
- **Honesty and Integrity:** dealing with issues truthfully responsibly and objectively and not seeking to use any kind of inappropriate influence for our own or anyone else's benefit.

STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR

How we display our core values

IMPARTIALITY

We should:

- Serve all Members equally and to the best of our ability to ensure that as far as is practicable everyone receives the same standard, range and quality of services
- Not display partiality during our work; for instance, we should never leave ourselves open to an accusation of favouritism either for a particular Member(s) or party
- Base our actions on a clear mandate founded in Office policy and practice.

Do

- Conscientiously work for all Members
- Provide objective, well-researched advice founded in office policy and practice
- Maintain your independence so that all Members can have trust and confidence in your actions and advice
- Be clear on your mandate when reaching an agreement with a Member. Check with your manager if you are unsure before committing to a course of action. Ensure that you record such agreements and communicate to your manager and any relevant colleague
- Offer information and briefings to all Members equally, not on a party basis.

Don't

- Favour or discriminate against particular Members
- Allow any personal political views you may have to influence your actions or advice
- Use impartiality as an excuse for not providing a service or assistance which normal helpfulness would require you to provide
- Enter into informal agreements or understandings for which you have no mandate and/or which are not recorded/communicated.

PROFESSIONALISM

We should:

- Work with Members in a professional and friendly way, and aim for excellence in terms of the standard of service we provide to them
- Use appropriate language when dealing with Members including the manner in which we address them
- Present ourselves well in a manner that is appropriate to Parliament. In particular, we expect our staff to dress smartly and professionally
- Do our best to be on top of the facts when dealing with Members, and if we don't know the answer to a question we should take responsibility for finding it out as quickly as possible and get back to the Member within a definite timeframe
- Not "pass the buck" when presented with an issue or query; instead we should follow through and ensure that the matter is answered properly, even if this is being done by another section
- Deal with difficulties or conflict in a professional and structured way.

Do

- Research the situation before providing information and advice to Members
- Be decisive and firm about what can or can't be done once you know the facts
- Dress well in a manner which respects Members and Parliament
- Handle conflict or difference constructively and unemotionally
- Behave respectfully to Members, mindful of the fact that you deserve to be respected in return.

Don't

- Behave informally in formal situations with Members (for example by addressing them by first names or joking inappropriately)
- Use inappropriate language (e.g. expletives) with Members under any circumstances
- Be negative, officious, inflexible or disinterested
- React to anger with emotional behaviour
- Propose solutions to Members without checking with colleagues that they are acceptable or viable
- Criticise colleagues or staff explicitly or implicitly.

RESPONSIVENESS

We should:

- Ensure the continuous provision of quality services to Members to meet their needs
- Always try to be helpful, and do our best to provide a service or resolve a problem when asked, even if the solution is not obvious.

Do

- Be helpful at all times and try to solve the problem if it is solvable in a timely fashion
- Try to go beyond the requirements of the job
- Try to anticipate the needs of Members and respond promptly to them
- Think “outside the box” and consult with colleagues whether in your own section or others – a little imagination will often present a solution to a problem and if you have any doubt check with your manager/colleagues.

Don't

- Promise what you can't deliver
- Wait for problems to arise before tackling them
- Walk away from a problem because you couldn't be bothered to help solve it.

HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

We should:

- Be truthful and open and if we make a mistake we should correct it as soon as possible
- Be meticulous in ensuring that nothing we do in providing services to Members is influenced by any personal gain or advantage
- Always handle private information about Members sensitively and confidentially
- Take decisions on the basis of the relevant rules and legislation and the facts of the situation before us
- Never seek to use political influence for our own or anyone else's benefit.

Do

- Set out the full facts of the situation truthfully
- Make sure that the public money and resources you deploy in providing services to Members are used properly and efficiently
- Comply with the law
- Handle information about Members sensitively and maintain confidentiality
- Be careful to appropriately represent the institution and its Members when speaking with the media.

Don't

- Knowingly mislead Members
- Disclose personal information about Members without authorisation
- Accept gifts or hospitality that might reasonably be seen to compromise your independence or integrity
- Lobby Members or take actions for personal advantage (for example, never approach a Member about your personal or career circumstances or to lobby support for a business project outside of normal project management rules).

CONCLUSION

The staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas are rightly proud of their place of work.

We take pride in our values and standards of behaviour.

We expect everyone to live up to them and to support one another within sections and across sections so that we can deliver the best possible service to Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas.



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