



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Policy

Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors in Parliament Buildings

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1. Overview

Definition of a visitor – this includes all persons (except for Secretariat staff, MLAs, Members' staff and Party staff) within Parliament Buildings, the immediate precincts and any other location outside Parliament Buildings where a Plenary or Committee meeting is taking place.

One aim of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (the Commission) is to ensure that the Assembly and its work is accessible to all and communicated widely.

It is with this in mind, that the Commission welcomes all visitors to Parliament Buildings, to view proceedings and to attend events and functions. Naturally the preservation of order and the safety and wellbeing of all users of Parliament Buildings will at all times be primary considerations for the Commission.

Plenary Sittings and Committee meetings are the core business of the Assembly and must therefore be allowed to proceed without any interference or disruption. The purpose of this policy is primarily to ensure that Assembly core business and other events, be these at Parliament Buildings or at an outside location, can proceed without interference from or disruption by visitors or other persons.

Underpinning this policy is Assembly Standing Order 66 which states that:

“Members of the public seeking to attend proceedings of the Assembly shall be permitted in such places reserved for them by the Speaker save that –

- (a) They are not permitted in the Public Gallery during contemplations;*
- (b) They are not permitted to have any item in the Public Gallery which in the opinion of the Speaker could interfere with the preservation of order; and*
- (c) The Speaker may, in the interests of preserving order, require them to leave.”*

In the case of Committee proceedings, similar directions may be given by the relevant Chairperson.

2. Application

The policy applies to **all** visitors whether or not by way of invitation, entering:

1. Any area within Parliament Buildings, including the Public Gallery
2. The immediate area outside Parliament Buildings within the perimeter boundary railings
3. Any Plenary Sitting or Assembly Committee meetings held outside Parliament Buildings

Persons are also advised to note the contents of paragraph (24) of the Northern Ireland Assembly Security policy which provides some further information regarding visitors to Parliament Buildings.

3. Responsibilities

The Commission has overall responsibility for the maintenance of good order and conduct in Parliament Buildings.

The final decision as to who is permitted to enter Parliament Buildings rests with the Commission. This includes visitors.

Whilst the Usher Services management team has daily operational responsibility for overseeing the conduct of visitors to Parliament Buildings, there remains a responsibility on Members and Assembly permanent pass holders who have invited visitors into the building, to ensure that those visitors behave appropriately.

There is also a responsibility on visitors to remain with their hosts or sponsors at all times during visits, and to ensure that they do not access areas to which they are not entitled to enter.

In the first instance, any concerns relating to visitor behaviour should be addressed by Ushers on duty at Parliament Buildings, in their capacity as Authorised Officers under Article 23 of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987. It may also be prudent to draw such concerns to the attention of any persons hosting visitors where applicable.

Whilst normally visitor behaviour does not present any real difficulties, there may be occasions when Ushers will require further guidance and direction from Usher Services management. In such instances, the visitors must remain outside Parliament Buildings until a direction from Usher Services management has been received.

There may also be some occasions when further direction may be sought from the Director of Corporate Services. In the absence of the Director of Corporate Services, Usher Services management may consult directly with the office of the Clerk/Chief Executive.

4. General Rules of Entry

Whilst the Assembly welcomes visitors to Parliament Buildings, persons will not be permitted to enter Parliament Buildings if they are:

- behaving in an unruly or disorderly manner;
- wearing uniform or displaying regalia or emblems which could be construed as divisive, inappropriate or offensive, or which could be identified as sectarian or aligned to one particular section of the community;
- carrying flags, banners, placards, photographs or similar items with a clearly visible message; or
- wearing any item of clothing with logos, illustrations or print displayed which may be deemed offensive, inappropriate and has the potential to cause disharmony, and especially those that have been directly linked to community conflict in Northern Ireland, or is clearly identified with a matter being debated in the Chamber or in Committee.

Where necessary, Ushers will consult with Usher Services management on

what is appropriate, particularly when considering clothing such as sporting attire etc.

It is acknowledged that it may be possible for certain items of clothing etc to be concealed under outer garments, and all persons must remain alert to such a possibility, taking action as appropriate in the circumstances.

Appendix (A) should be referred to in relation to Uniforms, Flags, Music & Emblems.

5. Assembly Plenary Sittings

Visitors should follow the instructions of Assembly Usher Services staff at all times.

Visitors wishing to observe Assembly Plenary Sittings will be expected to behave in an orderly and appropriate manner at all times. Behaviour that is not permitted includes shouting, hissing, jeering, stamping of feet, applause, etc.

Visitors will not be allowed to take into the Public Gallery items such as mobile phones, electronic equipment, cameras, bags, briefcases, food or drink. These items may be temporarily stored as directed by Ushers.

Interaction of any kind between visitors or other persons in the Public Gallery, and Members or officials in the Chamber is not permitted.

Where an individual or group of persons in the Public Gallery interrupts or attempts to interrupt Plenary proceedings, the Speaker will generally issue a warning from the Chair. If the interruption continues, the Speaker may direct Ushers to clear the Public Gallery, and may also suspend the Sitting.

In such instance, an Usher will request the person(s) to desist or refrain from behaving in the manner in question. Should the person(s) refuse to comply with that request, Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) officers may then be requested to ensure the removal of those persons from Parliament Buildings.

Where a Plenary Sitting is held outside of Parliament Buildings as referred to in para (2.3), Ushers will continue to act as Authorised Officers, and may seek PSNI assistance if necessary.

6. Assembly Committee Meetings

Visitors planning to observe Assembly Committee meetings will be expected to behave in an orderly and proper manner at all times, and they should follow the instructions from Assembly Ushers and Committee staff. Failure to comply with these instructions could mean that the visitors will be asked to leave the room in which the meeting is being held.

The passing of notes or papers to Members or witnesses is not permitted during meetings.

Briefcases or large bags are not permitted in Committee meeting rooms. These items may be temporarily stored as directed by the Assembly staff.

Mobile phones must remain switched off during Committee meetings, and cameras and recording equipment may only be used with the permission of the Committee Chair.

Visitors must observe silence and must not applaud, shout or stamp their feet etc.

Where an individual or group of persons interrupts or attempts to interrupt the meeting, the Committee Chair may issue a warning. If the interruption continues, the Chair may order the Ushers to clear the meeting room, and may also suspend the meeting. The assistance of PSNI may be sought if necessary.

Where a Committee Meeting is held at location outside Parliament Buildings as referred to in para (2.3), Ushers will continue to act as Authorised Officers.

7. Functions and events in Parliament Buildings

Functions and events are an integral part of the engagement process and also give visitors an opportunity to learn about the Assembly's legislative role.

Visitors attending functions and events in Parliament Buildings must adhere to the aforementioned guidelines in relation to general behaviour and clothing, and persons hosting such functions and events will ultimately be responsible for the general conduct and behaviour of their guests.

Where the conduct or behaviour of any visitors or any other persons attending a function or event in Parliament Buildings is deemed inappropriate, an Usher will in the first instance approach and speak to the person(s), and request that they immediately moderate their behaviour.

Should the inappropriate behaviour continue, the duty Senior Usher along with a member of Events or Outreach staff, will bring the matter to the attention of the person sponsoring the function or event. Should the inappropriate behaviour continue, the persons behaving in that manner may then be requested to immediately leave Parliament Buildings. If there is a refusal to immediately comply with that request, consideration will then be given to seeking the assistance of PSNI.

Functions and events are arranged through the Parliamentary Services Directorate, and for further information on these matters, contact should be made with the Events Office on 028 90521948 or Outreach Office on 02890521169.

8. Protests, Demonstrations and Rallies

Where the organisers of any protest, demonstration or rally at Parliament Buildings

have had prior discussion with the Usher Services Office, some members of the protest group such as organisers or speakers may be permitted access to the front steps outside Parliament Buildings, subject to the agreement of the Head of Usher Services, having consulted with the Events or Outreach Office and PSNI as appropriate.

In reaching any decision regarding access, the Head of Usher Services will take cognizance of the nature and scale of the protest, as well as the intentions, disposition and behaviour of those participating, and will consider such against the desire to ensure that Assembly business will not be disrupted, nor the security or safety of users of Parliament Buildings put at risk.

Such persons will still be subject to search at the Search Facility at the East Glen. In no circumstances will persons be allowed direct access via the pedestrian gates in the front railings of Parliament Buildings. These gates will be used only for emergency evacuation purposes.

A limited number of the protesters may be allowed into Parliament Buildings, again subject to the agreement of the Head of Usher Services as above.

In instances where there has not been prior discussion however, access to the front steps will normally not be permitted, and the persons concerned will be required to remain outside the perimeter boundary railings whilst any protest, demonstration or rally is on-going.

Banners, flags, placards etc. will not be allowed into Parliament Buildings or its immediate environs as delineated by the perimeter railings under any circumstances.

9. Taking External Photographs relating to a protest, petition, demonstration or other similar event

Where **anyone** wishes to take photographs outside Parliament Buildings, including the front steps leading to the boundary fence and those photographs are related to a protest, petition, demonstration or other similar event, they are asked to note the regulations and restrictions regarding uniforms, regalia, and the display of flags and emblems. (See Annex A below)

People leading or organising such events are also asked to be mindful of their individual responsibility regarding their own health and safety, and that of those with them especially on or around the front steps of Parliament Buildings. The health, safety and wellbeing of everyone using Parliament Buildings is a priority and staff may intervene at any time to ensure such.

It should be noted that further advice on the taking of photographs by persons for private purposes, such as tourism etc. is available in the Events in Parliament Buildings & Grounds policy 2016. www.niassembly.gov.uk/about-the-assembly/corporate-information/policies/events-in-parliament-buildings-and-its-grounds-policy

10. Promotions and PR Photo calls

There are many occasions where individuals and groups request permission to launch or highlight an issue with a photograph taken either inside or outside Parliament Buildings. Since restoration in 2007, the Commission has strived to make Parliament Buildings a more accessible and welcoming place and therefore, allows some photography to take place in the Great Hall and/or on the steps outside Parliament Buildings.

Where a group has requested permission to take a photograph to launch or publicise their group or a specific issue, the request should be forwarded in the first instance to the Communications Office. The Communications Office will alert the Head of Usher Services, and the decision whether to permit the request should be taken by the Head of Communications and the Head of Usher Services.

The procedure for taking such decisions will be as follows:

The group seeking permission for a photo call will provide the Communications Office with the following information, in writing:

- Organisation requesting the photo call
- Number of people expected in the photograph
- The purpose for which the photograph will be used
- An assurance that the photograph will not be used commercially
- That no flags, emblems, uniform, and regalia will be worn or displayed (as detailed in Appendix A of this document)
- Assurance that the photograph will not cause any disruption to the Assembly and its business (i.e. that any props used would be obtrusive)
- That the photo opportunity does not impact on the dignity of the Assembly and/or Parliament Buildings

On receipt of this information, the Head of Communications (or a designated Communications Officer) and the Head of Usher Services (or a person designated by the Head of Usher Services) will discuss the request and make a decision regarding the photo call.

It should be noted that not all requests will be facilitated, and that this procedure is not to be used for protests/demonstrations which are covered under Sections 8 & 9 of this policy.

11. Training, Monitoring and Review

All Usher Services staff will receive regular training regarding visitor management as appropriate.

This policy will be reviewed every 12 months.

Appendix A

Dress/Uniforms

The following regulations apply to dress and uniforms on entry to and whilst in the building.

| Type | Category |
|---|--|
| Schools | Permissible |
| Recognised Youth Organisations e.g. Boys Brigade, Scouts, Girl Guides, etc. | Permissible |
| Clerical e.g. collars, gowns, robes | Permissible |
| Sashes & Regalia e.g. Loyal Orders, Hibernian, etc. | Not permissible |
| Military I. UK Military | Permissible where triple sponsorship has been secured and where those wearing the uniforms are representing their Service in an official capacity. |
| Military II. Of other jurisdictions | Permissible where triple sponsorship has been secured and where those wearing the uniforms are representing their country in an official capacity. |
| Replica uniforms | Requires approval by SMG or Commission level |
| Sporting Attire including blazers, tops, tracksuits. | Permissible where triple sponsorship has been secured and where those wearing are representing their sport in an official capacity. |
| Emergency Services PSNI, Fire, Medical, etc. | Permissible when representing their Service in an official capacity or as part of an Event. |