



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Policy

Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors in Parliament Buildings

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Policy on conduct & behaviour of visitors within Parliament Buildings, the immediate precincts, and any other location outside Parliament Buildings where a Plenary or Committee meeting is taking place

1. Overview

Definition of a visitor – 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.

Please see paragraph (9) regarding the taking of photographs

A strategic 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 aim in mind, that the Commission welcomes visitors to Parliament Buildings, to view proceedings and to attend events and functions. The preservation of order and the safety and wellbeing of all users of Parliament Buildings will at all times be primary considerations of 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.

Underpinning this policy is Assembly Standing Order 66 which states, among other things, 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 meeting held outside 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.

The Usher management team have daily operational responsibility for overseeing the conduct of visitors to Parliament Buildings; there is of course 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 front line Usher staff 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 concerns to any persons hosting such visitors, where applicable.

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

There may also be some occasions when further direction may be sought from the Director of Facilities/Keeper of the House. In the absence of the Director of Facilities/Keeper of the House, Usher Management may consult directly with the office of the Clerk/Director General.

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.

Ushers will consult with their managers on what is appropriate particularly when considering clothing such as sporting attire.

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

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

5. Assembly Plenary Sittings

Visitors should follow the instructions of Assembly Ushers at all times.

Visitors planning to observe Assembly Plenary Sittings will be expected to behave in an orderly and proper manner at all times. Behaviour 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, other electronic equipment, cameras, bags, briefcases or food and drink. These items may be temporarily stored externally as directed by the Assembly staff.

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 order the Ushers to clear the Public Gallery, and may also suspend the Sitting.

In the first instance, an Usher should ask the person/s to desist or refrain from behaving in the manner in question. Should the person/s refuse to comply with that request, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Northern Ireland Assembly Police Unit (NIAPU) may then be requested to ensure the removal of those persons from Parliament Buildings under the auspices of the authority held by Usher staff, as per Article 23 of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987.

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.

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. They should follow the instructions from Assembly Ushers and Committee staff. Failure to comply with these

instructions could mean that they 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 meeting rooms; these items may be temporarily stored externally as directed by the Assembly staff.

All mobile phones or other electronic equipment must be switched off prior to entering the rooms.

Electrical or camera equipment is not permitted except by prior permission of the Committee Chairperson.

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

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 NIAPU may be sought if necessary.

Where a Committee Meeting is held outside of 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 give visitors an opportunity to learn about the Assembly's legislative role.

Visitors attending functions and events in Parliament Buildings must adhere to the guidelines above 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 invited guests.

Where the conduct or behaviour of any visitor or any other person attending a function or event in Parliament Buildings is deemed inappropriate, an Usher will approach and speak to the person in question, and ask that they moderate their behaviour.

Should the inappropriate behaviour continue, the duty Senior Usher along with a member of Events staff, will bring the matter to the attention of the person sponsoring the function or event.

In extremis and where the behaviour remains unacceptable further action may include the Senior Usher in the capacity of an Authorised Officer, asking the person in question to leave Parliament Buildings forthwith. Should that person refuse to comply with that request, consideration will then be given to seeking the assistance of PSNI.

Functions and events are arranged through the Facilities Directorate, and for further information on these matters please contact the Events Office on 028 90521948.

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 Office and NIAPU 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 while the 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

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 promotion, protest, petition, demonstration or other 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 our priority and our staff may intervene at any time to ensure the health and safety of all visitors. It should be noted that this does not apply to taking of photographs by persons for private purposes, such as tourism etc. This is covered separately by virtue of Regulation of Events in Parliament Buildings & Grounds policy 2014

10. Training, Monitoring and Review

All Usher staff will receive regular and appropriate training on a range of equality issues and in particular issues such as race and in engaging with people who have special needs as this was highlighted during the screening process.

All complaints made by Visitors will be monitored and will be if appropriate incorporated in reviews of this policy

This policy will be reviewed every six 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 secured and where those wearing the uniforms are representing their service in an official capacity.
Military II. Of other jurisdictions	Permissible where triple sponsorship 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 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 providing their service as part of the event

The use of any flags, emblems or music that might raise issues of potential sensitivity or controversy must first be discussed with the Events Office on 028 90521948