



CABINET OFFICE
LONDON SW1A 2AS

TO: All Business Unit Heads
Senior Finance Business Partners

BY EMAIL

24 April 2025

Dear Business Unit Heads and Senior Finance Business Partners

Guidance on the procurement of branded merchandise and the use of external venues for events

I am writing to provide you with the following guidance regarding the procurement of branded merchandise and the use of external venues for events. This follows the directive issued by the Government Chief Commercial Officer (GCCO) on 4 April 2025. This guidance should be applied immediately and sets out the mandatory processes which must be adhered to by all Cabinet Office employees. It is essential that we lead by example in eliminating waste and delivering value for money to the taxpayer.

The guidance will be iterative in nature and will be issued using the following two stage approach:

- **Stage 1: Immediate Impact:** This will address events planned within the next 12 weeks, particularly concerning potential cancellation costs.
- **Stage 2: Longer Term:** This will build upon the stage one guidance and firm up procedures for longer term events and merchandising purchasing. It will also provide details of how we will look to check and quality assure spend in these areas.

Stage 1 - IMMEDIATE

1. Branded Merchandise

The procurement of branded merchandise is now confined to items which demonstrate clear value to both the organisation and the taxpayer. **Non-essential promotional items are no longer permitted.** The distribution of branded merchandise is to be restricted to instances where it is truly necessary, which we would expect to be limited in number e.g. where expenditure on merchandise items is necessary for operational purposes.

Key Requirements for Branded Merchandise:

- **Necessity and Value for Money:** Heads of Business Units must clearly articulate the necessity and value for money for any branded merchandise proposed.
- **Approval Process:** A written justification and approval must be sought from the Budget Holder (minimum SCS 2) and Finance Business Partner by submitting the Branded Merchandise and External Venue Hire Request Form v1.0 (attached at Appendix 1) to

[REDACTED]

- **Use of Atamis:** Business Units are required to create a pipeline entry on the [Atamis](#) system for their requirement. This should be accompanied by the completed request form and evidence of budget holder approval. No orders should be placed with suppliers before approval has been granted on Atamis. Please contact your Commercial Business Partner if you require support on using Atamis, including how to upload the form.
- **Existing Contracts:** All Business Units are required to utilise the Cabinet Office's centrally managed contracts (Banner and APS) for [stationery](#) and [printing](#) needs, including necessary merchandise, irrespective of value.
- **Utilisation of Existing Stocks:** Existing stocks of branded merchandise should be used until exhausted. Further replenishment of non-essential items is prohibited.
- **Acceptable Merchandise:** Only items where branding is required for operational purposes are deemed acceptable.
- **Spend Control:** Any campaign, project, or programme with planned communications expenditure of £100,000 or more in a financial year, which may include merchandise, must comply with the [Government Communication Service spend control procedures](#).
- **Tracking Spend:** Expenditure on merchandise will be tracked (largely through Atamis and SOP) through authorised sourcing routes, allowing Commercial to monitor and justify spending effectively.

2. External Venues

The use of external venues for events should only occur when there is a lack of suitable available space within government buildings. Each Business Unit and Pillar must implement a robust control mechanism to ensure adherence to this stipulation.

Key Requirements for External Venues:

- **Prioritisation of Internal Venues:** Business Units must demonstrate that no suitable government building space is available prior to considering external venues. Guidance on identifying internal venue options will be provided, along with support from CO Estates, GPA, and [Calder](#).
- **Approval Process:** After establishing the unavailability of suitable internal space, approval for an external venue must be sought from the Budget Holder and Finance Business Partner using the appropriate request form (attached at Appendix 1).
- **Booking Process:** Following the necessary approvals, venues must be booked as outlined, ensuring that the approval form is submitted to Calder. No alternative methods for venue hire are permitted without prior approval from the Commercial Team.
- **Existing Bookings:** For events scheduled within the next 12 weeks, assess whether to cancel existing external venue bookings, considering the cost implications. All events planned from July 2025 onwards must be paused until the choice of venue is reviewed, with internal options explored.
- **Guest Speakers and Team Building:** Ensure value for money judgements are made regarding guest speakers and team-building activities. External speakers are only to be engaged where demonstrable added value is provided. Director approval is required, and expenditure should remain reasonable.
- **Sponsored/Pro Bono Arrangements:** Even if venues or merchandise can be obtained at no cost, the necessity of the arrangement must still be evaluated and approved by the Chief Executive, Government Communication Service and the Cabinet Office Commercial Director (or their delegates).
- **Spend Control:** Campaigns, projects, or programmes **exceeding £100,000** in planned communications expenditure in a financial year (including venue hire) are subject to the Government Communication Service spend control process.

Stage 2

The Cabinet Office Finance and Commercial teams will work together to undertake the following work to enhance the stage 1 guidance. For stage two this will include information on:

- the reporting requirements and analysis of spend.
- how non-compliant spend will be treated within the Department. As a minimum here, Directors General for their respective Pillars will need to provide an explanation for any non-compliant spend to the Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary.
- how compliance with these new controls will be integrated into the Annual Corporate Management compliance report, which may transition to quarterly reviews alongside digital monitoring and audit checks.
- how information can be made more readily available from CO Estates and the Government Property Agency on internal venues which can be booked across the Government Estates.
- how we can take an enhanced digital approach to the process to make it simpler and more efficient.

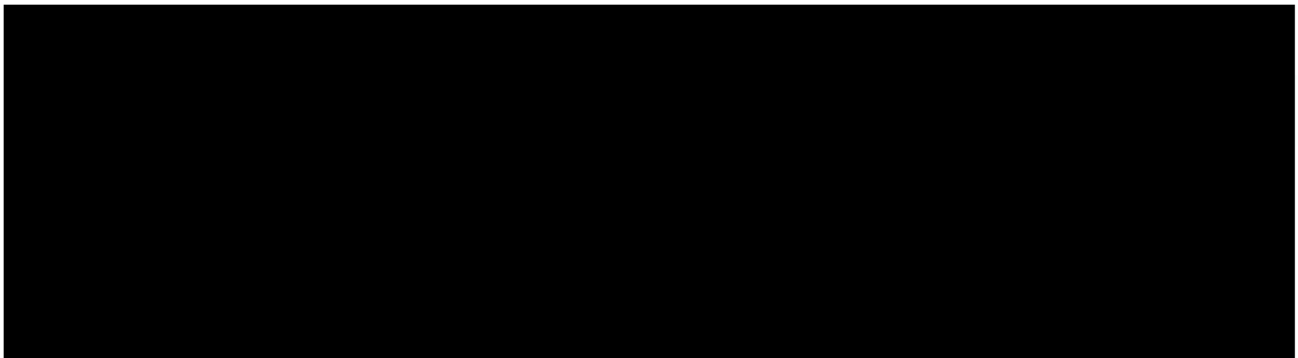
Immediate steps

It is crucial that this policy is effectively communicated to all relevant personnel working within your business units.

Please ensure that appropriate approval mechanisms are established, and that staff responsible for these expenditures understand and adhere to the control measures prior to placing orders or making bookings.

Thank you for your cooperation in helping the Department to maintain the highest standards of propriety and value for money in government expenditure.

Yours sincerely



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