Ararat Rural City

Council Expenses and Support Policy

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Chief Executive Officer
Chief Operating Officer

1 PURPOSE

This policy supports Councillors and members of delegated committees to perform their role, as defined in the *Local Government Act 2020*, by ensuring that expenses reasonably incurred in the performance of their roles are reimbursed. The policy also provides guidance on:

- Entitlements
- Processes for reimbursement
- Support available to Councillors and delegated committees
- Reporting requirements.

The policy is intended to ensure that Councillors and members of delegated committees are supported to perform their duties without disadvantage.

2 SCOPE

Section 41 of the Local Government Act 2020 provides that a Council must adopt and maintain an expenses policy in relation to reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses of Councillors and members of delegated committees.

This Policy applies to:

- Councillors of the Ararat Rural City Council
- Members of delegated committees of Ararat Rural City Council

Councillors' duties are those performed by a Councillor as a necessary part of their role in achieving the objectives of Council.

These duties may include (but are not limited to):

- Attendance at meetings of Council and its committees
- Attendance at briefing sessions, workshop, civic events or functions convened by Council
- Attendance at conferences, workshop, training programs related to the role of Councillor, Mayor or Deputy Mayor
- Attendance at meetings, events or functions representing Council
- Duties in relation to constituents concerning Council business.

Members of delegated committees exercise powers of Councillors, under delegation. This policy also applies to those members in the course of undertaking their role as delegated committee members.

3 POLICY

Councillors and members of delegated committees are entitled, under section 40 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), to reimbursement of expenses reasonably incurred in the performance of their duties.

This policy ensures that the reimbursement of these expenses is in accordance with the Act and meets the Act's principles of public transparency; achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community; and ensuring the ongoing financial viability of the Council.

Councillors and members of delegated committees will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses that are:

- Bona fide expenses **and**
- Have been reasonably incurred in the performance of the role of councillor; **and**
- Are reasonably necessary for the Councillor and member of a delegated committee to perform this role.

The Council commits to the following principles

- Reasonable expenses – Councillors and delegated committee members should not be out of pocket as a result of performing their Council functions and duties
- Proper conduct – reimbursement claimed by Councillors and delegated committee members must be expenses actually and necessarily incurred in performing their official Council functions and duties.
- Accountability and transparency – payment of any allowance, the reimbursement of expenses and the and the support provided to Councillors and delegated committee members must be accountable and transparent to the community
- Equity – there must be equitable access to expenses and facilities for Councillors and delegated committee members

4 REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES

4.1 Carer and dependent-related expenses

Council will provide reimbursement of costs where the provision of childcare is reasonably required for a councillor or member of a delegated committee to perform their role (s 41(2)(c)).

This applies to the care of a dependent, while the councillor or delegated committee member is undertaking their official duties; and may include expenses such as hourly fees and booking fees, if applicable.

Council will provide reimbursement of costs where the provision of carer services is reasonably required when a councillor or delegated committee member who is a carer (see ***Definitions***) incurs reasonable expenses in the performance of their duties (s 41(2)(d)).

Payments for carer and childcare services will not be made to a person who resides with the councillor or delegated committee member; has any financial or pecuniary interest with the councillor or delegated committee member; or has a relationship with the councillor, delegated committee member or their partner.

4.2 Attendance and Travel Related Expenses

The Mayor and Councillors receive invitations in their role as advocates for Council and Regional Projects. Within the capacity of the Council's budget such attendance and associated costs will be funded by Council under the administration of the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer.

Reimbursement for attendance at all other events, training opportunities, seminars and conferences, will require prior approval of the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer. A *"Conference – Seminar Attendance Application Form"* must be completed and submitted to the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer.

Attendance at any event overseas will require the approval of the full Council (air travel will be economy class). Interstate and overseas travel must be recorded in the Travel Register (Refer to the *International and Interstate Travel Policy and Application for International and Interstate Travel Form.)*

Any other reasonable expense incurred whilst performing duties as a Councillor will be reimbursed only after approval by the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer where practicable.

All claims for reimbursement of expenses are to be submitted monthly and within the financial year in which they are incurred (no later than 30 June).

No expenses will be reimbursed without the appropriate documentation/receipts. Council will retain records of all claims for audit purposes. When claiming reimbursement expenses Councillors must use the *"Councillor Request for Reimbursement of Expenses Form"*. The form must include details of expenses and the community benefit along with copies of receipts/tax invoices.

Travel Expenses will be reimbursed for the following:

- Ordinary and Special Council Meetings, Briefings and formal Community Asset Committee Meetings;
- Meetings, seminars, conferences, events or functions as agreed by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer from time to time, or by resolution of Council
- Council civic and ceremonial official functions.

Travel expenses will not be paid for travel undertaken at the choice of the Councillor or to inspect resident's inquiries or complaints.

Accommodation and related expenses (excluding mini bar costs and alcohol costs) required for attendance at seminars, conferences or attendance at events/functions will be approved by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

When claiming travel reimbursement expenses Councillors must use the *"Councillor Travel and Remote Travel Reimbursement Form"* . The form must include:

- Date of travel;
- Vehicle details;
- Destination;
- Odometer readings (start and finish);
- An explanation of the purpose of the business (ie function/event and the benefit to the community); and
- Signed confirmation of travel taken as part of role of Councillor.

All travelling expenses will be reimbursed in accordance with the Allowance payable to Mayors, Deputy Mayors and Councillors (Victoria) Determination No. 01/2026.

The remote area travel allowance is payable for each day that a mayor, deputy mayor or councillor spends travelling to, or returning from, eligible location that is more than 50 kilometres from the location that they normally reside in, based on the shortest possible practicable road distance.

If the shortest possible practicable road distance between eligible location and the location that the mayor, deputy mayor or councillor normally resides in is more than:

a) 50 kilometres and no more than 100 kilometres, the amount they are entitled to be paid per day is $50.60
b) 100 kilometres, the amount they are entitled to be paid per day is $101.20.

Each mayor, deputy mayor or councillor can receive no more that $6,325 in remote area travel allowance in any one financial year.

Where practicable, and by prior arrangement through the Governance Team, a Council pool vehicle will be made available to Councillors for travel outside the municipality where use of private vehicles or other means is not practicable.

The costs of a partner accompanying a Councillor on a Council business trip will be borne by the Councillor.

4.3 Exclusions

Any expense arising from a breach of road, traffic, parking or other regulations or laws, including Council Local Laws, will not be reimbursed or funded in any way by Council.

4.4 Other Expenses

Other expenses incurred by a Councillor or delegated committee member whilst performing duties may be claimable subject to prior approval by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

The cost of a partner, spouse or companion accompanying a Councillor on a business trip must be borne by the person.

4.5 Reimbursement Claims Procedure

- All reimbursement claims must be made on the approved expense reimbursement form outlined above, which are available from the Governance Team
- Original receipts/tax invoices must be attached to all claims (credit card receipts will not be accepted)
- Claims must be lodged with the Governance Team by the last day of the month.
- Claims will be processed by the Governance Team with sign off by either the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer
- All reimbursements will be paid by electronic funds transfer within 21 days of a compliant claim form being submitted.

5 RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

5.1 Mayoral Car

The Mayor shall have access to a fully maintained vehicle (including servicing, fuel card and insurance).

The make and model of the Mayoral vehicle shall be in accordance with the Council's Procurement Policy or at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

The Mayoral vehicle shall be available for use by the Mayor in the discharge of his or her duties as the Mayor for their term. The vehicle may be used for reasonable private use by the Mayor.

The fuel card and an E-Tag are located in the Mayoral vehicle.

The Mayoral vehicle is required to be garaged off street.

An odometer reading will be requested each month.

The Mayor is required to nominate any family member or associate who may drive the vehicle when accompanying the Mayor.

In the event of the Mayor taking leave of official duties or the Mayor not requiring full use of the vehicle, the Mayoral vehicle should be housed at the Municipal Depot and be available for the Deputy Mayor and Councillors in carrying out official duties on behalf of the Mayor and Council. Bookings for the Mayoral vehicle can be made through the Governance Team.

5.2 Access to Council's Pool Vehicles

Council vehicles should be utilised for use on Council related business. Council vehicles can be booked through the Governance Team.

Use of Councillor private vehicles must be with prior approval by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

5.3 Public Transport

Where possible the public transport network should be utilised to attend meetings and conferences.

5.4 Administrative Support

The Governance Team will provide secretarial support for the Mayor and Councillors. This includes:

- Diary Management;
- Responding to all correspondence;
- Responding to invitations;
- Bookings of conference registrations, travel arrangements and meeting rooms; and
- Processing Mayoral and Councillor Allowances and Councillor requests for Reimbursement of Expenses/Travel Claims.

5.5 Mayor's Office

A suitably equipped Mayoral office is available at the Municipal Officers, 59 Vincent Street, Ararat. The Mayoral office is all abilities accessible and is available during business hours only.

5.6 Office Access

Councillors are entitled to have access to the Municipal Offices during normal business hours.

Councillors must ensure that when they are within a staff-only area they avoid giving rise to the appearance that they may improperly influence Council staff decisions.

Access to the Shire Hall building is only available on Tuesday for Council Meetings and on other days as scheduled in the Councillors calendar.

5.7 Office Equipment and Stationery

Councillors will be provided the following for use while conducting Council business:

- Mobile phone
- Tablet
- Printer and printer consumables
- Provision of an email address
- Business Cards
- Name badges

In line with Council's waste management policy, wherever possible Councillor correspondence and information will be provided via email or electronic distribution.

5.8 Mobile Phones and Tablets

Mobile phones and tablets purchased, maintained and provided by Council are to be used only for the conduct of Council related business.

All mobile phone handsets, tablets and service numbers are and shall be deemed Council property. All mobile handsets, tablets and services must be used in compliance with applicable licences, notices, contracts and agreements.

Due to the high incidence of mobile phone and tablet theft and misuse after loss, a mobile phone and tablet service must be cancelled immediately once it is determined missing.

Councillors are required to take adequate care and ensure that measures are taken to secure the mobile phone and tablet. This includes ensuring the mobile phone and tablet is not left unattended out of the workplace or in a vehicle. A Councillor may be responsible for any costs incurred if due care has not been taken of the allocated mobile phone and/or tablet.

The is imperative that the theft or loss be reported to the nearest police station and to Council as soon as possible.

Mobile Phones and Tablets must be PIN or fingerprint access enabled.

All Mayor and Councillors equipment must be returned to Council prior to election day without exception.

5.9 Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS)

Council receives many requests from residents. These may take the form of requests for information, requests for service, or comments on community issues, proposals for increases to Council facilities and services.

A computerised Customer Relationship Management System has been established to record and manage responses to these enquiries.

Although most residents and visitors make requests by telephone, in person, at Council Customer Service Centres or by mail, they may also approach a Councillor and request that he or she seeks a response from Council staff on their behalf.

Councillors are encouraged to submit these requests for service directly to Chief Executive Officer or the Governance Team so that they will be recorded in the Customer Relationship Management System and followed up as soon as possible.

If you have any questions in relation to a request, please contact the Governance Team for assistance.

5.10 Correspondence

All incoming correspondence to Councillors must be registered through Council's Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS).

Any item of correspondence addressed to the Mayor and/or Councillors will be registered and directed to the appropriate officer. A copy of correspondence addressed to the Mayor and/or Councillors will be provided to the Mayor or Councillors as addressed.

Correspondence received directly by Councillors should be forwarded to the Governance Team as soon as practicable so normal process can take place.

Any item of correspondence addressed to a particular Councillor by name, which is marked either confidential or personal, will be opened by the Governance Team, registered and directed as appropriate.

5.11 Invitations

The Mayor in consultation with Councillors will determine which Councillor/s will attend events on his or her behalf. An electronic calendar invitation will be forwarded to the Councillor/s attending the function/event. Invitations will also be listed on the Councillors diary (which is sent out weekly on the email).

Councillors should advise Governance Team of any invitations received, so the Mayor can discuss attendance with all Councillors.

5.12 Use of Corporate Stationery and General Stationery

Council's letterhead stationery is used only for official Council business and can only be used for official replies prepared for a Councillor by the Governance Team and signed/approved by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

Any other use of Council's letterhead should be discussed with the Chief Executive Officer.

Councillors shall, upon request, be supplied with general stationery held or obtained general for the organisation's requirements. Stationery may include but not necessarily be limited to: Copy paper, writing pads, notebooks, business cards and personal diary.

5.13 Photocopying

Council related photocopying can only be carried out at the Municipal Offices upon authorisation by the Chief Executive Officer. Photocopying is not to be carried out at the Library, Visitor Information Centre or any other Council site. All photocopying will be carried out by an authorised officer.

5.14 Health and Wellbeing

In line with Ararat Rural City Council's commitment to promoting a healthy working environment, Councillors and delegated committee members are able to access (where required) Council's appointed confidential professional counselling service (EAP) to help resolve both personal and Council related problems or concerns that may impact on their capacity to effectively undertake their roles.

5.15 Insurance

Section 43 of the *Local Government Act 2020* provides:

A Council must indemnify and keep indemnified each Councillor, member of a delegated committee and member of a Community Asset Committee against all actions or claims whether arising during or after their term of office in respect of anything necessarily done or reasonably done or omitted to be done in good faith—

(a) in the performance of a duty or a function or the exercise of a power under this Act, the regulations or a local law or any other Act; or

(b) in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the performance of a duty or a function or the exercise of a power under this Act, the regulations or a local law or any other Act.

Council's insurance program provides coverage for Councillors and members of delegated committees under the following insurance policies

- Public Liability
- Professional Indemnity
- Councillors and Officers' liability
- Travel

5.16 Councillors Profiles on Website

A page on Council's website will be provided outlining Councillor's profiles. The content for each Councillor profile will include a photograph, contact details, personal history, hobbies, vision and Council appointments.

6 COUNCILLOR DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Induction Program

Upon commencement of each electoral term, a purpose designed induction program will be provided to all Councillors. Councillors must actively participate in the induction program of Council.

The induction program will include the following elements:

- Relationships Building – Councillors and senior staff, led by the Chief Executive Officer, have shared responsibility for the strategy, priorities, efficient resource use and overall performance of services delivered to the community. The strong working relationship is therefore critical;

- Roles and Responsibilities – Understanding the separate but complementary roles of Council as a whole, Councillors, the Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer is fundamental to achieving outcomes for the local community;
- Councillor and Meeting Conduct – Equally important to decision making is the smooth functioning of the elected Council and the cooperation of Councillors. The induction program will provide information about and discussion of the law and procedures of meetings as well as the provisions of the Councillor Code of Conduct.
- Strategic Directions – As an early priority the incoming Council needs to review the strategic direction and major projects agreed by the previous Council and determine whether they will continue to be endorsed. The induction program will include briefings with sufficient detail to ensure that all Councillors have a common understanding of key policy areas, strategies, plans and ongoing projects.
- Values and Behaviours – The incoming Council is required to review and adopt a Councillor Code of Conduct within four months of the election. The induction program will provide the opportunity for Councillors to contribute to the review and adoption of the Councillor Code of Conduct.

Induction plans will be made available to candidates prior to a General Election.

6.2 Training and Conferences

Councillors will be given the opportunity to attend conferences and training sessions as they are important in enhancing the knowledge of Councillors and their ability to make contemporary, informed decisions.

The selection of the conference or training sessions should be based on its relevance to the responsibilities of the respective Councillor and any specific professional development needs.

6.3 Professional Development

Council is committed to the development of skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated Councillors. Council recognises the importance of Councillor training and education as an integral part of personal growth and organisational development in the performance of duties. Professional Development programs/courses are available to all Councillors.

Professional Development should be tested against the following criteria:

- Relevance in the Councillor's role and personal development needs;
- The desire of the Councillor to attend the course;
- The achievement of Council's Corporate aims and broad objectives;
- The efficient functioning of the council while absent from training;
- The availability of Councillor training funds;
- The consideration of time required for study; or
- The benefit to the community.

6.4 Councillor Training, Conference and Professional Development Reporting Requirements

Attendance at conference or professional development event will be subject to a report to Council. The report is to be written, tabled at a Council Meeting within 2 months of the conference or professional development event and may be a joint report if more than one Councillor attended.

The report should include:

- Details of course topic, content, location, date and duration;

- Relevance of conference, workshop, training to Council's business and Councillor's personal development requirements;
- Total cost covering course, course material, travel, accommodation and any other expenses for the Councillor; and
- Benefits to the community from attendance.

7 MAYOR AND COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES

The Mayor and Councillors are entitled to receive from the Council an allowance.

Councillors should obtain taxation advice from their accountant as these allowances are taxable and may therefore have individual tax implications. If a deduction is required, please contact the Governance Team.

It is the individual Councillor responsibility to notify Council of any changes to banking details, address or contact details. Council cannot be held responsible if errors occur due to lack of notification or incorrect details.

Mayoral and Councillors allowances are paid monthly by Electronic Funds Transfer.

8 MONITORING, EVALUATING AND REVIEW

8.1 Audit Committee

Quarterly reports of all Councillor and delegated committee member expenses will be provided to Council's Audit and Risk Committee.

The report will include:

- expenses incurred by Councillors during the quarter.
- reimbursement claims made by councillors during the quarter.
- reimbursements made by councillors during the quarter.

8.2 Website

The Councillor and Delegated Committee Member Expenses Report is published on the Council's website on a monthly basis. The report outlines the monthly and year to date amounts of expenses, which includes travel expenses, car mileage expenses (Mayoral car), carer and dependent related expenses, information and communication technology expenses and conference and training expenses (as per Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations 2014 section 14(2)(db)).

8.3 Annual Report

The Annual Report shall include the amount paid or attributed to a Councillor and member of delegated committee and include travel expenses, car mileage expenses (Mayoral car), childcare expenses, information and Communication technology expenses and conference and training expenses.

8.4 Policy Monitoring and Review

Council commits to monitoring processes and decision making to understand the overall success of the policy's implementation.

A period review of the policy will be undertaken to ensure any changes required to strengthen or update the policy are made in a timely manner.

9 ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

It is recognised that, from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, a change to the name of a Federal or State department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters this document must be by resolution of Council.

10 DEFINIITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Carer	A carer as defined under section 4 of the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*
Delegated committee	Delegated committees are defined under section 63 of the *Local Government Act 2020*
Expenses	Where pre-approved expenses are incurred by Councillors or members of delegated committees and meet the requirement of the Policy for reimbursement. *They must be accompanied by an official tax receipt.*

11 REFERENCES

Council Policies and Forms:

Governance Rules
Governance Framework
Public Transparency Policy
Councillors Code of Conduct
International and Interstate Travel Policy
Application for International and Interstate Travel Form
Travel register
Councillors Travel and Remote Travel Reimbursement Form
Conference/Seminar Attendance Application Form
Request for EFT Payment form

Legislation:
Local Government Act 2020
Carers Recognition Act 2012
Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
Freedom of Information Act 1982
Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014
Equal Opportunity Act 2010
Gender Equity Bill 2020

Other Documents:
Allowance payable to Mayors, Deputy Mayors and Councillors (Victoria) Determination No. 01/2026.