



Ararat Rural City

COUNCILLOR SUPPORT AND REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES POLICY

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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Councillors
Chief Executive Officer
Governance and Administration Coordinator

INTENT

This policy sets out the support, resources, training and development which will be provided to Councillors and guidance on the reimbursement of expenditure that may be claimed in performing their duties as an elected Councillor.

POLICY

This Policy provides an overview of how the Council can provide assistance and support to Councillors in carrying out their role and official duties as Councillors. It also seeks to set out parameters and processes for legitimate claims.

Section 75B of the Local Government Act 1989 provides that a Council must adopt and maintain a policy in relation to reimbursement of expenses of Councillors.

Councillors Allowances

Council shall review and set Mayoral and Councillor allowances in accordance with the Act.

Councillors should obtain taxation advice from their accountant as the Mayoral and Councillor 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.

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.

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 Councillors private vehicles must be with prior approval by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer.

Public Transport

Where possible Councillors should utilise the public transport network to attend meetings and conferences.

Reimbursement of Expenses

The Local Government Act 1989 (Section 75) provides for the reimbursement of “necessary out of pocket expenses” incurred whilst performing duties as a Councillor.

The Mayor and Councillors receive invitations in their role as advocates and lobbyists 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 and Related Expenses

Travel Expenses will be reimbursed for the following:

- Ordinary and Special Council Meetings, Briefings and formal Section 86 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 at 85% of the current Australian Pay and Classification Scales as outlined in the Victorian Local Authorities Award 2001 (PLF011) clause 23.1.5.

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.

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.

Dependent Care

Council will reimburse the cost of dependent care expenses incurred by Councillors when attending:

- Ordinary and Special Council Meetings, Briefings and formal Section 86 Committee Meetings;
- Meetings, seminars, conferences, events or functions as agreed by the Mayor or Chief Executive Officer or by resolution of Council
- Council civic and ceremonial official functions.

Reimbursement will be made subject to:

- Where the care relates to dependent children, the eldest child under care being less than 16 years of age.
- Where the care relates to dependent adults, the Chief Executive Officer being satisfied that the expense is warranted.
- Each child care expense is supported by a receipt from the caregiver showing the dates and times care was provided.
- A Councillor providing details as to why the care is needed on each occasion.

Dependent care costs will not be paid in relation to care provided by immediate family members (partner, parent, sibling, other child, or partners of same) or by a person who normally or regularly resides with the Councillor.

Other Expenses

Other expenses incurred by a Councillor whilst performing duties as a Councillor 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.

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.

Mayor's Office

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

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.

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.

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.

It 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Reporting

Councillor 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.

Website

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

Annual Report

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

Health and Wellbeing

In line with Ararat Rural City Council's commitment to promoting a healthy working environment, Councillor's 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 role as a Councillor.

Insurance

Council's insurance program provides Councillors with Public Liability, Professional Indemnity and Councillors and Officers liability cover.

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.

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.

REFERENCES

- Local Government Act 1989, Section 75
- Victorian Local Authorities Award 2001
- Councillors Code of Conduct
- Councillors Code of Conduct Support Guide
- 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