

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The broad principle adopted by Council in connection to the provision and use of Council-owned assets to Councillors is to enable Councillors to effectively discharge the requirements of their office. Limitations about the use of these assets are adopted to ensure that Council-owned assets are not utilised for purposes other than those directly related to the office holder.
- 1.2 Section 250(1) of the Local Government Regulation 2012 (Qld) requires Council to adopt an expenses reimbursement policy. Section 249(2) of the LGR states that an expenses reimbursement policy provides for the following:
 - 1.2.1 payment of reasonable expenses incurred, or to be incurred, by councillors for discharging their duties and responsibilities as councillors; and
 - 1.2.2 provision of facilities to councillors for that purpose.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to Councillors and sets out guidelines for the reimbursement of legitimate expenses incurred or to be incurred by a Councillor while carrying out Council Business. It also deals with the provision of administrative support to enable Councillors to discharge their duties and responsibilities.
- 2.2 This policy does not provide for, or add to, the remuneration received by Councillors for the performance of their roles. Councillors' remuneration is determined by the Local Government Commission and as such, falls outside the scope of this policy.
- 2.3 Where a Councillor has special needs or suffers from some form of impairment, the special access and equity needs of the Councillor may result in the provision of additional support or other changes to this policy as required.

3. Policy Statement

- 3.1 Council is committed to ensuring that Councillors are not financially disadvantaged in the conduct of their role. This policy underpins that commitment by providing that reasonable expenses incurred by Councillors in carrying out their duties and responsibilities will be reimbursed. This policy also sets out the facilities and resources that Council will provide to Councillors.
- 3.2 The payment or reimbursement of expenses and the provision of facilities and resources for Councillors will be:
 - 3.2.1 open and transparent;

- 3.2.2 financially responsible and accountable;
- 3.2.3 based on ensuring economy and efficiency;
- 3.2.4 subject to budget provisions; and
- 3.2.5 in accordance with all statutory requirements.
- 3.3 This policy has been written to reflect the following underpinning principles:
 - 3.3.1 the use of public money must be in the public interest;
 - 3.3.2 the allocation of Council resources must be fair and reasonable;
 - 3.3.3 public disclosure of policy and resolutions promotes transparent decision making; and
 - 3.3.4 Councillors must accept accountability for their expenditure and use of facilities.

4. Guiding Principles – General

Budget Provisions

- 4.1 A budget will be allocated to each Councillor each financial year for reasonable expenses incurred under this policy.
- 4.2 Budget allocations are available for one financial year only. Unspent funds in a single financial year will not be carried over to the next financial year.
- 4.3 All entitlements under this policy are subject to Council's budgetary constraints.

Professional Development

- 4.4 Councillors are encouraged to undertake relevant Professional Development, including conferences, seminars and training.
- 4.5 Council will organise and pay for business costs for Professional Development where the activity level is reasonable, and the activity is:
 - 4.5.1 directly related to a Councillor's official duties; or
 - 4.5.2 organised by a government agency or an industry body (e.g. LGAQ, ALGA).

[Note: Councillors are encouraged to attend a LGAQ and/or ALGA conference during the term.]

- 4.6 Requests by Councillors to attend Professional Development are to be made in writing to the CEO outlining the details of the event and the benefits to Council. The CEO may approve professional development within Australia in consultation with the Mayor where there is sufficient budget allocations to cover the costs.

- 4.7 Any funds expended at the event on personal pursuits should be payable by the Councillor from private funds.

Council Business

- 4.8 To be entitled to reimbursement under this policy, expenses must be incurred conducting Council Business.
- 4.9 Any expenses of a personal nature are not reimbursable. Expenses of a personal nature include, but are not limited to:
- 4.9.1 tourism related costs;
 - 4.9.2 social events;
 - 4.9.3 in-flight and in-house movies;
 - 4.9.4 Mini bar purchases;
 - 4.9.5 Airline club fees;
 - 4.9.6 Alcohol not consumed as part of a meal; and
 - 4.9.7 Payment of costs associated with the return of personal items which have been left behind.

5. Guiding Principles – Travel Expenses

Travel Expenses Generally

- 5.1 Council will reimburse travel expenses where travel is undertaken for Council Business.
- 5.2 All requests for travel are to be made in sufficient time to gain the required approval and should enable Council to take advantage of travel discounts and deals.
- 5.3 The following approval is required to incur travel expenses:
- 5.3.1 local and interstate travel – CEO approval;
 - 5.3.2 international travel – a resolution of Council
- 5.4 Economy class air travel is the standard. Where flight time exceeds five hours, the Mayor is eligible for Business Class travel and other Councillors are eligible for Premium Economy class (or equivalent).
- 5.5 Councillors are required to travel by the most direct and cost effective route available.

Meals

- 5.6 Council will reimburse the actual cost of meals associated with Council Business, when:
 - 5.6.1 the Councillor incurs the cost personally;
 - 5.6.2 the councillor can produce original documents sufficient to verify the actual meal cost (e.g. tax receipt); and
 - 5.6.3 the expenses are reasonable.
- 5.7 Reimbursement will be limited to a maximum of the ATO guidelines for meal allowance except for in exceptional circumstances (e.g. entertaining in an unusually expensive location outside the region) and approved by the CEO.
- 5.8 The approval of the CEO should be obtained for the reimbursement of costs of alcohol consumed with a meal. The CEO may place conditions on approval (e.g. financial limits).
- 5.9 Tips and gratuities are not reimbursable unless the meal is in a foreign country and there is a recognised cultural expectation that a tip will be provided. The approval of the CEO should be obtained for the reimbursement of tips and gratuity costs.

[Note: Such approval is expected to be sought when travelling to countries with a tipping culture, e.g. the United States of America.]

Accommodation

- 5.10 Councillors are entitled to accommodation when it is necessary having regard to the length of travel for Council Business. Councillors are entitled to stay in accommodation to a standard of 3/4 stars or equivalent. However, where practical, Council will book accommodation offered as part of a conference package (which may exceed the 3/4-star standard).
- 5.11 Council will book and pay for accommodation in accordance with this policy.
- 5.12 Where a Councillor chooses to stay with friends or family, no accommodation expenses will be paid.
- 5.13 Councillors may be reimbursed for reasonable incidentals associated with accommodation in accordance with this policy, up to a maximum of the ATO guidelines.

Parking and transport

- 5.14 Councillors may be reimbursed for parking or transport (public transport, taxis, etc.) when conducting Council Business.

[Note – vehicles for travel within the Whitsunday Region are dealt with separately in this policy]

- 5.15 Any fines or infringements issued while undertaking such activities are the personal responsibility of the Councillor incurring the fine.

Spouses, partners and family members

- 5.16 Councillors are not entitled to reimbursements for expenses incurred for spouses, partners or other family members without the prior approval of the CEO.
- 5.17 Where Council has incurred unapproved costs for spouses, partners or other family members for the sake of expediency (e.g. booking flights), the expense associated with spouses, partners or other family members should be reimbursed to Council within 10 business days.

6. Guiding Principles – Other expenses

Advertising

- 6.1 Councillors are not entitled to be reimbursed or provided with funds, services or facilities for advertising purposes.

Alcohol

- 6.2 Councillors are not entitled to be reimbursed or provided with funds for the purchase of alcoholic beverages without the approval of the Chief Executive Officer.

Other exclusions

- 6.3 Expenses related to functions and activities requested or organised by Council will be made from the relevant approved departmental budget.
- 6.4 It is reasonable that expenses associated with advocacy and representative activities undertaken by Councillors on behalf of Council should be adequately funded from existing budgets. Such expenses should not be a charge against the approved budget allocation for the Councillor.

Operational Support

- 6.5 Each Councillor may be provided with an administrative and operational support officer to assist them in the performance of their duties, and to undertake Council Business. Such officers are employees of Council and are subject to Council's usual terms and conditions of employment and reporting lines.
- 6.6 Councillor support officers should not assist councillors with matters other than Council Business.

- 6.7 Communication support is provided on a professional basis to support or further the interests of Council, not those of an individual Councillor.
- 6.8 The arrangements for provision of operational support will be reviewed on a periodic basis and shall be subject to budgetary and operational parameters.

Office Accommodation and Assets

- 6.9 Councillors have access to office accommodation and meeting rooms located in Council premises. These assets should be booked through Council's ordinary processes.

Business and Communication Tools

- 6.10 Councillors will be issued with business and communication tools to assist them in performing their duties and undertaking Council Business. These tools should be utilised in accordance with any relevant policies, procedures, conditions of use and guidelines
- 6.11 Councillors should transact all Council Business using a Council supplied device connected to Council's information technology network. Councillors should not conduct Council Business on private electronic devices nor utilise private mail or messaging accounts for Council Business. Any incidental use of private electronic devices for Council Business (e.g. unprompted contact from the community) should be redirected to official channels and captured as a public record.
- 6.12 All business and communication tools are procured by Council and are of the same standard as those available to senior management.
- 6.13 All business and communication tools remain the property of Council and should be accounted for during any audit and returned at the end of the Councillor's term of office.
- 6.14 Business and communication tools will be replaced at the end of their working life.
- 6.15 Councillors may make incidental personal use of business and communication tools, but excessive or unreasonable personal use costs (as determined by the CEO) should be reimbursed by the Councillor.
- 6.16 Requests for additional or alternate business and communication tools will be assessed on their merit and determined by the CEO.

Vehicles

- 6.17 To acknowledge the fact that the role of Mayor requires extensive 'after hours' work, the Mayor shall be provided with a Council vehicle with full private use.
- 6.18 Councillors other than the Mayor may elect to either:

- 6.18.1 use a Council provided vehicle to attend Council Business. Council will make a suitable 'pool' vehicle available for priority use of a Councillor, located at a Council facility; or
- 6.18.2 use their personal vehicle for Council Business and claim an allowance for the kilometres travelled. Such allowance will be the rate set by the ATO for vehicle usage and be based on a log kept by the Councillor that records the purpose of each trip and distance travelled.
- 6.19 Council will meet all operating costs and provide fuel cards for Councillors driving a Council-owned vehicles.
- 6.20 Councillors should complete a logbook when using Council vehicles and should specify if any of the kilometres driven were for private use. Any private use by a Councillor shall be reimbursed by the Council using the ATO's business use of motor vehicle cents per kilometre method applicable at the time of travel.
- 6.21 Vehicle expenses for private vehicle use shall only be reimbursed for Council Business, in accordance with ATO guidelines.

Corporate Wear, Personal Protective Equipment and Name Badges

- 6.22 An annual professional attire allowance of \$500 will be provided to Councillors to purchase professional attire or uniforms from the approved corporate uniform supplier.
- 6.23 Councillors will be provided with all necessary safety equipment and are expected to observe the appropriate Workplace, Health and Safety measures when at any workplace.
- 6.24 Councillors will be provided with business cards, name badges and access cards.

Use of Corporate Cards

- 6.25 The CEO may authorise the provision of corporate cards to Councillors to enable them to make incidental expenses in accordance with this policy. Councillors must perform a reconciliation and provide tax invoices to match expenditure.

Asset Maintenance Costs

- 6.26 Council will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and reasonable wear and tear costs of Council-owned equipment that is supplied to Councillors for official business use. This includes the replacement of any facilities that fall under Council's asset replacement program.

Hospitality

- 6.27 Council recognises that Councillors may have occasion to incur hospitality expenses while conducting Council Business, in addition to entertainment or hospitality organised by Council under the Entertainment and Hospitality Policy.
- 6.28 The Mayor may incur hospitality expenses up to the value of \$4,000.00 per annum where it is deemed necessary (by the Mayor) in the conduct of Council Business.
- 6.29 Each Councillor other than the Mayor may incur hospitality expenses up to \$500.00 per annum for hospitality expenses deemed necessary (by the Councillor) in the conduct of Council Business.
- 6.30 Any hospitality expense in excess of these amounts will require the prior approval of the CEO.
- 6.31 Reasonable alcohol costs may be included as a hospitality expense where any Councillor attends a function or dinner for the purposes of professional networking or in relation to Council business, with the approval of the CEO; and
- 6.32 All hospitality expenses shall be reimbursed only where such expenses are otherwise consistent with Council's Entertainment and Hospitality Policy.

Legal costs and Insurance Cover

- 6.33 Council may decide, by resolution, pursuant to section 107 of the LGA, to cover costs incurred through any inquiry, investigation, hearing or legal proceedings into the conduct of a Councillor, or arising out of, or in connection with the Councillor's performance of their duties.
- 6.34 Councillors will be covered under Council insurance policies while discharging their duties. Specifically, insurance cover will be provided for public liability, professional indemnity, Councillors liability, personal accident and/worker's compensation, international and domestic travel insurance (subject to the terms and condition of the travel insurance policy).

Caretaker Period under the LGA

- 6.35 Once the caretaker period commences, Councillors must not use Council facilities for political or election purposes and only be eligible to claim expense reimbursement for costs relating to Council Business (not electoral expenses) or as otherwise approved by Council resolution.

7. Reporting

- 7.1 As required by section 186 of the LGR, Council's Annual Report will include details of the expenses incurred by each Councillor during the financial year, as set out in this policy.

8. Related Policies and Legislation

Local Government Act 2009 (Qld)
Local Government Regulation 2012 (Qld)
Public Ethics Act 1994 (Qld)
Councillor Code of Conduct
Entertainment and Hospitality Policy

9. Definitions

ATO means the Australian Taxation Office.

Caretaker Period has the meaning given in the LGA.

CEO means the Chief Executive Officer of Council.

Council means Whitsunday Regional Council.

Council Business means business conducted on behalf of Council where a Councillor is required to undertake certain tasks to satisfy legislative requirements, perform ceremonial activities or achieve business objectives for the Council. Council Business should result in a benefit being achieved either for Council, the Whitsunday region or the community. Council Business includes functions that are a statutory requirement of the Councillor's role or are officially recorded in minutes or other public records. These might also include attending an event or function to perform duties or as a Council representative such as:

- ceremonial openings of buildings and facilities;
- fetes and carnivals;
- annual or presentation dinners;
- public meetings;
- private meetings arranged through Council administrative channels (i.e. documented in official records or diary) for the purpose of conducting discussions regarding the business of Council; or
- other meetings, events or functions, such as:
 - meetings of Council or of its committees that the Councillor is entitled or asked to attend, or at which the Councillor has business for the benefit of the Whitsunday region;

STRATEGIC POLICY

Councillor Expenses and Resources (GOV_09)

Endorsed by Council

27 November 2024

- inspections, deputations, conferences and meetings at which the Councillor's attendance is permitted by Council;
- Meetings with stakeholders including individuals, community groups, Councillors and staff;
- official functions organised for the local government; or
- meeting with residents for the purpose of local government business.

Expenses of a personal nature are not Council Business.

Councillor means the elected representatives who hold (current) office with Council, including the Mayor.

Expense means a cost actually incurred.

Facilities refers to 'tools of trade' provided by Council, required to enable Councillors to perform their duties with relative ease and at a standard appropriate to fulfil their professional role for the community.

LGA means the *Local Government Act 2009* (Qld)

LGR means the *Local Government Regulation 2012* (Qld)

Professional Development means training that improves a Councillor's skills and knowledge relevant to their role as a Councillor and is directly related to Council Business. Examples of this type of training include public speaking development courses or attending a Local Government conference.

COUNCIL POLICY			
Date Adopted by Council	27 November 2024	Council Resolution	OM2024/11/27.9
Effective Date	27 November 2024	Next Review Date	November 2028
Responsible Officer(s)	Manager Governance and Administration	Revokes	LSP_OMCEO_10 Adopted 11 October 2017
Public Consultation: Yes / No	No		