

COUNCILLOR EXPENSES REIMBURSEMENT POLICY

Preface:

1.1 Legislative requirements:

Section 250 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012* requires that a local government must adopt an expenses reimbursement policy which may be amended by resolution at any time.

In summary the regulation states:

- The *expenses reimbursement policy* is a policy providing for —
 - (a) payment of reasonable expenses incurred, or to be incurred, by councillors for discharging their duties and responsibilities as councillors;
 - (b) provision of facilities to councillors for that purpose.

- As soon as practicable after a local government adopts or amends its expenses reimbursement policy, the local government must—
 - (a) ensure a copy of the policy may be inspected and purchased by the public at the local government's public office; and
 - (b) publish the policy on the local government's website.

The price for purchasing a copy of the policy must be no more than the cost to the local government of making the copy available for purchase.

- A local government can not resolve that a meeting at which a proposed expenses reimbursement policy is discussed (including its adoption or amendment, for example) be closed.

Definitions

CEO: Council's Chief Executive Officer.

Expenses: These expenses relate to actual expenses deemed necessary and required for the business of Gympie Regional Council. In addition, expenses are payments reasonably incurred, or to be incurred, in connection with Councillors discharging their duties. The expenses may be either reimbursed to Councillors or paid direct by Council. Expenses are not included as remuneration. All expense amounts quoted throughout the policy are ex GST.

Facilities: Facilities provided to Councillors are the "tools of trade" required to enable them to perform their duties with relative ease and at a standard appropriate to fulfil the community expectation of their role.

Official Council Business: Activities conducted on behalf of Council where a Councillor is required to undertake certain tasks to satisfy legislative requirements or achieve business objectives for the Council. Official Council business should result in a benefit being achieved either for the local government and/or the local community: This includes:

- Attendance at Council, Committee and Briefing Meetings;
- Attendance at prescribed Local Government training/workshops, seminars and conferences;
- Attendance at civic ceremonies and community events where a formal invitation has been received inviting Councillors in their capacity to undertake official duty;
- Attending public meetings, annual meetings or presentation dinners where invited as a Councillor;
- Attending meetings of community groups where invited to speak about Council programs or initiatives;
- Attending private meetings with constituents, where arranged through official council channels and details of discussions are documented in official records or diaries;
- Attending Civic Reception functions on behalf of the Mayor; and
- Attending organised meetings/inspections/community consultations pertaining to Committee responsibilities.

Private Use of Council Vehicle: Use of a Council vehicle for other than official Council business is private use. For the purposes of this policy only, however, private use does **not** include:

- Travel between a Councillor's home and official Council business;
- Any incidental deviations from the direct travel route where the distance travelled is not material (eg. a Councillor who is attending official Council business could stop enroute at the corner store, provided that the Councillor does not make a significant deviation from the most direct route.)

The home garaging of a Council vehicle is permitted.

Professional Development

a) Mandatory Training:

Where one or more Councillors are required to attend training courses, workshops, seminars or conferences for skills development related to a Councillor's role. Examples of this type of training include Councillor induction, code of conduct, meeting procedures and legislative obligations. Attendance at conferences includes major industry events eg Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) and Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA) or specific events that are relevant to all Councillors or Committee members.

b) Discretionary training:

Where a Councillor identifies a need to attend a conference, seminar, workshop or training to improve skills relevant to their role as a Councillor, other than mandatory training, the Council may allow for the expenses to be covered to a limit of \$5,000 available to each Councillor during their current term in office. The Mayor or Chief Executive Officer is to approve the attendance of a Councillor to the conference, seminar, workshop or training prior to the expense being incurred.

Policy

1.2 Statement of Principles

Gympie Regional Council acknowledges the core principles underpinning the *Local Government Act 2009*, those being:

- (a) transparent and effective processes, and decision-making in the public interest;
- (b) sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services;
- (c) democratic representation, social inclusion and meaningful community engagement;
- (d) good governance of, and by, local government;
- (e) ethical and legal behaviour of Councillors and local government employees.

Council has formulated this policy in line with the above principles.

2.0 Expenses

2.1 Professional Development

Council will reimburse expenses incurred for mandatory professional development; and discretionary professional development. Council will meet registration fees, course fees and entrance fees together with reasonable travel, accommodation and sustenance expenses.

- Registrations should, where practicable, be made in sufficient time to take advantage of "early bird" discounts.
- Councillors will provide a verbal or written report on the outcomes of any Professional Development.

2.2 Travel as required to represent Council

Councillors may incur travel costs to attend statutory Council meetings, committee meetings, briefings, and travel to attend conferences, training workshops and seminars.

- Any vehicle usage must comply with section 3.1 of this policy.
- If using their own private vehicles, Councillors are required to keep a log book with details to substantiate the relevance and distance of the travel. Where appropriate Councillor's private vehicle usage may be reimbursed by Council if the total travel claim does not exceed the cost of the same travel using economy flights plus the cost of all related taxi transfers.
- Councillors are to maintain the log book and are to calculate the amount of reimbursement in accordance with the scale prescribed by Directive Number 14/10 (or the most current directive) made pursuant to section 54(1) of the *Public Service Act 2008*.
- Travel between a Councillor's home and official Council business is included for the purpose of calculating any reimbursement applicable.
- From an insurance viewpoint Councillor's own vehicles should be covered by either a comprehensive or a third party property damage insurance policy. Councillors are required to produce evidence that the insurance policy has been endorsed to indemnify Gympie Regional Council. It is understood this is a standard type endorsement available on request from all insurance companies. Council will refund any endorsement fees.
- The amount reimbursed will be calculated on the actual mileage travelled by the Councillor.
- Councillors are required to travel via the most direct route using the most economical and efficient mode of transport.
- All Councillor travel approved by Council will be booked and paid for by Council. This will occur as soon as practicable after the decision to attend the event to ensure the most economical method of travel is attained.
- Airline tickets are not transferable and can only be procured for the Councillor's travel on Council business. They cannot be transferred to offset any other unapproved expenses (eg the costs of a spouse accompanying the Councillor).
- Economy class is to be used where possible unless a specific resolution of Council specifies another class.

2.3 Accommodation

Councillors may need to stay away overnight to attend to Council business, however for this to be considered as an expense of Council written approval must be obtained from the Mayor/CEO prior to incurring any expense.

When attending conferences, seminars, training workshops or courses, and where available, Councillors must utilize the package offered by the conference organisers, unless a more suitable or more economical venue convenient to the event can be obtained.

In all other cases, written approval must be obtained from the Mayor/CEO prior to the incurring of the expense for accommodation costs to be reimbursed.

All Councillor accommodation for Council business will be booked and paid by Council.

Council will pay for the most economical deal available, however where possible the standard for Councillors' accommodation should be four star rating.

2.4 Hospitality Expenses

Councillors may have occasion to incur hospitality expenses while conducting Council business apart from civic receptions organised by Council.

The maximum amount of hospitality expenses which may be reimbursed:

- for Councillors is \$500 per financial year.
- for the Mayor is \$ 4,000 per financial year.
- Reimbursement for hospitality expenses may include alcoholic beverages when supply of such beverages meets established social customs.

2.5 Meal allowance

Gympie Regional Council shall reimburse the cost of sustenance for Councillors who are travelling for Council business related reasons including professional development when:

- the Councillor incurs the cost personally and
- a meal is not provided within the registration costs of the approved activity/event or during a flight.

The amount reimbursed shall be:

- The actual amount, or ;
- For meals the following limits shall apply:
 - Breakfast \$25.00
 - Lunch \$30.00
 - Dinner \$45.00

No alcohol shall be paid for by Council as part of the meal allowance.

2.6 Incidental allowance

Up to \$20 per day may be paid by Gympie Regional Council to cover any incidental costs incurred by Councillors required to travel and who are away from home overnight for official Council business.

Examples of incidentals include but may not be limited to: tea/coffee; newspapers; telephone.

Incidental expenses must be verified by providing receipts.

2.7 Travel Transfer Costs

Any travel transfer expenses associated with Councillors travelling for Council approved business will be reimbursed.

Examples of travel transfer expenses include train, taxi, bus and ferry fares.

Cab charge vouchers may also be used where Councillors are required to undertake duties relating to the business of Council.

3.0 Facilities

Provision of Facilities

All facilities provided to Councillors remain the property of Council and must be returned when a Councillor's term expires.

Private Use of Council Owned Facilities

The provision of facilities for use by Councillors is based upon the principle that *no private benefit is to be gained* from the facilities provided to Councillors.

The facilities are to be used for Council business only unless prior written approval has been granted by the Mayor or CEO.

3.1 Gympie Regional Council Office based Administrative tools

For the Mayor specifically:

- An office.
- An administration officer for secretarial support.
- Use of a Council maintained vehicle as detailed below.

Mayor's Vehicle:

The Mayor shall be provided with use of a Council owned vehicle for use on Council business for each term of Council:

- The vehicle shall be a mid-large sized sedan or wagon with fuel efficient engine similar to a Hyundai i40 premium wagon.
- At all times the vehicle is to be driven by only the Mayor, the Mayor's spouse or partner, a Councillor or a Gympie Regional Council employee.
- In an emergency situation another person may drive the vehicle.
- Private use of the motor vehicle may be utilised by one of the following options:

Option 1: The Mayor may purchase private use rights of a motor vehicle for private use within Queensland subject to contribution of 2% of the base Mayoral salary.

Option 2: If option 1 is not chosen private use of the vehicle should be minimal and in line with the principle that no private benefit be gained from the facilities provided to the Councillors. Incidental private use of the Council owned vehicle is to be reimbursed to Council on a monthly basis.

Where Option 2 is chosen, the Mayor is to maintain a log book detailing all private usage. The amount of reimbursement to Council for private usage will be in accordance with the scale prescribed by Directive Number 14/10 (or the most current directive) made pursuant to section 54(1) of the Public Service Act 2008.

- Fuel for the Council owned vehicle will be provided by Council.
- Car parking at the local government office premises and when away from that premises reimbursement of parking costs paid by the Mayor when attending to official Council business.
- Council will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and wear and tear costs of the Council owned vehicle.
- Any fines incurred while travelling in a Council owned vehicle or a privately owned vehicle while attending to Council business will be the responsibility of the Mayor or other driver if applicable.
- It is the Mayor's responsibility to ensure that he/she or any other driver as is applicable, are legally licensed to drive the Council vehicle or to drive a private vehicle while attending to official Council business.
- Gympie Regional Council will accept no responsibility for unlicensed or illegal driving matters.

For all Councillors:

- Communal office space - with an office provided in Gympie, Imbil library, Kilkivan Branch office and Tin Can Bay library and basic stationery for use in that office.
- Postage for items of Council business.
- Name badge
- Safety equipment (eg safety helmet, vest, shoes, safety glasses where necessary).
- 3G Internet access and broadband dependant on location.
- Email access.
- Publications.
- Stationery.
- Shared access to office equipment.

For Councillors (excluding the Mayor):

- A Council maintained vehicle for Council business, as detailed below.

Councillor Vehicle (excluding the Mayor):

Each Councillor (excluding the Mayor) shall be provided with use of a Council owned vehicle for use on Council business for each term of Council:

- The vehicle shall be to a maximum standard of an entry level mid size AWD sports utility vehicle diesel automatic (SUV).
- At all times the vehicle is to be driven by a Councillor or Gympie Regional Council employee.
- The Councillor's spouse or partner may drive the vehicle only at such a time as the Councillor is incapacitated or in such other circumstances as would reasonably require that the Councillor's spouse or partner drive the vehicle.

- In an emergency situation another person may drive the vehicle.
- Private use of the motor vehicle may be utilised by one of the following options:

Option 1: A Councillor may purchase private use rights of a Council vehicle for private use within Queensland subject to contribution of 2% of the base Councillor salary.

Option 2: If option 1 is not chosen private use of the vehicle should be minimal and in line with the principle that no private benefit be gained from the facilities provided to the Councillors. Incidental private use of the Council owned vehicle is to be reimbursed to Council on a monthly basis.

Where Option 2 is chosen, the Councillor is to maintain a log book detailing private usage. The amount of reimbursement to Council for private usage will be in accordance with the scale prescribed by Directive Number 14/10 (or the most current directive) made pursuant to the section 54(1) of the Public Service Act 2008.

- Fuel for the Council owned vehicle will be provided by Council.
- Car parking at the local government office premises and when away from that premises reimbursement of parking costs paid by Councillors while attending to official Council business.
- Council will be responsible for the ongoing maintenance and wear and tear costs of the Council owned vehicle.
- Any fines incurred while travelling in a Council owned vehicle or privately owned vehicle while attending to Council business will be the responsibility of the Councillor or other driver if applicable.
- It is the Councillor's responsibility to ensure that he/she or any other driver as applicable, are legally licensed to drive the Council vehicle or to drive a private vehicle while attending to official Council business.
- Gympie Regional Council will accept no responsibility for unlicensed or illegal driving matters.

Permanent use of a private vehicle by a Councillor in place of a Council supplied vehicle

A Councillor may choose to use their own privately supplied vehicle in place of accepting a Council supplied vehicle for use on Council business for each term of Council. In such circumstances an annual allowance of \$8000, payable on a fortnightly pro-rata basis, will be paid to the Councillor to cover all costs associated with the supply and use of the private vehicle. The allowance is to cover costs including but not limited to fuel, oils, tyres, insurance, registration, depreciation, hire of a replacement vehicle if required, repair, maintenance and any other costs associated with the supply and use of the private vehicle.

A Council supplied vehicle will not be made available to a Councillor for use on Council business where an annual allowance is paid to the Councillor for use of a privately supplied vehicle.

3.2 Home Office:

Council shall provide each Councillor with:

- A mobile computer device with appropriate software and accessories as decided by the CEO.
- A smart phone. Call costs of up to \$90 per month will be paid for by Council. Councillors will be invoiced periodically for any excess call costs incurred above the monthly allowance where applicable.
- Multi-function printer and consumables.
- Basic stationery.
- Maintenance of Council owned equipment.

3.3 Legal Costs and Insurance Cover:

Council may decide to cover costs incurred through any inquiry, investigation, hearing or legal proceeding into the conduct of a Councillor, or arising out of or in connection with, the Councillor's performance of his/her functions.

Councillors may be covered under Council insurance policies while discharging civic duties. Specifically insurance cover may be provided for public liability, professional indemnity, Councillor's liability, personal accident, international and domestic travel insurance.

3.4 Other:

The Chief Executive Officer will provide an administration process to facilitate payment of private reimbursement costs to Council.