

Council Expenses Policy

Date adopted	22 June 2024
Adopted by	Council
Review due	22 June 2026
Responsible officer	Head of Governance
Records reference	10404147

1. Purpose

This Policy supports the requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) in relation to payment of allowances and reimbursement of expenses for Councillors and Delegated Committee members. It also provides an overview of how Council provides resources and training to its Councillors and Delegated Committee members to support them to carry out their functions and duties.

This Policy is not intended to prescribe for every possible situation that may arise. Any matter not provided for in this Policy will be considered by the Mayor and / or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), or the Deputy Mayor if the matter pertains to the Mayor.

Under the Act, Council must reimburse a Councillor or Delegated Committee member for out-of-pocket expenses where the Council is satisfied that the expenses:

- Are bona fide expenses;
- Have been reasonably incurred in the performance of the role of Councillor or Delegated Committee member; and
- Are reasonably necessary for the Councillor or Delegated Committee member to perform that role.

2. Application and Scope

This Policy applies to all Councillors elected to the Melton City Council.

This Policy also applies to Delegated Committee members where specified under this Policy.

Expenditure must always be in the interests of the City of Melton community and is allocated from Council's annual budget.

Claims for any expenditure not included in this Policy will be subject to a Council resolution.

3. General Provisions

3.1. Overarching Principles

- Where possible, Council will book and pay for any expenses up front. Where this is not appropriate or practicable, Council will reimburse the Councillor for the out-of-pocket expense/s incurred, where those expenses comply with this Policy.
- Expense claims must be reasonable and proportionate. They must also include an explanation if the connection between the expense incurred, and the role of Councillor or member of a Delegated Committee is unclear.
- Unreasonable expenses will not be reimbursed. For example, Council will not reimburse mini-bar expenses for the purchase of alcohol. The Head of Governance will determine whether expenses claimed are considered to be unreasonable or disproportionate in accordance with this Policy.
- Council will only reimburse expenses incurred by Councillors. Council will not pay for, or reimburse expenses for, partners or anyone else accompanying the Councillor on external Council-related business.
- Where a Delegated Committee is appointed by Council, relevant clauses from this Policy will be incorporated into the Terms of Reference and reimbursement of bona fide out-of-pocket expenses incurred by Delegated Committee members while performing their duties in those roles will be made in line with this Policy.
- Training in relation to this Policy will be provided to all Councillors during the initial Councillor Induction training and periodically to ensure they are aware of the protocols in relation to Councillor expenses.

3.2. Claiming Expenses

All claims for reimbursement of expenses must be submitted via the electronic Expenses Claim Form. Documentation, such as tax invoices, receipts etc, must be uploaded with the claim form to verify the expenditure.

Receipts/tax invoices must be provided for any expenses which are being claimed, unless otherwise specified in this Policy. Failure to produce a receipt/tax invoice may result in the expense not being reimbursed.

Receipts/tax invoices must be itemised and contain sufficient, relevant information about the expense incurred. EFTPOS receipts/invoices with only a total price, without any explanation of what the expenditure relates to, will not be accepted.

The Head of Governance will review and authorise the claims in accordance with this Policy.

Reimbursement will occur within 21 days of an accurately completed Expense Claim Form, and all required documentation, being received and authorised. Reimbursement will be paid via electronic funds transfer into the Councillor/Delegated Committee member's nominated bank account.

All reimbursements will be paid in arrears.

Requests for reimbursement should be received within 30 days of the cost being incurred. Claims for expenses submitted three months or more since the expenses were incurred will not be reimbursed. All claims for the previous financial year must be made by 7 July each year to ensure that they appear in the correct financial year.

Claims for reimbursement of expenses incurred in a previous financial year cannot be accepted once the accounts for that year have been closed.

3.3. Insurance

Council will ensure that policies of insurance are maintained in accordance with the provisions of the Act to provide the relevant protections to Councillors and Delegated Committee members while performing their duties as a Councillor or Delegated Committee member. These insurance policies include:

- Public liability
- Professional indemnity
- Councillor and Officers liability

3.4. Legal Costs

Other than by specific Council resolution any legal expenses incurred by a Councillor shall be the responsibility of that Councillor. A Councillor shall not engage legal representation or seek legal advice where they will be seeking reimbursement from Council unless specifically authorised by Council before incurring the costs. Where the CEO believes that there would be a risk to health and safety for a Councillor, and supporting legal advice from a qualified legal practitioner recommends the provision of Council funded legal advice, the CEO may authorise expenditure for Councillor legal costs under delegation.

3.5. Child Care/Carer (Care) Expenses

Council will reimburse the cost of necessary child care or carer services where the provision of care is reasonably required for a Councillor or Delegated Committee member to perform their role. Carer services will be eligible to be reimbursed when a Councillor is a carer in a care relationship within the meaning of section 4 of the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*.

Care expenses will not be reimbursed if paid to a family member or a person who normally or regularly lives with the Councillor or Delegated Committee member, except where a live-in (professional) helper such as a nanny is required to work extra time at extra expense because of the Councillor or Delegated Committee member's duties.

Care expenses will be claimed via a completed Expenses Claim Form and shall be substantiated by documentation showing the dates and times care was provided. The Councillor or Delegated Committee member shall also provide the description of Council work undertaken and details of child care / caring required for each occasion.

Care Expenses will be reimbursed for attendance at:

- Council Meetings, Briefing Sessions, and Submission Hearings of the Council;
- Delegated Committee Meetings;
- Official Council functions;
- Meetings arising as a result of a Councillor being appointed by the Council to an external body or an Advisory Committee;
- Training or conferences the Councillor is attending which Council has paid for; and
- Other meetings, events, or occasions as agreed from time to time by the Mayor or CEO or by resolution of the Council, prior to the expense being incurred.

Care Expenses that may be reimbursed include:

- payment to an accredited child care/attendant care provider, or
- a person providing care who does not:
 - have a familial or like relationship with the Councillor; or
 - reside either permanently or temporarily with the Councillor; or
 - have a relationship with the Councillor or the Councillor's partner such that it would be inappropriate for Council to reimburse monies paid to the care provider.

Fees are generally payable per hour or part thereof, subject to any minimum period which is part of the care provider's usual terms.

Rates for non-accredited child care/attendant care provider must be reasonable and agreed in advance where possible.

3.6. Access and Inclusion

Council commits to supporting any individual who requires particular assistance to be able to fulfil their role as a Councillor or Delegated Committee member. Councillors or Delegated Committee members requiring particular workplace assistance or reasonable modifications to access Council's facilities or utilise Council's resources should contact the Head of Governance.

3.7. Councillor Welfare

Councillors and Delegated Committee members may approach the CEO with regard to any specific guidance, counselling or coaching they may require to enhance their performance as a Councillor or Delegated Committee member.

Councillors or Delegated Committee members experiencing personal difficulties may seek counselling on a confidential basis through Council's Employee Assistance Program.

4. Councillor Allowances

Council will pay an allowance to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and Councillors as required under the Act.

Allowances shall be paid approximately monthly provided that upon a Councillor ceasing to hold office or pending an election, payment shall be withheld until such time as the Councillor is declared elected. If a Councillor retires or has their position as a Councillor terminated, they will be required to reimburse Council any Allowance paid in advance.

Allowances will be withheld in the event that a Councillor is suspended or ordered to stand down in accordance with the Act.

Payment will be made by electronic funds transfer into the Councillor's nominated bank account.

5. Administrative Support

5.1. Meeting Rooms and Mayoral Office

The Mayor is provided with office accommodation at the Melton Civic Centre and Caroline Springs Library which may be used for Council business.

Council also provides a Councillor Lounge at the Melton Civic Centre which includes an office/lounge area and a meeting room which is available for all Councillors to use. Refreshments will be provided for Councillors in the Councillor Lounge.

Councillors may request to use other meeting rooms owned and controlled by Council for meetings where the primary purpose is to allow the Councillor to discharge their Council duties. The Councillor must be in attendance and bookings must be made in advance through the Mayor and Councillor Support Team. Costs associated with booking the meeting room will be included in Council's operational budget. Councillors will be required to reimburse any costs incurred outside this Policy.

5.2. Professional Memberships

Council will pay a Councillor's membership of a professional association where the qualification for the membership was gained via the "Professional Development, Training and Conferences" provisions of this Policy.

5.3. Communication Technology

Due to the environmental impact, Council's preference is that all Council and Committee papers, Councillor communications and correspondence are distributed electronically.

Councillors will be provided with a mobile phone, laptop computer and a multi-functional printer/scanner/photocopier to assist with the conduct of Council business. Where special accommodations are required, this can be approved by the CEO in consultation with the Mayor. Councillors will also be provided with a Council email address and mobile phone number. Any equipment and service provided is to be used for official Council business only.

Council will pay all costs associated with the provision of this equipment and services including paper for printing, printer cartridges, connection fees, rental charges and all Council business call and data charges.

It is acknowledged that there will be some incidental private use of mobile communications equipment, such as occasional standard phone calls and text messages within Australia. Use of council equipment overseas must be pre-approved in writing by the CEO.

Councillors must adhere to Council's Privacy Policy and the Councillor Code of Conduct in using any IT resources provided by Council. Council equipment and electronic communications system must be used within the boundaries of normal appropriate practice.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Storage, transmission, downloading or display of material must not contravene any state or federal law such as equal opportunity, occupational health and safety, and sexual harassment legislation.
- Communication activities must not defame an individual, organisation, association, company, or business.
- The use must not contravene a Council policy, procedure, statute, or regulation.
- The equipment or electronic communications system must not be used to run a private business, whether for profit or not-for-profit.

Any faults or issues with the equipment should be reported to the Mayor and Councillor Support Team at the earliest possible opportunity and they will liaise with Council's Technology department to have the fault or issue rectified.

Council-provided technology such as mobile phones and laptops will be replaced for each new Council term and in accordance with Council's policies.

5.4. Administrative Support

The Mayor and Councillor Support Team will provide administrative support to Councillors to assist them, such as with responding to correspondence, enquiries, requests for service, registrations for attendance at approved conferences, reservations for accommodation and meeting rooms as part of their official duties as a Councillor.

The Mayor and Councillor Support Team will provide diary management support for Councillors relating to their official delegate appointments, official invites and events that are included in the Council Calendar.

5.5. Mail Inward & Invitations

All hardcopy mail received by Council is deemed to be Council business and will be opened by Central Records staff. Private mail should not be sent via or to the Council address.

5.6. Apparel and Stationery

Council's official letterhead is only to be used for official Council correspondence signed by either the Mayor or an authorised member of Council staff. Councillors are to provide their own letterhead for electoral or ward representation purposes and make it clear they are communicating in their personal capacity, not as a representative of Council.

Each Councillor, on request, may be provided with the following Melton City Council corporate apparel which is to be returned when the Councillor ceases to hold office:

- one suit jacket
- one winter jacket
- one pair of pants or skirt/dress
- 2 shirts/tops

At the mid-point of each Council term, each Councillor, on request, is to be provided with a replacement jacket and pants or skirt/dress, as required.

A further budget allocation of \$1,000 per Council term per Councillor is made for the purchase of additional or replacement items of Melton City Council corporate apparel.

At the commencement of each Council term, Councillors will be provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) required to assist in carrying out the duties of office.

5.7. Return of Resources

All resources provided to Councillors are provided for use by the Councillor in the conduct of their duties of office. All equipment provided and items purchased, including representational corporate apparel bearing the Melton City Council logo, shall be returned to the Mayor and Councillor Support Team within seven days of the Councillor's retirement or termination of office, unless specified elsewhere in this Policy.

6. Travel and Vehicle Expenses

Council encourages a range of travel options conducive to the environment. A Council 'pool' vehicle will be provided for use by Councillors for Council related business. Reasonable transport expenses incurred by Councillors or Members of Delegated Committees in the course of their official duties in their role will be reimbursed.

Expenses will be reimbursed to Councillors following receipt of a completed Expense Claim Form which includes all required information and supporting documentation. Some discretion will be allowed in limited instances where expenses claimed cannot be supported by documentation such as receipts.

6.1. Private vehicle use

Council will reimburse travel costs associated with the use of a private vehicle, including car parking fees, reasonably incurred when attending meetings and functions (within Victoria) which are related to their duties as a Councillor or Member of a Delegated Committee.

Travel expenses claimed in relation to events must be supported by documentation which demonstrates the event was related to their duties as a Councillor or member of a Delegated Committee.

The allowance payable for reimbursement of private vehicle use will be in accordance with the rates determined by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) 'cents per kilometre' method calculation.

Councillors can also seek reimbursement for use of a taxi, uber or like service provider for the cost of travel directly related to their duties, noting that the use of public transport or private transport is the preferred method of transport where practical.

6.2. Interstate travel

Council will cover costs associated with Councillors travelling interstate on Council business that is approved by the CEO and is within the limits of the budget approved by Council. This comprises airfares, car hire, taxis, and ride-sharing fares.

All Councillor travel will be booked by the Mayor and Councillor Support Team and will utilise the most direct route and the most practical and economic mode of transport. Air travel up to and including 5 hours duration will be in economy class. Air travel expected to be greater than 5 hours duration will be premium economy class. To ensure value for money, all requests for airline bookings and accommodation must be advised as soon possible.

Travel claims will be to and from the Councillor's notified place of normal residence.

6.3. Overseas travel

Council will cover costs associated with Councillors travelling overseas on Council business as approved by Council resolution within the limits of the budget approved by Council. This comprises airfares, visas, passports, car hire, taxis, ride-sharing fares, and any other genuine expenses.

All Councillor travel will be booked by the Mayor and Councillor Support Team and will utilise the most direct route and the most practical and economic mode of transport. All air travel will be in economy class. To ensure value for money, all requests for airline bookings and accommodation must be advised as soon as the travel is approved by Council.

Travel claims will be to and from the Councillor's notified place of normal residence.

6.4. Vehicles

A fully maintained Council vehicle, commensurate with the role and duties, and in consultation with the Mayor, will be provided to assist the Mayor to perform their duties and for private use during the Mayoral term in accordance with Council's Motor Vehicle Policy.

6.4.1. Fines and Infringements

Any costs arising from a breach of road, traffic parking or other regulations or laws or for damage or loss of a vehicle is the responsibility of the person travelling and will not be reimbursed or funded by Council.

7. Professional Development, Training and Conferences

Council will allocate a set amount at the start of each term, which will be reviewed at budget time, to each Councillor for them to attend professional development, training, and conferences.

The set amount for each Councillor will cover the registration fees, reasonable travel, meal, and accommodation expenses associated with attendance by Councillors at professional development, training, and conferences.

Training that is provided directly by Council will not be deducted from the annual allocation.

Councillors wanting to attend professional development, training or conferences are required to complete an Application to Attend Training or Conference Details ("Application") form which will then be submitted to the Mayor and CEO for approval.

Factors to be considered in the review include:

- Relevance of the program to the efficient and effective operations of Melton City Council;
- Whether the event provides an opportunity to receive or upgrade relevant training and skills related to the role of a Councillor;
- Whether the event provides the opportunity to learn key information about an issue of public policy related to the City of Melton community;
- Whether the event has the potential to foster broad economic development opportunities with the municipality.
- Cost/benefit of being represented;
- Expertise, interest, and experience of Councillors in areas of conference business.

Reports of professional development, training and conferences attended by Councillors will be provided to all Councillors at the next available Briefing of Councillors. The Report should describe the learning, knowledge or information obtained as a result of attending the professional development, training or conference.

Approval of Councillors' attendance at professional development, training, and conferences where the cost exceeds their budget allocation, or their budget allocation has been exhausted will be via Council resolution.

Consistent with the approval process for travel, all interstate and overseas conferences must be pre-approved by resolution of Council.

All approved attendances at training and conferences shall be booked through the Mayor and Councillor Support Team.

In instances where the course or qualification will not be completed prior to the next election, Council will only reimburse costs associated with units that were completed during the elected term. Specifically, expenses claimed for subjects that will be undertaken during a period that includes the caretaker period or after the elected term has expired will not be paid/reimbursed. If the Councillor is re-elected, they can apply to have relevant expenses reimbursed for subjects undertaken during this period.

In the event the Councillor does not successfully complete a subject or withdraws from the course they will be required to repay any fees or costs paid by Council in relation to that unit/qualification.

8. Events and Functions

Provision of resources or reimbursement of expenses to a Councillor to attend a function or event will only be provided:

- Where the Mayor has been invited to represent Council at an event;
- Where a benefit to Melton City Council can be demonstrated e.g., attendance will contribute towards a commitment under the Council Plan;
- Where, if an invitation has been received by the individual, they have been invited in their capacity as a Councillor;
- Following all supporting documentation, such as invitations / emails etc., being presented with any claims resulting from the attendance.

Invitations to events that are unrelated to their role as Councillor may give rise to conflict of interest concerns and Councillors should consider Council's Gift Policy when considering these invitations. Where acceptance of the invitation could be perceived as a conflict of interest or create an impression of compromised impartiality, the invitation should be politely declined.

Council does not support political parties, financially or by any other means. Where a Councillor attends a political party event in a personal capacity the cost is to be borne by the individual Councillor and no reimbursement will be provided. This does not apply to official functions the Councillor is attending in their role of Councillor which are also attended by members of political parties.

8.1. Charity fundraising events

Council may meet the cost of the Mayor or, if the Mayor is unable to attend, their representative, to attend charity fundraising events within the City of Melton where the work of the charity benefits the Melton community. If the Mayor or their representative wishes to make a financial contribution to the charity (e.g., a donation or purchase of an auction item) they will be required to make this contribution personally.

Council is sometimes asked to support a charity or fund-raising event by purchasing tickets or groups of tickets (such as "tables"). Requests of this nature will be approved by the CEO. The CEO, in consultation with the Mayor, or where possible advise the Mayor, will also determine how the tickets will be allocated and whether the recipients will be required to purchase the tickets or contribute towards their cost.

9. Accompanying Partners/Guests

Any additional attendance fees, airfares accommodation costs, meal costs or any other costs incurred as a result of the attendance of partners and/or children shall be borne by the Councillor. Council will not provide administration assistance to undertake travel arrangements for any person other than the Councillor(s) attending.

10. Accommodation & Meals

Where overnight accommodation is required, accommodation will be selected based on what is reasonable given the location and event being attended.

Accommodation will be arranged to achieve the best value for Council, with breakfast and parking being included wherever possible. Accommodation is to be based at the training/conference venue, or at close proximity. The Mayor and Councillor Support Team will book the accommodation upon receipt of an approved Councillor Application to Attend Training or Conference Form, which will be approved by the Head of Governance.

Should Councillors elect to stay at accommodation that is more expensive than the above rates the Councillor will be responsible for paying the difference.

Council will not cover or reimburse the purchase of alcohol.

10.1. Refreshments (mini bar)

Council will reimburse a Councillor for reasonable mini-bar expenses, such as bottled water and small snacks etc. Alcohol purchased via the mini-bar will not be reimbursed. An itemised account will be required for reimbursement.

10.2. Other accommodation costs

In-room movie charges and dry-cleaning/laundry costs will not be reimbursed to a Councillor or paid for by Council.

10.3. Meals

When a Councillor is attending training and conferences in person, Council will pay for meals that are not included in the training or conference package or included with the accommodation arrangements. Meal allowances will also be paid when a Councillor is attending official Council meetings or functions in person and where a meal is not provided at the meeting or function.

Daily allowances for meals will be paid to a maximum amount as follows and adjusted in accordance with the consumer price index (CPI):

Breakfast -	\$33.00
Lunch -	\$46.00
Dinner -	\$65.00

Should Councillors elect to purchase a meal that is more expensive than the allowances above, the Councillor will be responsible for paying the difference.

Incidental costs such as snacks, coffee or alcohol will not be covered by Council unless included as part of a meal as stipulated above. These rates are based on the rates determined by the ATO and will be updated annually in accordance with ATO published rates or 3%, whichever is greater.

11. Reporting

The CEO shall ensure that any reporting in relation to Councillor expenses and travel required by the Act or the relevant regulations is completed.

Full details of all reimbursements made in accordance with this Policy will be provided quarterly to the Audit and Risk Committee.

In the interests of transparency and good governance, details of reimbursements to Councillors and Delegated Committee members will also be published in Council's Annual Report and quarterly on Council's website.

12. Definitions

Term	Definition
The Act	means the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	Means the food and non-alcoholic beverage Consumer Price Index in Melbourne, Australia or if this index is discontinued or suspended, such other index that represents the change in the cost of living in Melbourne
Official Council Functions	means functions arranged by Council where Councillors have been invited to attend in their capacity as Councillor
Official Council Business	means business undertaken in the performance of the role of Councillor

13. Related Documents

Name	Location
<i>Local Government Act 2020</i>	https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/local-government-act-2020
Councillor Code of Conduct	Documents Reports Strategies Melton City Council
Public Transparency Policy	Documents Reports Strategies Melton City Council
Motor Vehicle Policy	Melton City Council Intranet
Credit Card Policy	Documents Reports Strategies Melton City Council

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