

## PAYMENT OF EXPENSES AND PROVISION OF FACILITIES POLICY

### POLICY OBJECTIVE

This policy enables the reasonable and appropriate reimbursement of expenses and provision of facilities to Councillors to help them undertake their civic duties.

It ensures accountability and transparency, and seeks to align Councillor expenses and facilities with community expectations. Councillors must not obtain private or political benefit from any expense or facility provided under this policy.

The policy has been prepared in accordance with the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) and *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021* (the Regulation), and complies with the Office of Local Government's Guidelines for the payment of expenses and provision of facilities to Mayors and Councillors in NSW.

The policy sets out the maximum amounts council will pay for specific expenses and facilities. Expenses not explicitly addressed in this policy will not be paid or reimbursed.

The main expenses and facilities are summarised in the table below. All monetary amounts are exclusive of GST.

Expense or facility	Cost
General travel expenses	Actual Cost
Interstate, overseas and long-distance intrastate travel expenses	Actual Cost
Accommodation and meals	As per the NSW Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Reviewed Award 2009, adjusted annually
Professional development, Conferences and Seminar	Actual Cost
ICT expenses	Actual Cost
Carer expenses	Actual Cost
Home office expenses	Actual Cost
Council vehicle and fuel card	Provided to the mayor
Reserved parking space at Council offices	Provided to the mayor
Furnished office	Provided to the mayor
General Managers Office staff supporting Mayor and Councillors	Provided to the mayor and councillors
Use of private motor vehicle	Actual per km allowance

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Additional costs incurred by a Councillor in excess of any agreed limit is considered a personal expense that is the responsibility of the Councillor.

This policy has been developed using the Better Practice Template as recommended by the NSW Office of Local Government.

Expenses and facilities provided by this policy are in addition to fees paid to Councillors. (The minimum and maximum fees Council may pay each Councillor are set by the Local Government Remuneration Tribunal as per section 241 of the Act and reviewed annually. Council must adopt its annual fees within this set range.)

Council staff are empowered to question or refuse a request for payment from a Councillor when it does not accord with this policy.

### 1. POLICY STATEMENT

The intent of this policy is to:

- enable the reasonable and appropriate reimbursement of expenses incurred by Councillors while undertaking their civic duties;
- enable facilities of a reasonable and appropriate standard to be provided to Councillors to support them in undertaking their civic duties;
- ensure accountability and transparency in reimbursement of expenses and provision of facilities to Councillors;
- ensure facilities and expenses provided to Councillors meet community expectations;
- support a diversity of representation; and
- fulfil the Council's statutory responsibilities

### 2. POLICY COVERAGE

Unless otherwise stated this policy is applicable to all Councillors.

### 3. STRATEGIC PLAN LINK

Objective: 4.0 Wentworth is a caring, supportive and inclusive community that is informed and engaged in its future.

Strategy: 4.1 Provide strong and effective representation, leadership, planning, decision-making and service delivery.

### 4. DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Term/Word	Definition
Accompanying person	Means a spouse, partner or de facto or other person who has a close personal relationship with or provides carer support to a Councillor.
Act	Means the <i>Local Government Act 1993</i> (NSW).
Appropriate refreshments	Means food and beverages, excluding alcohol, provided by Council to support Councillors undertaking official business.

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<b>Clause</b>	Unless stated otherwise, a reference to a clause is a reference to a clause of this policy.
<b>Code of Conduct</b>	Means the Code of Conduct adopted by Council or the Model Code if none is adopted.
<b>Councillor</b>	Means a person elected or appointed to civic office as a member of the governing body of Council who is not suspended, including the Mayor.
<b>General Manager</b>	Means the General Manager of Council and includes their delegate or authorised representative.
<b>Incidental personal use</b>	Means use that is infrequent and brief and use that does not breach this policy or the Code of Conduct.
<b>Long distance intrastate travel</b>	Means travel to other parts of NSW of more than three hours duration by private vehicle.
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales.
<b>Official business</b>	Means functions that the Mayor or Councillors are required or invited to attend to fulfil their legislated role and responsibilities for Council or result in a direct benefit for Council and/or for the local government area, and includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meetings of Council and committees of the whole;</li> <li>• meetings of committees facilitated by Council;</li> <li>• civic receptions hosted or sponsored by Council; and</li> <li>• meetings, functions, workshops and other events to which attendance by a Councillor has been requested or approved by Council.</li> </ul>
<b>Professional development</b>	Means a seminar, conference, training course or other development opportunity relevant to the role of a Councillor or the Mayor.
<b>Regulation</b>	Means the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (NSW).
<b>Year</b>	Means the financial year, that is the 12 month period commencing on 1 July each year.

### 5. POLICY CONTENT

It is the policy of Council that Councillors are recompensed for legitimate and reasonable expenses and can access agreed resources through an equitable, accessible, transparent and accountable process, subject to Office of Local Government (OLG) Guidelines, and any relevant legislative requirements.

#### General Conduct

Councillors must act lawfully, honestly and exercise a reasonable degree of care and diligence in carrying out their functions under the Act or any other Act. This is a requirement under section 439 of the Act and reinforced in the Model Code of Conduct made under section 440.

Council's Code of Conduct Policy provides that Council resources must be used ethically, effectively, efficiently and carefully. Council property including intellectual property, official services and facilities must not be misused by any person or body for private benefit or gain. Councillors must



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also avoid any action or situation that could create the appearance that Council resources are being used inappropriately.

Council commits to the following principles:

- **Proper conduct:** Councillors and staff acting lawfully and honestly, exercising care and diligence in carrying out their functions.
- **Reasonable expenses:** providing for Councillors to be reimbursed for expenses reasonably incurred as part of their role as Councillor.
- **Participation and access:** enabling people from diverse backgrounds, underrepresented groups, those in carer roles and those with special needs to serve as a Councillor.
- **Equity:** there must be equitable access to expenses and facilities for all Councillors.
- **Appropriate use of resources:** providing clear direction on the appropriate use of Council resources in accordance with legal requirements and community expectations.
- **Accountability and transparency:** clearly stating and reporting on the expenses and facilities provided to Councillors.

### Private or political benefit

Councillors must not obtain private or political benefit from any expense or facility provided under this policy.

Private use of Council equipment and facilities by Councillors may occur from time to time. For example, telephoning home to advise that a Council meeting will run later than expected.

Such incidental private use does not require a compensatory payment back to Council.

Councillors should avoid obtaining any greater private benefit from Council than an incidental benefit. Where there are unavoidable circumstances and more substantial private use of Council facilities does occur, Councillors must reimburse Council.

Campaigns for re-election are considered to be a political benefit. The following are examples of what is considered to be a political interest during a re-election campaign:

- production of election material;
- use of Council resources and equipment for campaigning;
- use of official council letterhead, publications, websites or services for political benefit; and
- fundraising activities of political parties or individuals, including political fundraising events.

### General expenses

All expenses provided under this policy will be for a purpose specific to the functions of holding civic office. Allowances for general expenses are not permitted under this policy.

Expenses not explicitly addressed in this policy will not be paid or reimbursed.

### Specific expenses

#### General travel arrangements and expenses

All travel by Councillors should be undertaken using the most direct route and the most practicable and economical mode of transport.

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Each Councillor may be reimbursed for travel expenses incurred while undertaking official business or professional development or attending approved conferences and seminars within NSW. This includes reimbursement:

- for public transport fares
- for the use of a private vehicle or hire car
- for parking costs for Council and other meetings
- for tolls
- by Cabcharge card or equivalent
- for documented ride-share programs, such as Uber, where tax invoices can be issued.

Allowances for the use of a private vehicle will be reimbursed by kilometre at the rate contained in the Local Government (State) Award.

Councillors seeking to be reimbursed for use of a private vehicle must keep a log book recording the date, distance and purpose of travel being claimed.

### Interstate, overseas and long distance intrastate travel expenses

Given Council's location near an interstate border, travel within the Sunraysia area of Victoria will be considered as general travel. Arrangements and expenses for this travel will be governed by general travel provisions.

Council will scrutinise the value and need for Councillors to undertake overseas travel. Councils should avoid interstate, overseas and long distance intrastate trips unless direct and tangible benefits can be established for Council and the local community. This includes travel to sister and friendship cities.

Councillors seeking approval for any interstate and long distance intrastate travel must submit a case to, and obtain the approval of, a full Council meeting prior to travel.

Councillors seeking approval for any overseas travel must submit a case to, and obtain the approval of, a full Council meeting prior to travel. The case should include:

- objectives to be achieved in travel, including an explanation of how the travel aligns with current Council priorities and business, the community benefits which will accrue as a result, and its relevance to the exercise of the Councillor's civic duties;
- who is to take part in the travel;
- duration and itinerary of travel; and
- a detailed budget including a statement of any amounts expected to be reimbursed by the participant/s.

For interstate and long distance intrastate journeys by air of less than three hours, the class of air travel is to be economy class.

For interstate journeys by air of more than three hours, the class of air travel may be premium economy.

For international travel, the class of air travel is to be premium economy if available. Otherwise, the class of travel is to be economy.

Bookings for approved air travel are to be made through the General Manager's office.



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For air travel that is reimbursed as Council business, Councillors will not accrue points from the airline's frequent flyer program. This is considered a private benefit.

### **Travel expenses not paid by Council**

Council will not pay any traffic or parking fines or administrative charges for road toll accounts.

### **Accommodation and meals**

In circumstances where it would introduce undue risk for a Councillor to travel to or from official business in the late evening or early morning, reimbursement of costs for accommodation and meals on the night before or after the meeting may be approved by the General Manager. This includes where a meeting finishes later than 9.00pm or starts earlier than 7.00am and the Councillor lives more than 50 kilometres from the meeting location.

Council will reimburse costs for accommodation and meals while Councillors are undertaking prior approved travel or professional development outside the Sunraysia region.

The daily limits for accommodation and meal expenses within Australia are to be consistent with those set out in Part B Monetary Rates of the NSW Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Reviewed Award 2009, as adjusted annually.

The daily limits for accommodation and meal expenses outside Australia are to be determined in advance by the General Manager, being mindful of the previous clause.

Councillors will not be reimbursed for the purchase of alcoholic beverages.

### **Refreshments for Council related meetings**

Appropriate refreshments will be available for Council meetings, Council committee meetings, councillor briefings, approved meetings and engagements, and official Council functions as approved by the General Manager.

As an indicative guide for the standard of refreshments to be provided at Council related meetings, the General Manager must be mindful of Part B Monetary Rates of the NSW Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Reviewed Award 2009, as adjusted annually.

### **Professional development**

Council will set aside funds annually in its budget to facilitate professional development of councillors through programs, training, education courses and membership of professional bodies.

In the first year of a new Council term, Council will provide a comprehensive induction program for all Councillors which considers any guidelines issued by the OLG. The cost of the induction program will be in addition to the ongoing professional development funding.

Annual membership of professional bodies will only be covered where the membership is relevant to the exercise of the Councillor's civic duties, the Councillor actively participates in the body and the cost of membership is likely to be fully offset by savings from attending events as a member.

Approval for professional development activities is subject to a prior written request to the General Manager outlining the:

- details of the proposed professional development;
- relevance to council priorities and business; and

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- relevance to the exercise of the Councillor's civic duties.

In assessing a Councillor request for a professional development activity, the General Manager must consider the factors set out in the above clause, as well as the cost of the professional development in relation to the Councillor's remaining budget.

### Conferences and seminars

Council is committed to ensuring its Councillors are up to date with contemporary issues facing Council and the community, and local government in NSW.

Council will set aside funds annually in its budget to facilitate Councillor attendance at conferences and seminars. This allocation is for all Councillors. The General Manager will ensure that access to expenses relating to conferences and seminars is distributed equitably.

Approval to attend a conference or seminar is subject to a written request to the General Manager. In assessing a Councillor request, the General Manager must consider factors including the:

- relevance of the topics and presenters to current Council priorities and business and the exercise of the Councillor's civic duties
- cost of the conference or seminar in relation to the total remaining budget.

Council will meet the reasonable cost of registration fees, transportation and accommodation associated with attendance at conferences approved by the General Manager. Council will also meet the reasonable cost of meals when they are not included in the conference fees. Reimbursement for accommodation and meals not included in the conference fees will be subject to normal travel expense provisions.

### Spouse, Partner and Accompanying Person Expenses – Within the Local Government Area

Council will meet the reasonable costs of spouses and partners or an accompanying person for attendance at official Council functions that are of a formal and ceremonial nature within the local government area. Such functions would be those that a Councillor's spouse, partner or accompanying person could be reasonably expected to attend.

### Spouse, Partner and Accompanying Person Expenses - Local Government Conferences

Council will meet limited expenses of spouses, partners or accompanying persons associated with attendance at the Local Government New South Wales Association's annual conference. These expenses are to be limited to the costs of registration and the official conference dinner. Travel expenses, accommodation and sundry expenses for spouses, partners or accompanying persons are not included and are the responsibility of the individual Councillor.

If a service is shared between a Councillor and a spouse/partner/accompanying person the expense associated with the service will be reimbursed as long as the expenses did not increase due to the attendance of the spouse/partner/accompanying person.

### Information and communications technology (ICT) expenses

Council will provide Councillors with a laptop and pay for data and internet costs associated with these devices.

Councillors make seek reimbursement for costs associated with communications devices and services used by Councillors to undertake their civic duties.



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### **Special requirement and carer expenses**

Council encourages wide participation and interest in civic office. It will seek to ensure Council premises and associated facilities are accessible, including provision for sight or hearing-impaired Councillors and those with other impairments.

Transportation provisions outlined in this policy will also assist Councillors who may be unable to drive a vehicle.

In addition to the provisions above, the General Manager may authorise the provision of reasonable additional facilities and expenses in order to allow a Councillor with an impairment to perform their civic duties.

Councillors who are the principal carer of a child or other elderly, disabled and/or sick immediate family member will be entitled to reimbursement of carer's expenses at the discretion of the General Manager for attendance at official business, plus reasonable travel from the principal place of residence.

Child care expenses may be claimed for children up to and including the age of 16 years where the carer is not a relative.

In the event of caring for an adult person, Councillors will need to provide suitable evidence to the General Manager that reimbursement is applicable. This may take the form of advice from a medical practitioner.

### **Home office expenses**

Each Councillor may be reimbursed for costs associated with the maintenance of a home office, such as minor items of consumable stationery and printer ink cartridges.

### **Insurances**

In accordance with Section 382 of the Act, Council is insured against public liability, professional indemnity and Councillors and Officers claims. Councillors are included as a named insured on this Policy.

Insurance protection is only provided if a claim arises out of or in connection with the Councillor's performance of his or her civic duties, or exercise of his or her functions as a Councillor. All insurances are subject to any limitations or conditions set out in the policies of insurance.

Council shall pay the insurance policy excess in respect of any claim accepted by Council's insurers, whether defended or not.

### **Legal assistance**

Council may, if requested, indemnify or reimburse the reasonable legal expenses of:

- a Councillor defending an action arising from the performance in good faith of a function under the Act provided that the outcome of the legal proceedings is favourable to the Councillor.
- a Councillor defending an action in defamation, provided the statements complained of were made in good faith in the course of exercising a function under the Act and the outcome of the legal proceedings is favourable to the Councillor.



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- a Councillor for proceedings before an appropriate investigative or review body, provided the subject of the proceedings arises from the performance in good faith of a function under the Act and the matter has proceeded past any initial assessment phase to a formal investigation or review and the investigative or review body makes a finding substantially favourable to the Councillor.
- In the case of a code of conduct complaint made against a Councillor, legal costs will only be made available where the matter has been referred by the General Manager to a conduct reviewer and the conduct reviewer has commenced a formal investigation of the matter and makes a finding substantially favourable to the Councillor.
- Legal expenses incurred in relation to proceedings arising out of the performance by a Councillor of his or her functions under the Act are distinguished from expenses incurred in relation to proceedings arising merely from something that a Councillor has done during his or her term in office. For example, expenses arising from an investigation as to whether a Councillor acted corruptly would not be covered by this section.
- Council will not meet the legal costs:
  - of legal proceedings initiated by a Councillor under any circumstances;
  - of a Councillor seeking advice in respect of possible defamation, or in seeking a non-litigious remedy for possible defamation; or
  - for legal proceedings that do not involve a Councillor performing their role as a Councillor.

Reimbursement of expenses for reasonable legal expenses must have Council approval by way of a resolution at a Council meeting prior to costs being incurred.

### General facilities for all councillors

Councillors may book meeting rooms for official business in a specified Council building at no cost. Rooms may be booked through the General Manager's office.

The provision of facilities will be of a standard deemed by the General Manager as appropriate for the purpose.

### Stationary

Each Councillor may be reimbursed for costs associated with minor items of consumable stationery. Council will supply Councillors with a business card if requested.

### Administrative support

Council will provide administrative support to Councillors to assist them with their civic duties only. Administrative support may be provided by staff as arranged by the General Manager or their delegate.

Council staff are expected to assist Councillors with civic duties only, and not assist with matters of personal or political interest, including campaigning.

### Additional facilities for the Mayor

Council will provide to the Mayor a maintained vehicle to a similar standard of other Council vehicles, with a fuel card. The vehicle will be supplied for use on business, professional development and attendance at the mayor's office.

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The Mayoral allowance will be reduced to cover the cost of any private travel.

A parking space at Council's offices will be reserved for the Mayor's Council-issued vehicle for use on official business, professional development and attendance at the Mayor's office.

Council will provide the Mayor with a furnished office incorporating a computer configured to Council's standard operating environment, telephone and meeting space.

In performing their civic duties, the Mayor will be assisted by staff providing administrative and secretarial support, as determined by the General Manager.

Council staff assisting the Mayor are expected to work on official business only, and not for matters of personal or political interest, including campaigning.

### Approval, payment and reimbursement arrangements

Expenses should only be incurred by Councillors in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

Approval for incurring expenses, or for the reimbursement of such expenses, should be obtained before the expense is incurred.

Up to the limits specified in this policy, approval for the following may be sought after the expense is incurred:

- Local travel relating to the conduct of official business
- Carer costs

Final approval for payments made under this policy will be granted by the General Manager or their delegate.

### Direct payment

Council may approve and directly pay expenses. Request for direct payment must be submitted to the General Manager for assessment against this policy, with sufficient information and time to allow for the claim to be assessed and processed.

### Reimbursement

All claims for reimbursement of expenses incurred must be made on the prescribed form, supported by appropriate receipts and/or tax invoices and be submitted to the Director Finance & Policy.

### Notification

If a claim is approved, Council will make payment directly or reimburse the Councillor through accounts payable.

If a claim is refused, Council will inform the Councillor in writing that the claim has been refused and the reason for the refusal.

### Reimbursement to Council

If Council has incurred an expense on behalf of a Councillor that exceeds reasonable incidental private use or is not provided for in this policy:

- Council will invoice the Councillor for the expense
- the Councillor will reimburse Council for that expense within 14 days of the invoice date.



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If the Councillor cannot reimburse Council within 14 days of the invoice date, they are to submit a written explanation to the General Manager. The General Manager may elect to deduct the amount from the Councillor's allowance.

### Timeframe for reimbursement

Unless otherwise specified in this policy, Councillors must provide all claims for reimbursement within three months of an expense being incurred. Claims made after this time will not be approved.

### Disputes

If a Councillor disputes a determination under this policy, the Councillor should discuss the matter with the General Manager.

If the Councillor and the General Manager cannot resolve the dispute, the Councillor may submit a notice of motion to a Council meeting seeking to have the dispute resolved.

### Return or retention of facilities

All unexpended facilities or equipment supplied under this policy are to be relinquished immediately upon a Councillor or Mayor ceasing to hold office or at the cessation of their civic duties.

Should a Councillor desire to keep any equipment allocated by Council, then this policy enables the Councillor to make application to the General Manager to purchase any such equipment. The General Manager will determine an agreed fair market price or written down value for the item of equipment.

The prices for all equipment purchased by Councillors under this provision will be recorded in Council's annual report.

### Publication

This policy will be published on Council's website.

### Reporting

Council will report on the provision of expenses and facilities to Councillors as required in the Act and Regulations.

### Auditing

The operation of this policy, including claims made under the policy, will be included in Council's audit program and an audit undertaken at least every two years.

### Breaches

Suspected breaches of this policy are to be reported to the General Manager.

Alleged breaches of this policy shall be dealt with by following the processes outlined for breaches of the Code of Conduct, as detailed in the Code and in the Procedures for the Administration of the Code.

## 6. RELATED DOCUMENTS & LEGISLATION

### Legislation

- *Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)*

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- *Local Government (General) Regulation 2021*

### Council Policies

- GOV003 – Fraud Control Policy
- GOV004 – Internal Reporting Policy
- GOV005 – Procurement Policy
- GOV020 – Code of Conduct Policy
- GOV022 – Legislative Compliance Policy
- GOV024 – Credit Card Policy

### Council Documents

- Procurement Manual
- Legislative Compliance Framework
- Governance Framework
- Fraud Control Plan

## 7. ATTACHMENTS

Nil.

## 8. DOCUMENT APPROVAL

This document is the latest version of the official policy of the Wentworth Shire Council, as adopted by Council on 16 March 2022. All previous versions of this policy are null and void.

This policy may be amended or revoked by Council at any time.

A PDF copy of the signed document can be accessed from Council's record management system and Reliansys.

Signed: .....

**General Manager Wentworth Shire Council**

17 March 2022

**Date**