



Merri-bek
City Council

Councillor Support Expenses and Resources

Policy ID No	D23/550774
Date Authorised by Council:	6 December 2023
Commencement Date:	6 December 2023
Review Date:	6 December 2027
Responsible Department	Business Transformation

Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Context	3
2.1	Alignment	3
2.2	Organisational Context.....	4
2.3	Research and other drivers	5
3.	Objectives	5
4.	Policy details	6
4.1	Resources and Facilities Support.....	6
4.2	IT Equipment	9
4.3	Meetings arranged by Councillors.....	11
4.4	Advanced Approval to Travel Interstate or Overseas	13
4.5	Travel and Accommodation	14
4.6	Professional development.....	17
4.7	Professional memberships and subscriptions	18
4.8	Community participation	18
4.9	Attendance by Spouse/Partner at Seminars, Conferences and Civic Functions	20
4.10	Insurance and indemnity (combined sections)	21
4.11	Health and Wellbeing	21
4.12	Apparel	22
4.13	Childcare/family care	22
4.14	Support for a Councillor with a Disability.....	22
4.15	Sponsorship and Donations.....	23
4.16	Available Budget & Approval.....	23
4.17	Arrangements and Reimbursement	24
5.	Roles and responsibilities	26
6.	Monitoring, Evaluating and review	26
7.	Reporting	27
8.	Definitions.....	27
9.	Associated Documents	28
10.	References	28

1. Introduction

This Councillor Support, Expenses and Resources Policy establishes the facilities, resources and support necessary or appropriate to provide to Councillors in the performance of their duties as elected representatives.

This includes:

- Outlining Councillors' entitlements for reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses incurred while performing the duties of a Councillor;
- Establishing Councillors' support, resources and equipment entitlements associated with performing the duties of a Councillor;
- Establishing Councillors' entitlements to paid professional development;
- Providing guidelines on the process for Council to sell this Council supplied IT equipment to Councillors who leave office; and
- The specifying procedures to be followed in applying for reimbursement and in reimbursing expenses;

In the event Council establishes a Delegated Committee the provisions of this Policy relating to the reimbursement of expenses will apply to a member who is not a Councillor (if any), as if they were a Councillor.

The Policy also sets out the processes for ensuring that the costs of resourcing and supporting Councillors, and the value of any expenses reimbursed, are reported to the community quarterly to promote good governance, transparency and accountability.

2. Context

2.1 Alignment

Where duties performed are necessary or appropriate for the purposes of achieving the objectives of Council, having regard to any relevant Act, Regulations, Ministerial Guidelines and Council policies, Councillors are entitled to access facilities, support and resources as described in this Policy and the Local Government 2020 (the Act).

The provision of facilities, resources and support to Councillors, and the expenses paid or reimbursed, will be consistent with the following principles:

- Encouraging diversity in participation, equity and access;
- Accountability and transparency; and
- No disadvantage.

Mayor and Councillor allowances are provided separately to reimbursements of expenses and the provision of facilities/resources support.

2.2 Organisational Context

The duties and activities considered to be necessary or appropriate for the purposes of achieving the objectives of a Council include, but are not limited to:

- Attending ordinary and special Council meetings, meetings of committees of Council, Councillor Briefing sessions organised by the Chief Executive Officer or delegate and civic or ceremonial functions convened by the Council, the Mayor or the Chief Executive Officer;
- Attending meetings or workshops scheduled by the Council, the Mayor or the Chief Executive Officer;
- Attending community meetings and Ward Councillor meetings;
- Participating in site inspections or meetings, or participating in delegations or deputations to which the Councillor has been duly appointed as a representative of Council or relevant to a matter which is, or is anticipated to be the subject of a decision of Council;
- Attending a meeting or function as the nominated representative of Council or the Mayor;
- Attending meetings of community groups, organisations and statutory authorities to which the Councillor has been appointed Council delegate or the nominated representative of Council;
- Attending discussions with officers or any person, on any matter relating to the City; and
- Attending seminars, training, conferences or professional development courses as an attendee, speaker or Council's nominated representative or delegate, which:
 - Contribute to the development of personal and professional skills or knowledge of the Councillor which are necessary for the performance of the duties of a Councillor;
 - Are consistent with Council's objectives;
 - Will cover or present material with application, importance or relevance to current or future issues faced by the Council;
 - Are within the Mayor and Councillors' approved annual budget for conferences and seminars.
- Council's nominated representative for attendance at conferences, seminars, training or professional development, includes appointed 'Councillor Responsible for' to a related portfolio and/or appointed committee member if that appointment has been made by Council.

- Support or reimbursement will not be provided if the costs:
 - Relate to a cost or expense (or portion thereof) which should reasonably be borne by another entity, or for which another entity is reasonably liable, or is outside the scope of this Policy; or
 - Relate to expenses of a personal nature or which are not related to the business of Council.

The procedure and provisions for the reimbursement of expenses applies to members of Delegated Committees for expenses incurred in the course of their role as a Delegated Committee member, regardless of whether or not they are a Councillor.

2.3 Research and other drivers

Under the Act:

- Councillors are entitled to resources and facilities support and reimbursements of expenses related to their duties as a Councillor; and
- A Council must adopt and maintain a policy in relation to the reimbursement of expenses for Councillors and members of Delegated Committees.
- Council must make available the resources and facilities resources and facilities reasonably necessary to enable them to effectively perform their role.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to ensure the transparent and responsible provision of resources and support required by a Councillor to effectively undertake their duties as an elected representative by:

- Outlining the level of support to be provided;
- Maximising the value of seminar, conference and/or course attendance;
- Providing the approval processes for resources and support, including all interstate and overseas travel by Councillors in an official capacity;
- Providing for the provision of reasonable costs of childcare to be reimbursed, in order to support a Councillor to perform their role;
- Providing for expenses incurred by Councillor a who is a carer in a care relationship within the meaning of section 4 of the Carers Recognition Act 2012 to be reimbursed on order to support them to perform their role;
- Outlining the procedure for reimbursement of expenses; and
- Providing reporting mechanisms that are available to the community, including maintaining registers required by the Act or regulations and in accordance with the Public Transparency Policy.

4. Policy details

Councillors and members of delegated committees will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses that are:

- bona fide expenses; and
- have been reasonably incurred in the performance of the role of Councillor and
- are reasonably necessary for the councillor and member of a delegated committee to perform this role.

Similarly, Councillors will be provided with the resources, facilities and support reasonably required for them to be effective in their role.

The entitlement to the support, resources and expenses outlined in the Policy will be assessed in accordance with the Policy Scope, Context and Objectives and in line with the approval process outlined.

This Policy is not intended to prescribe for every possible situation that may arise.

Should a situation arise that is not adequately covered by this Policy, the matter will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer who may refer it to Council for determination by resolution.

The Policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant Council policies adopted from time to time, including but not limited to, the Councillor Code of Conduct and specific policies regarding the use, security and maintenance and Council equipment, as adopted and or amended from time to time.

Unless otherwise specifically stated, where the Policy makes provision for Council to pay for a resource or expense, that resource or expense may be reimbursed as an out of pocket expense or, where the policy makes provision for reimbursement of an expense, that resource or expense may be paid by Council without the Councillor first incurring the expense. In both situations, the approval processes outlined in this policy will apply.

4.1 Resources and Facilities Support

4.1.1 Administrative Support

The Chief Executive Officer shall provide an appropriate level of administrative support for the Mayor and Councillors.

The level of administrative support shall be determined by the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with the Mayor.

Councillors are provided with a security card enabling appropriate access to Council venues.

4.1.2 Councillor Portal (Councillor Connect)

A Councillor Portal providing access to:

- Council business papers (Meeting Agendas and Minutes, Councillor Briefing Presentations);
- Correspondence directed to multiple Councillors or the Council;
- Information about projects and achievements of Council's operations;
- Policies and resource materials (including reference material and reports from other agencies or organisations);
- News items relevant to Council;
- Forms relevant for Councillors;
- Any other information considered relevant or necessary by the Chief Executive Officer or delegate; and

This will be the primary resource portal for Council business papers and key information for Councillors.

4.1.3 Equipment and stationery

Council shall, upon request, provide Councillors with standard stationery, equipment and consumables held or obtained generally for the organisation's requirements, including, but not necessarily limited to, paper, writing implements, diaries, writing pads, printer cartridges, envelopes and the like. Council letterhead will only be provided for correspondence that has been approved by Council or for the Mayor to correspond as Council's official spokesperson.

Requests for stationery should be made to the Executive Assistant to Mayor and Councillors.

Each Councillor will be provided with personalised business cards and a name badge for use while on Council business.

4.1.4 Printing and copying

The resources provided for Councillors to print and copy items are outlined in the IT Equipment and Stationery sections in this policy.

Any requests for bulk copying or printing (more than 10 copies of a document that is more than 20 pages in length) must be determined by resolution of Council with consideration of the relevance to the Council Plan and Council's objectives. Printing to promote the activities of an individual Councillor or Ward Councillors may only be approved if it is part of the Communications Strategy or Communications unit workplan.

On request and subject to availability, Councillors will be provided with copies of brochures, flyers or reports to distribute in the course of their duties, if these have been produced as part of Council's usual operations.

4.1.5 Mayor's office, Councillors' office and meeting room

A suitably equipped Mayoral office shall be provided within the Council offices.

A Councillors' office and meeting room will be provided for use by Councillors within the Council offices, suitably equipped for computer access, office work, photocopying, reading, research, and meetings. The meeting room may be booked by Council staff, however will be vacated for any Councillor meeting.

The space and equipment provided for the Mayoral Office and Councillors' office and meeting room provided shall be at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer.

4.1.6 Parking

Car parking will be available at the Civic Centre, subject to parking restrictions.

Councillors are eligible for a 'staff' parking permit, which allows permit holders to park in designated areas:

- the signed areas of the Merri-bek Civic Centre car park;
- David Street Brunswick carpark behind the Mechanics Institute, and
- Belair Avenue Glenroy car park.

When parking in a staff parking area, Councillors must clearly display a current permit in the bottom left hand corner of the windscreen and only park in a designated staff parking permit area.

Infringements may be issued if a current permit is not displayed, not clearly visible, or if parked in an incorrect permit area. Parking permits do not exempt a Councillor from all other road (parking) rules.

4.1.7 Meals and Refreshments

Where Council meetings, functions or events are held at times that extend through normal meal times, Council will provide suitable meals for Councillors.

4.1.8 Website

Each Councillor will be provided with a page on Council's website, the content of which may include a photograph, contact details, ward map, personal statements, hobbies and interests, Councillor assignments (areas of responsibility or appointments by Council to Committees), academic qualifications and professional memberships.

This information will be limited during the election (caretaker) period leading up to the Council election.

Additional information may be included on the Councillor's webpage at the Councillor's request, subject to the content being approved for publication by the Chief Executive Officer.

4.2 IT Equipment

Councillors are issued with IT equipment, meeting Council's IT standards, in order to facilitate Council-related communications between the community, Council staff and Councillors.

Councillors may choose to be supplied with the standard equipment or elect to purchase their own units (non-standard with no IT Support) and be reimbursed for equipment up to the same value of the equivalent standard equipment.

IT may support software that is not Merri-bek approved applications, however consideration will be given to cyber security risk and safeguarding Council's network infrastructure.

Where Council reimburses a Councillor for non-consumable IT equipment, the equipment becomes the property of Council and must be returned at the end of the Council term.

Equipment, software, service and facilities offered includes:

- mobile telephone and bluetooth wireless adaptor (for Councillors' private vehicles that do not support bluetooth);
- a tablet/laptop device;
- Windows/OS and MS Office (via Office365) amongst others will be installed on the device;
- cloud-based data storage (Office365);
- multi-function unit for printing, photocopying and scanning documents;
- Mobile phone voicemail; and
- IT support.

Mobile telephones and devices will all have wireless broadband capability and be Mobile internet enabled (e.g. 4G access).

4.2.1 Use of IT equipment

Council phones and mobile data enabled devices will be provided to support a Councillor to undertake their duties, however, it is recognised that for practical reasons, a Councillor may make a reasonable number of non-Council related calls. They may also make reasonable personal use of mobile devices, including mobile data.

Councillor expenses will be monitored by the Manager Governance and Strategy and if a Councillor exceeds the data plan month for use of data or calls on their mobile devices, re-imburement of those costs will be sought from the Councillor.

If the amount exceeded relates to costs incurred as a result of higher than expected Council business, Councillors will be required to put this in writing to the Manager Governance and Strategy to acquit this matter. If the costs incurred are for non-Council business use, the amount of non-Council business use must be reimbursed to Council. The Manager Governance and Strategy will raise an invoice for the amount and the Councillor must pay this in line with Council's payment terms.

International calls will not be considered reasonable use unless a Councillor is conducting Council business (such as making arrangements for a conference/tour that has been approved by a resolution of Council). Telephone calls to information service providers which incur a significant per minute charge will normally not be considered reasonable use.

App store purchases will not be covered by Council and must be reimbursed by Councillors.

4.2.2 Global roaming

Councillors can request that global roaming be activated on their Councillor provided equipment, when travelling overseas, however Councillors will be invoiced for all costs incurred for this period, unless travelling for Council business with the approval of Council via a Council resolution.

4.2.3 Damaged equipment

Equipment provided to a Councillor should last the full Council term. If equipment is damaged any more than twice the equipment will be replaced at the Councillor's cost.

4.2.4 Lost equipment

If the equipment is lost during the Council term, it will be replaced at the Councillor's cost. Stolen equipment will be replaced on production of a police report.

4.2.5 Return of equipment

If a Councillor is suspended in accordance with the Act, the Councillor must return all Council equipment and materials to the Council at the beginning of the term of suspension.

In the case that a Councillor seeks a leave of absence, they will not be required to return their Council provided equipment, unless specifically requested by a vote of Council, where the reason for the leave meets the definition of a conflict of interest with that person's role as Councillor.

4.2.6 End of Council term or resignation/retirement of a Councillor

Councillors who leave office and who wish to retain the IT equipment provided by Council may do so by purchasing the equipment, otherwise all equipment must be returned to Council.

Equipment (standard or non-standard) will be sold to retiring Councillors on the basis of the value of the equipment at that time. The valuation will be arranged by the Manager Information Technology.

A retiring Councillor who does not wish to purchase the equipment but wishes to maintain the same mobile telephone number may have this number ported to a personal mobile phone account at no cost.

Council provided IT support will cease to Councillors from the time of going out of office. Former Councillors may engage an IT support provider at their own cost if they choose.

Subscription services will also cease such as Microsoft Office (O365) at the time of a Councillor's resignation or retirement from office. If Councillors do not intend to maintain an O365 account (Microsoft Office and online storage) then arrangements should be made with the IT support provider to transfer data to another storage provider or locally on the device.

4.3 Meetings arranged by Councillors

4.3.1 Meeting Rooms

Subject to availability, and in accordance with relevant policy, Council meeting/function rooms owned and controlled by Council may be booked by Councillors for use free of charge for meetings and other functions, provided the Councillor is in attendance and the use is necessary or appropriate for performing the duties of a Councillor or the conduct of Council business. Councillors must make these bookings via booking form.

Any non-Council venue booked directly by a Councillors for any purpose, must be done at their own cost and will not be reimbursed.

Ward or Councillor meetings should be held in Council owned venues to avoid hall hire costs. Officer support is provided to Councillors for their meetings in regard to booking the venue, and scheduling dates in the Councillors diary. The Executive Assistant to Mayor and Councillors will also organise a catering pack (tea and coffee), on request.

The Councillor will need to set up the venue, organise any catering and pick up the keys to the venue as required. IT support or equipment and/or copying of materials is not available for meetings arranged by Councillors.

Councillors must not permit or provide access to community members to secure (office) parts of Council offices unless a Council officer is present.

4.3.2 Ward meetings

A Ward meeting is a meeting called by a Councillor to provide an opportunity for constituents to come and talk to their Councillor(s) about a range of Ward based and municipality-based issues. A Ward meeting is held in the Ward that the Councillor(s) represent and will usually have an open or broad invitation.

It is the Councillor's decision as to the format, date and location of the meeting.

Issues arising from Ward meetings should be communicated in writing by Ward Councillors to the Executive Officer Civic and CEO Office. These items will be raised and processed as customer requests/complaints (CRSs) in the Customer Request System.

Ward meetings can be held by individual Councillors or as multi-member Ward meetings at the discretion of the relevant Ward Councillors.

Ward meetings will be promoted on Council's Website and through Council's standard communication/social media channels (e.g. Facebook post). Up to 30 flyers giving notice of the Ward meeting will be produced on request, for display around the Ward. Flyers must be displayed in accordance with the General Local Law.

Individual Councillor Ward meetings will be advertised as 'Councillor's Ward meeting'. Other Ward Councillors will be made aware of the date and time of the Ward meeting.

4.3.3 Councillor Meetings

A Councillor Meeting is a meeting called by a Councillor(s), that may be Ward related, but is in relation to a specific topic with specific invitees. Councillor Meetings are not supported by Council officers, other than bookings of Council facilities which may be made by Mayor and Councillor support staff. A catering pack may also be made available. No IT support is available.

It is the Councillor's decision as to the format, date and location of the meeting. Councillor meetings will not be advertised as they have specific invitees. (duplication).

4.3.4 Meet the Mayor meetings

Meet the Mayor meetings can be held in any ward in the municipality.

4.4 Advanced Approval to Travel Interstate or Overseas

4.4.1 Requests to travel

- a) It is recommended that a maximum of two Councillors attend the same event for any interstate or overseas conference, workshop, seminar etc.
- b) Approval for all interstate and overseas travel by a Councillor/s should be by resolution of the Council via a Council report. The Council report must identify the following:
 - background;
 - the purpose of the travel;
 - how the travel meets Council's objectives in line with the Council Plan;
 - the benefits to Council and/or Merri-bek;
 - proposed costs (airfare, accommodation, conference fees, meals, etc); and
 - nomination of the Councillor/s that should undertake such travel.
- c) A Councillor seeking approval for interstate or overseas travel other than attendance at the Australian Local Governments'(ALGA) National General Assembly, must provide the substantive information for the Council Report.

4.4.2 Exceptions

With the exception of overseas travel, in the event that timeframes do not permit approval in advance (e.g., arranging a meeting with a member of parliament), approval for interstate travel can be sought from the Chief Executive Officer after consulting with the Mayor.

4.4.3 Unofficial Overseas Travel

Councillors cannot represent the Council during personal overseas trips without prior approval through a Council resolution.

4.5 Travel and Accommodation

4.5.1 Air Travel

Where air travel is approved (as outlined under 4.4 of this Policy) flights are to be economy class flights utilising non-flexible fares where possible (when travel times can be assured). When selecting flights, consideration should be made to adjusting schedules to take advantage of cheaper options. The best price and conditions when booking flights will be sourced, irrespective of a Councillor's frequent flyer memberships.

Travel to conferences must be made directly from Melbourne.

4.5.2 Public Transport, taxis and rideshare schemes

Councillors may use public transport, taxis or rideshare schemes to undertake their duties as a Councillor. Receipts are required in all cases. Charges will be reimbursed by Council.

Where Council provides a Myki (or similar public transport card), subscription to a rideshare scheme, cab charge or any access to any other service that directly invoices Council, these invoices will be compared to Councillor diary entries to identify correlations to Councillor duties. Where there is no apparent connection, the Councillor will be required to acquit for the use of the service in connection with their duties as a Councillor or reimburse the amount not related to Council business.

Myki

On request, a Councillor will be provided with a Myki card for use in Victoria. Any personal use must be reimbursed to Council.

If a Councillor uses their own Myki card, they will be reimbursed for any use related to undertaking office on the provision of a Myki statement highlighting the relevant trip(s) for reimbursement and the reasons for the trip(s) in accordance with the reimbursement process under 4.17.

Cabcharge

Council, on request, will provide a Councillor with a Cab Charge Card for Council business use.

Taxis should only be used if they are the most efficient means of transport available.

Rideshare

A Councillor may choose to use a rideshare scheme to undertake their duties. Councillors may submit receipts for reimbursements for these trips in accordance with the reimbursement process under 4.17.

4.5.3 Mayoral vehicle

The Mayor will have access to a fully maintained vehicle (including servicing, fuel and insurance) or bicycle in accordance with the Light Vehicle Policy.

The vehicle will be available for use by the Mayor in the discharge of his or her duties as the Mayor and a Councillor, and for reasonable private use during the Mayoral term.

If the Mayor chooses the option of a bicycle, including an electric bicycle, instead of a motor vehicle:

- The make and model of the bicycle will be determined in consultation with the Director City Infrastructure; and
- If requested, a membership to a car sharing scheme, will be provided for the period they are Mayor, with all costs associated with the membership paid by Council.

4.5.4 Accommodation

Where Councillors attend a conference, event or function that is held over more than one day, accommodation will be provided on conference nights. For example, should a conference, event or function commence on a Friday afternoon and finish on Sunday at 12 noon, accommodation will be provided for the Friday and Saturday nights only.

Accommodation will be provided for the night before the commencement of the conference providing the conference commences prior to 12 noon. Where the conference, event or function commences after 12 noon it is expected that Councillors will travel on the morning of the intended conference, event or function.

Any additional costs incurred as a result of extended stays, the attendance of partners and/or children and the cost of non-essential room extras such as mini bar or in-house movies shall be borne by Councillors.

Practical judgment will be exercised when selecting accommodation that best suits a Councillor circumstance. Cost implications, risk and the best use of time will be considered. As a general guide, the maximum daily rate for accommodation is \$230 per night (subject to an annual update, where required, to be approved by the CEO for the life of the policy), but may be exceeded when:

- visiting a capital city; or
- staying at the venue where the conference, event or function is being held.

Note: Peak periods will be taken into consideration when enforcing this policy. For Example, booking accommodation during a major event such as Sydney Mardi Gras.

4.5.5 Food and drinks

Council will reimburse Councillors for meals when attending conferences, events, and functions that are work related. Council will not reimburse the purchase of alcohol at any time, unless pre-approved by the CEO.

4.5.6 Passport and visas

Councillors travelling overseas are responsible for ensuring that they have a current passport with a minimum of 6 months remaining and obtain any required visas. Costs for visas can be paid or reimbursed by the Council. However, costs associated with obtaining a current passport are the responsibility of the individual Councillor.

4.5.7 Non-Allowable Expenditure

Council will not reimburse expenditure in relation to the following items:

- Alcohol;
- Snacks;
- Any costs associated with accommodation that are outside room and breakfast (e.g. mini bar, laundry, tips and gratuities);
- Airline club fees;
- Excess baggage claims;
- Toiletries;
- Any items lost or stolen;
- Tourism related costs (e.g.: day trips, excursions, activities, hire of bikes or boats etc);
- Reading materials (including newspapers, magazines, books etc);
- Traffic, parking or speeding fines;
- Travel costs not associated with the conference or event;
- In-flight or in-house movies or entertainment costs;
- Personal gifts, goods, services or souvenirs purchased; and
- Costs incurred for family or other persons travelling with Councillors (including meals, travel, incidentals etc).

4.6 Professional development

Professional development programs/courses are available to all Councillors.

4.6.1 Induction

Upon the commencement of each electoral term, a purpose designed induction program will be provided to all Councillors. Any costs relating to this program will not be deducted from the Councillors allotted annual budget, will not be attributed to any individual Councillor expenses (therefore not required to be reported as part of quarterly individual Councillor expense reports) .

The costs of the Councillor induction program and group training recommended or mandatory for all Councillors will be maintained in a register and included in the annual report, and reported as required in the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework annually.

4.6.2 Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD);

If a Councillor elects to attend the AICD Company Directors course and has approval to attend by a resolution of Council, the cost of attendance will not contribute to, or affect the Councillors allocation of \$10,000 for their attendance at seminars, conferences and training and community events.

Councillors attending the AICD Company Directors course will be required to sit the accreditation. A Councillor who does not complete the accreditation will be required to refund the attendance cost.

4.6.3 Other Professional Development

Council will also provide access to the following professional development programs/initiatives:

- meeting procedures;
- chairing of meetings;
- media training;
- social media
- public speaking
- governance training
- financial training;
- team building and interpersonal skills; and
- Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)/Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)/ALGA, Australian Local Government Women's Association ALGWA, etc Councillor Development programs.

Individual professional development expenditure should be tested against the following criteria:

- is it in the interest of the Merri-bek community;
- does it meet the budget determined by Council;
- does it clearly offer and promote public benefit, as distinguished from private benefit;
- is it directly relevant to the Councillor's role; and
- does it take place and is it able to be utilised during the Councillor's term of office.

4.7 Professional memberships and subscriptions

Council is a member of:

- The MAV;
- The VLGA; and
- The ALGWA.

Individual memberships, professional associations or subscriptions which are considered demonstrably beneficial to Council or the performance of the duties of a Councillor may be reimbursed subject to a resolution of Council.

Professional membership will not be paid for the Australian Institute of Company Directors, unless the membership fee is included as or otherwise reduces the cost of the Company Directors Course. The membership must be deleted from the list of professional memberships for the subsequent years after completing the course.

4.8 Community participation

4.8.1 Event roles

The Mayor is the primary Council representative for events. If the Mayor is unavailable to attend an event, the Deputy Mayor (if appointed) will become the primary representative. If the Deputy Mayor is not available, the Mayor may delegate the role to a Councillor.

Where there is a significant event link to a Councillor as a committee representative or area of responsibility (i.e. Councillor Responsible For), the Mayor may choose to delegate their role to the appropriate Councillor, ahead of the Deputy Mayor.

Speech support is only provided for Councillors who wish to speak at functions in an official role as Merri-bek representative (i.e. Mayor's delegate).

The Mayor, or delegated Councillor representing Council at an event is be entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, reasonable bona fide costs associated with representing Council at the event.

Should any other Councillor wish to attend the event then the costs associated with attending the event will be borne by the Councillor.

The Mayor will undertake any official role at Council events or may delegate the role to the Deputy Mayor or other Councillor with related responsibilities. The Chief Executive Officer or (Chief Executive Officer 's delegate) will usually act as master of ceremonies (MC) if required.

Invitations for Council events will be issued from the Mayor. All Councillors will receive an invitation to Council organised or sponsored events.

4.8.2 Local community events

Attendance at local events and functions is a key part of a Councillor's representative role.

Councillors will carefully consider if their attendance at an event or function truly relates to the duties of office, and whether community resources should be used to pay for their attendance.

Councillors will avoid conflicts of interest (or perceptions of) that may arise as a result of their attendance at events and functions, including the applicable gifts threshold.

Under Section 128 of the Act, a material conflict of interest because of receipt of an applicable gift does not include reasonable hospitality received by the person at an event or function the person attended in an official capacity as a Councillor.

Hospitality is a gift where a Councillor attends an event or function:

- From free tickets the Councillor received and there are NO official duties to perform, or
- With free membership; or
- Where the hospitality is generous e.g. a two or three course meal with alcohol at an event or function.

Councillors will act in accordance with the Gift, Benefits and Hospitality Policy for Councillors in disclosing offers.

4.8.3 Paid community events

Councillors will be supported to attend paid events that:

- Are Council-organised or Council-sponsored; or
- Are held by groups or organisations based in the City of Merri-bek, have a 'demonstrable benefit' to the local community and are directly related to a Councillor's area of responsibility or committee membership as appointed by Council; or
- Melbourne-based events hosted by key community partners/stakeholder organisations, where an official invitation is received, the Councillor has been invited in an official capacity and attendance has been approved by resolution of Council; and

Do not conflict with any Council policies or resolutions, such as those related to gambling, and attendance can be reasonably viewed as contributing to the fulfillment of the Council's goals. The cost of a Councillor's partner or guest will not be covered by Council and may constitute an applicable gift (or contribute to an applicable gift) under the Act for the Councillor if accepted free of charge.

Ticketed events with a value of \$150 or more per ticket will only be paid with approval by resolution of Council.

4.9 Attendance by Spouse/Partner at Seminars, Conferences and Civic Functions

Attendance at any seminar, conference or civic function by a Councillor's spouse/partner shall be at the expense of the Councillor except where:

- Prior approval has been given by Council;
- Attendance by a Councillor's spouse/partner is considered to be necessary or appropriate to support the business or representational needs of Council (for example, for the purpose of childcare or other care needs); and
- Sufficient provision exists in the approved annual budget for conferences and seminars.

Where Council has approved a Councillor's spouse/partner to attend a seminar, conference or civic function, Councillors are entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, their spouse or partner's:

- Registration fees (for a Civic Function, but not a seminar or conference);
- Reasonable costs for meals and refreshments;
- Attendance at one primary conference dinner, when held, for each interstate conference attended.

Other than this, all additional costs incurred for the attendance of a spouse/partner will be at the expense of the Councillor.

Councillors are entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, the reasonable costs and expenses of their spouse or partner attending:

- Functions held by Council;
- Functions held by other Victorian municipalities or local government peak bodies; and
- Where there is an agreed expectation of partners attending, i.e. spouse/partner of the Councillor is specified on the invitation.

The above is subject to funds being available within the annual budget, and on the basis of equity amongst all Councillors. Costs will be met from the Mayor and Councillors conferences and seminars budget.

4.10 Insurance and indemnity (combined sections)

Section 43 of the Act provides:

A Council must indemnify and keep indemnified each Councillor, member of a delegated committee ... against all actions or claims whether arising during or after their term of office in respect of anything necessarily done or reasonably done or omitted to be done in good faith:

- a) in the performance of a duty or a function or the exercise of a power under this Act, the regulations or a local law or any other Act; or
- b) in the reasonable belief that the act or omission was in the performance of a duty or a function or the exercise of a power under this Act, the regulations or a local law or any other Act.

Councillors are covered under the following Council insurance policies while discharging, in good faith, the duties of civic office including attendance at meetings of external bodies as Council representatives:

- Public liability;
- Professional indemnity;
- Councillors' and officers' liability; and
- Business Travel Insurance policy (approved accompanying partners are also covered).

The Council will pay the insurance policy excess in respect of any claim made against a Councillor arising from Council business where any claim is accepted by Council's insurers, whether defended or not.

4.11 Health and Wellbeing

In line with Merri-bek's commitment to promoting a healthy working environment, Councillors and immediate family are able to access (where required) Council's appointed confidential professional counselling service (EAP) to help resolve both

personal and Council related problems or concerns that may impact on their capacity to effectively undertake their role as a Councillor.

4.12 Apparel

The Council shall, upon request, lend Councillors protective clothing. This clothing is to be returned promptly upon the completion of the activity/duty for which the articles were required.

This clothing shall be limited to wet weather pants and pullover, gumboots, winter jacket and/or hat, or other such clothing to meet the organisation's requirements, unless otherwise resolved by Council for a specific item(s).

4.13 Childcare/family care

Councillors are entitled to have paid by Council, or reimbursed, the cost of childcare/family care expenses for immediate family members, necessarily incurred by Councillors whilst discharging their duties as a Councillor within the scope of this Policy, subject to the following conditions:

- The maximum hourly rate a Councillor will be reimbursed for child care/family care expenses is twenty three dollars and twenty three cents (\$23.23) per hour indexed annually to CPI at the commencement of each Mayoral term;
- Childcare/family care costs must be substantiated by a receipt from the caregiver showing the dates and times care was provided, and the Councillor shall show why the care was needed on each occasion; and
- A person who provides child/family care does not need to be a licenced or registered provider, however must not be an immediate family member (partner, mother/father, sister/brother, grandmother/grandfather or sister-in-law/brother-in-law) or person who normally lives with the Councillor or child/family member.

For the purposes of this Policy, a child shall be defined as up to, but not including 16 years of age.

4.14 Support for a Councillor with a Disability

The Chief Executive Officer or delegate will assess and approve reasonable support - through additional facilities and expenses - to allow a Councillor with a disability to perform their duties of office

4.15 Sponsorship and Donations

Any sponsorship or donations made by a Councillor will be made on their own behalf and not on behalf of Council, except in accordance with a prior resolution of Council.

Councillor sponsorship and donations not in accordance with a prior resolution of Council (in accordance with the Sponsorship and Donations Guidelines) will not be reimbursed by Council.

4.16 Available Budget & Approval

An annual budget is provided in the Mayor and Councillor budget for attendance at seminars, conferences and training and community events. This budget will allow Councillors to access up to a maximum \$10,000 (plus GST) for relevant professional development and initiatives (as listed above) over the course of a Councillor's elected period (4 years). Any further expenditure requested will be presented to Council for approval.

A resolution of Council will be required to exceed this cap.

4.16.1 Where Council Resolution is required

- a) Where any professional development activity, seminar or conference attendance activity exceeds \$1,500 (excluding GST).
- b) AICD Company Directors course
- c) Where interstate or overseas travel is requested (refer section 4.4)
- d) Where any further expenditure exceeding an individual Councillors annual budget is requested.
- e) Individual memberships, professional associations or subscriptions which are considered demonstrably beneficial to Council or the performance of the duties of a Councillor may be reimbursed.
- f) Melbourne-based events hosted by key community partners/stakeholder organisations, where an official invitation is received, and a Councillor has been invited in an official capacity;
- g) Ticketed events with a value of \$150 or more per ticket.
- h) Attendance by Spouse/Partner at Seminars, Conferences and Civic Functions
- i) Any requests for bulk copying or printing (more than 10 copies of a document that is more than 20 pages in length)

4.17 Arrangements and Reimbursement

4.17.1 Processing Arrangements

Prior to approving any registration, Councillors will submit relevant details for approval, and consider the following factors:

- the alignment of the request with this Policy; and
- the available budget for that Councillor.

If attendance is approved as aligned with the Policy and within the available budget, the Mayor and Councillor Support team will make arrangements for payment and registration.

If attendance is not aligned with the Policy or the available budget has been exceeded, the Councillor will be advised of the options to either seek a Council resolution to approve attendance or pay for attendance themselves.

4.17.2 Council paid items (in advance/directly invoiced)

For equipment that meets Council's IT standards (and hence is supported by Council), Council will meet the purchase, initial installation, maintenance costs, connection fees, rental charges and the operating costs of that equipment incurred by Councillors in the undertaking of their Councillor duties including all Council business call charges.

4.17.3 Claims for Reimbursements

Where a request is made for reimbursement of expenses incurred under this policy, Council may reimburse an amount less than the amount claimed where the actual expense incurred is considered unreasonable, taking into account the estimated costs to Council to purchase similar goods.

Claims are to be submitted by a Councillor via the online form on the Councillor Portal. If the online form cannot be accessed, the Mayor and Councillor Support team may provide a hardcopy form which must be completed and signed by the Councillor.

Claims should be accompanied by original receipts/tax invoices for any expenses claimed which clearly identify the name of the payee and ABN where applicable.

If receipts cannot be produced, Councillors may be required to provide a statutory declaration.

Claims must include sufficient detail to demonstrate, in accordance with the Act that the expense for which reimbursement is claimed is a reasonable out-of-pocket expense incurred while performing the duties of a Councillor.

4.17.3.1 Timeframe for submission of claims

Councillors are required to submit claims in a timely manner to ensure transparency and timely accountability.

Claims for reimbursement of expenses in the September, December and March quarters must be submitted by the close of business of the following month to allow for accurate and timely recording of Councillor expenses on Council's website.

Claims for reimbursement of expenses in the June quarter must be submitted within 14 working days of the end of financial year.

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

Reimbursements will be paid by electronic funds transfer within 21 days of a compliant claim form being submitted.

4.17.4 Processing

4.17.4.1 Form of claims

4.17.5 Assessment of claims Approvals

Approval for payment of costs and reimbursement of expenses in accordance with this policy will be made by the Manager Governance and Strategy or Unit Manager Governance in accordance with delegations by the Chief Executive Officer. The Executive Officer Civic and CEO Officer will assist in administering the approval process.

If there is a question about a claim, in the first instance, this will be discussed this matter with the relevant Councillor.

If required, guidance/intervention will be sought from the Chief Executive Officer.

If required, the Chief Executive Officer will refer claims to a Council meeting for determination.

4.17.6 Injury or Illness preventing attendance at a paid event or conference

Councillors who suffer from an injury or illness preventing them from attending a course, conference or workshop, particularly where travel is involved, should notify the Manager Governance and Strategy preferably with enough notice for Council to either substitute an alternative Councillor or to cancel the intended travel and accommodation arrangements and any associated fees

Failure to inform Council of non-attendance may result in Council seeking reimbursement.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Party/parties	Roles and responsibilities	Timelines
Chief Executive Officer	Determines exceptions to this policy	Where there is not enough time available to seek a resolution of Council (if required)
Director Business Transformation	Is consulted by the Manager Governance and Strategy or Unit Manager Governance and administers this Policy in their absence	As required
Manager Governance and Strategy	Administers this Policy	Ongoing
Unit Governance	Manager Administers this Policy Maintains the Interstate and Overseas Travel Register Arranges for Council reporting when required Ensures legislative requirements are met; Researches; coordinates consultation, reviews and updates the Policy.	Ongoing

6. Monitoring, Evaluating and review

The cost of Councillor support and resources will be monitored and reviewed by the Manager Governance and Strategy to ensure that ongoing expenses can be accommodated within the Mayor and Councillors budget.

The Policy will be reviewed at least once each Council term to ensure the required support and resources are being provided to enable Councillors to fulfil their duties as elected representatives.

7. Reporting

The cost of Councillor support and resource expenses is to be reported to the community by inclusion of the details on the Council website. This will be reported quarterly.

Councillors are required to sign an agreement for the use of Council equipment (Attachment 1).

Councillors are provided with this equipment to conduct Council business and the equipment must be used for this purpose only.

In addition, Council will maintain and have available for public inspection, a register of overseas and interstate travel (other than interstate travel by land for less than three days) by Council staff and Councillors.

Councillors attending any approved activity must provide all Councillors with a verbal or written report on their attendance. The report must be submitted to a Council meeting as soon as practicable. The information may be provided to the Unit Manager Governance for inclusion in the Governance Report.

8. Definitions

Term	Definition
Bona Fide Costs/Expenses	Costs or expenses incurred by a Councillor, where it can demonstrated with supporting documentation that the expenses were incurred during the course of Council business.
Carer	Carer is defined under section 4 of the Carers Recognition Act 2012
Delegated Committee	A committee with delegated power established under section 63 of the Local Government Act 2020

9. Associated Documents

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Light Vehicle Policy
- Sponsorship and Donations Guidelines
- Public Transparency Policy
- Carers Recognition Act 2012
- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
- Local Government Act 2020

10. References

[Babysitters and Babysitting Jobs | Babysits](#)

[The average babysitting cost in Australia - 2023 edition \(babysits.au\)](#)