

Program:	Executive Office
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Scope

This policy applies to the Mayor and Councillors of Mackay Regional Council to ensure accountability and transparency for reimbursing reasonable expenses incurred whilst undertaking their official Council Business.

This policy will ensure that the Mayor and Councillors have reasonable facilities to assist them in their official Council Business.

This policy does not provide salaries or any other form of remuneration to Councillors, which the Local Government Remuneration Commission determines.

Objective

The objectives of this policy are:

- a) to provide specific guidelines for the reimbursement of legitimate expenses incurred or to be incurred by a Councillor while carrying out official Council Business.
- b) to guidance for administrative support to enable Councillors to perform their duties with relative ease to discharge their duties and responsibilities as a Councillor.

Policy Statement

Councillors are elected community representatives who set the strategic direction for the Mackay Region.

Mackay Regional Council (MRC) is committed to ensuring that its elected representatives are not financially disadvantaged. This policy underpins that commitment by demonstrating that reasonable expenses incurred by the Mayor and Councillors whilst carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Reasonable expenses will be accepted and/or reimbursed and outlining the facilities and resources that MRC will provide to enable Councillors to discharge their duties and responsibilities.

The payment of or reimbursement of expenses and the provision of facilities and resources for Councillors will be:

- open and transparent;
- financially responsible and accountable;
- based on ensuring economy and efficiency;
- subject to budget provisions; and
- in accordance with all statutory requirements.

MRC will each year, as part of its budget process, establish a budget for the payment of reasonable expenses and the provision of facilities and resources to Councillors. Any unspent funds in a single financial year will not be carried over to the following year. It is acknowledged that each item will have an annual allocation in the budget; however, the allocation is not required to be spent for the specified use, and the entire budget (as provided by this policy) can be used for approved expenditure under this policy.

MRC's annual report will contain the particulars enacted by this policy and details of any expenses reimbursed under this policy.

MRC considers that to the extent this policy engages and limits, or potentially limits and human rights, that limitation is reasonable in that it is proportionate and justified.

This process to remain in force until otherwise determined
by Mackay Regional Council

Contents

1.0 Principles..... 4

 1.1 General Entitlement..... 4

 1.2 Official Council Business Representative 4

1.3 Conferences 5

1.4 Hospitality & Community Events..... 5

1.5 Discretionary Professional Development 5

1.6 Travel Expenses..... 5

1.7 Vehicles..... 6

 1.7.1 *Mayoral Vehicle*6

 1.7.2 *Councillor Vehicles*6

 1.7.3 *Private Vehicle Usage*.....7

1.8 Provision of Facilities, Services & Equipment 7

 1.8.1 *Administrative Tools and Access to Council Office Amenities*7

 1.8.2 *Insurance Cover*8

 1.8.3 *Support Resources*8

 1.8.4 *Legal Assistance*.....9

 1.8.5 *Corporate Credit Card*.....9

1.9 Other Resources 9

 1.9.1 *Communication and Technology Resources*.....9

 1.9.2 *Uniforms and Safety Equipment*.....10

1.10 Annual Report..... 10

2.0 Definitions..... 11

3.0 Review of Policy 13

4.0 Reference 13

1.0 Principles

1.1 General Entitlement

Councillors are entitled to be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred while undertaking Council Business and provided with appropriate facilities to assist them in their duties. A budget will be allocated each financial year for reasonable expenses to be incurred in accordance with this policy.

In determining the validity of a claim for reimbursement, Councillors must consider public perceptions to ensure that the process meets the community's expectations concerning accountability and transparency.

MRC will reimburse the expense incurred by the Mayor (or of the Mayor's nominated representative) for the expenses of the spouse or partner (where officially invited) of the Mayor (or of the Mayor's nominated representative) when the Mayor has been invited to attend an authorised function or event in an official capacity.

Where a separate ticket is required to be purchased, the cost of a partner or companion accompanying a Councillor (excluding the Mayor as per the clause above) on Council Business must be borne by that person. If a partner or companion wishes to accompany a Councillor in a private capacity, such travel will not be booked by MRC.

1.2 Official Council Business Representative

MRC will cover all expenses incurred in undertaking official Council Business, which includes the following:

- Preparing, attending and participating in Council meetings, committee meetings, workshops, strategic briefings, deputations and inspections;
- Attending civic functions or civic events to perform official duties or as an official Council representative;
- Attending a community event to represent the Council;
- The attendance of the Mayor or Councillor in an official capacity, representing the Council at ordinary meetings, annual general meetings, annual and bi-annual conferences of the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA, Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

These costs will be excluded from the allowance referenced in clauses 1.4 and 1.5; however, they will still be reported against the individual Councillor in the Annual Report as per clause 1.8.

1.3 Conferences

MRC will pay for Councillors to attend Conferences relevant to the role as a Councillor, (such as flights, taxis, vehicle hire, and parking), accommodation, meals and associated registration fees, deemed reasonable and necessary.

All conference attendance required a Council resolution prior to travel unless it is urgent.

Councillors returning from a conference must provide a summary report to the Council.

1.4 Hospitality & Community Events

Each Councillor can attend, at their discretion, meetings, workshops, courses, seminars, ticketed community events and training courses that will improve their skills or are relevant to the role of Councillor.

MRC will budget \$2,500 per Councillor/per financial year for the quadrennial term of office. No transfer between Councillors and no carry forward option is permitted beyond one year. There is no requirement for a Council resolution to approve these attendances.

1.5 Discretionary Professional Development

MRC will provide \$5,000 per each Councillor per a quadrennial term for professional development to improve their skills relevant to the role of Councillor.

There is no requirement for a Council resolution to approve these attendances. However, the Councillor must submit a request to the Mayor for approval prior to attending and, subject to approval, provide all relevant documentation within 14 days of attending the event to ensure reimbursement of expenses.

Any professional development that requires overseas travel requires a formal Council resolution.

1.6 Travel Expenses

Where Councillors have received approval to attend a conference, workshop/or seminar, MRC will reimburse all travel expenses deemed necessary as follows:

- (a) Conference registration fees - MRC will make payment on behalf of the Councillor and/or reimburse any reasonable expenses incurred by the Councillor associated with their attendance.
- (b) Flight bookings - All Councillor travel will be booked and paid for by MRC. Economy class is to be used where possible, although upgrades may be approved in certain conditions or at the Councillors' expense. Airline tickets will not be transferable, but flight insurance will be paid to cover Councillors travelling for official Council Business.
- (c) Accommodation - Councillors will be entitled to stay at hotel accommodation when it is considered necessary to attend Council

Business or when it is not practical for the Councillor to attend an early morning commitment or return home for the night.

- (d) Meal allowances and incidental expenses - Councillors are entitled to be reimbursed for the meal cost when travelling or attending to Council Business outside the region. Meal costs will be refunded in accordance with the relevant Taxation Determination (TD 2021/6).
- (e) Parking, Tolls, Hire Car, Public Transport – Vouchers for public transport will be provided where possible. Councillors will be reimbursed for parking and toll charges incurred whilst travelling on official Council Business. Any fines or infringements issued while undertaking such activities are the personal responsibility of the Councillor incurring the fine.
- (f) All international travel will require a Council resolution.
- (g) All Councillor travel will be booked through MRC's [corporate travel service](#).

1.7 Vehicles

1.7.1 Mayoral Vehicle

The Mayor will be provided with a fully maintained suitable MRC vehicle below the threshold for luxury car tax (ex GST and on-road costs) determined by the Australian Tax Office, including fuel and all running costs for unlimited and unrestricted use by the Mayor for Council Business and private purposes in recognition of the duties required to be performed by the Mayor and the irregular hours required to attend Council, community and civic responsibilities.

1.7.2 Councillor Vehicles

Councillors have the option of either being provided with access to a suitable MRC fleet vehicle as required or being reimbursed for the use of their private vehicle:

- Use of MRC-Provided Vehicles on council business;
- Councillors will have access to a suitable MRC vehicle for official MRC business. A Councillor wishing to use an MRC vehicle for MRC business must submit a request to the CEO at least two (2) days prior to use, except in exceptional circumstances as determined between the Councillor, Mayor and CEO;

All fuel used in an MRC-owned vehicle on official Council Business will be provided or paid for by MRC.

1.7.3 Private Vehicle Usage

Use of a Councillor's private vehicle for official Council Business will be reimbursed by MRC for:

- a) Official Council Business;
- b) Official Council meetings, internal meetings, functions, community events and public meetings in the role of Councillor;
- c) To investigate issues/complaints regarding MRC services raised by residents/ratepayers/visitors to the region.

Councillors claiming reimbursement for using their private vehicle for Council Business shall submit the appropriate form detailing the relevant travel based on logbook details.

The reimbursed amount will be based on the published Australian Tax Office business use of motor vehicle cents per kilometre method and the kilometre rate applicable at travel time.

Councillors will receive an appropriate logbook to assist in this process. Reimbursement under this part is limited to a maximum of \$18,000/annum per Councillor whilst still subject to individual claims and logbook records.

This annual limit will be monitored regarding travel requirements, with a review of the policy to be made if necessary.

1.8 Provision of Facilities, Services & Equipment

MRC will provide facilities, services, and equipment for the Councillors to use in their respective roles with MRC.

All facilities and equipment provided remain the property of MRC, will be maintained and, as appropriate, replaced by MRC, and must be returned to MRC when a Councillor's term expires.

The facilities and equipment provided by MRC to Councillors are to be used only for Council Business unless prior approval has been granted by resolution of Council.

1.8.1 Administrative Tools and Access to Council Office Amenities

Councillors will be provided with access to the following:

- A fully maintained office space, known as the "Councillors' Room", will be available at the Administration Centre, Gordon Street Mackay and Council meeting rooms for daily usage;
- Car parking spaces at the main Administration Building;

- Laptop computer, docking station, monitor and keyboard (including home office items such as docking station, monitor, keyboard, etc.);
- Use of Council internet access;
- Fax and/or scanner;
- Printer, photocopier;
- Paper shredder, filing cabinet;
- Stationery;

Any other administrative necessities that the Council resolves are necessary to meet Council's business.

1.8.2 Insurance Cover

Councillors will be covered under relevant MRC insurance policies while discharging civic duties. Specifically, insurance cover will be provided for:

- a) public liability;
- b) professional indemnity,
- c) personal accident and/or workers compensation;
- d) international and domestic travel.

MRC will pay the excess for injury claims made by a Councillor resulting from the conduct of official Council Business and on any claim made under insurance cover.

MRC will cover costs incurred through injury, investigation, hearings or legal proceedings into the conduct of a Councillor or arising out of or in connection with the Councillor's performance of his/her civic functions. When it has been found that the Councillor breached the provisions of the *Local Government Act 2009*, the Councillor will reimburse the Council for all associated costs incurred by Council.

1.8.3 Support Resources

Extra to general Council management and staff support, the following Council staffing and other resources will also be provided in direct support of Councillors and their functions:

- Executive Assistant – Provision for the Mayor of a Council staffed Executive Assistant position within the Office of the Mayor & CEO;
- Executive Support Officer – Provision for Councillors of access to the services of a Council staff Executive Support Officer position within the Office of the Mayor & CEO;

A communication specialist will be available from the Corporate Communications & Marketing Team or via contract to provide strategic communications advice to the Office of the Mayor and CEO.

1.8.4 Legal Assistance

The MRC recognises that Councillors may sometimes require legal representation due to their roles, functions, and duties at Council. Where there is a relevant nexus between their role at the Council and a legal proceeding against them, it may be appropriate to provide financial assistance to meet the cost of obtaining legal representation.

Council Policy Legal Assistance for Councillors and Employees sets out specifics.

1.8.5 Corporate Credit Card

The Mayor may be provided with a corporate credit card for business expenses in accordance with the provisions of MRC's Purchasing Card Policy.

1.9 Other Resources

1.9.1 Communication and Technology Resources

To enable Councillors to be able to communicate effectively, Councillors will be provided with:

- An allowance for the provision of their mobile phone and the costs of a mobile phone package paid by MRC.
- An allowance for providing their own home internet and phone line connections to be used for MRC purposes, including home office connectivity.

Mobile Phones

The mobile phone package allowance will be \$140 per month. The Councillor is required to arrange for the Plan in their name and be paid a monthly allowance.

Any costs over and above those covered by the Plan shall be at the Councillor's expense.

MRC will also provide support services for mobile phones. Where such service is not provided in-house, the costs for the provision of the service will be borne by MRC.

Home Internet

MRC will pay the one-off installation costs (if required) and an allowance towards the monthly costs for the line rental and current internet package (set at \$100/month).

The Councillor is to arrange for the Plan in their name and be paid a monthly allowance.

Any costs over and above those covered by the package shall be at the Councillor's expense.

1.9.2 Uniforms and Safety Equipment

MRC will provide to a Councillor:

- Uniform allowance as per staff policy;
- Council blazer, tie or scarf;
- Necessary safety equipment for use on official business (e.g. safety helmet, boots, safety glasses).

1.10 Annual Report

As per section 186 of the *Local Government Regulation 2012*, the expenses incurred by, and the facilities provided to, each Councillor during the financial year under this policy will be published in each Annual Report.

The Regulation does not specify the form for any publishing, with the below to be the base upon which expenses incurred under this policy are displayed –

Summary of Policy Provisions:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Heading</u>	<u>Description</u>
1.2	Official Council Business Representative	Acceptance of costs, including travel and accommodation, associated with attending Council-approved Conferences, seminars or workshops.
1.3	Conferences	MRC will pay reasonable registration fees for Councillors to attend conferences deemed to be relevant to their role as a Councillor.
1.4	Hospitality & Community Events	An allowance of \$2,500 will be assigned per Councillor per financial year for them to attend any hospitality or community event of their choice.
1.5	Discretionary Professional Development	Allowance for up to \$5,000 per Councillor per term of Council for a Councillor to undertake personal development courses or similar, including associated travel and accommodation expenses if applicable.
1.6	Travel Expenses	Acceptance of costs associated with travel on behalf of and representing the Council.

<u>Section</u>	<u>Heading</u>	<u>Description</u>
1.7	Vehicles	Provision of a Council-supplied vehicle, including private use, for the Mayor. Access for Councillors to Council fleet vehicles or mileage reimbursement for private vehicle use for Council Business travel.
1.8	Provision of Facilities, Services & Equipment	Administrative tools and access to Council office amenities, insurance coverage, and support resources
1.9	Other Resources	Communication and Technology Resources, Uniforms and safety equipment

Expenses Summary Table Collating Individual Councillor costs

<u>Section</u>	<u>Heading</u>	<u>Conferences / Travel</u>	<u>Travel on Council Business</u>	<u>Vehicle Costs</u>	<u>Other Support</u>
1.2	Official Business Representative	Including registration, accommodation, travel and other costs.			
1.3	Discretionary Professional Development and Councillor attendance				Including registration, accommodation, travel and other costs.
1.4	Travel Expenses	Including registration, accommodation, travel and other costs.			
1.5	Vehicles			Include all costs	
1.6	Provision of Facilities, Services & Equipment				Include costs
1.7	Other Resources				Include costs

2.0 Definitions

To assist in interpretation, the following definitions shall apply:

Council shall mean all individual elected representatives, including the Mayor of Mackay Regional Council.

Council Business shall mean official business conducted on behalf of the Council, where a Councillor is required to undertake specific tasks to satisfy legislative requirements or achieve Council objectives, for example, attend official Council meetings, Councillor forums and workshops, formal professional development training relevant to Councillor responsibilities, Committees/Boards as Council's official representative, and scheduled meetings relating to Council appointments.

Council Business should result in a benefit being achieved either for the local government and/or the local community; for example, this includes but is not limited to:

- Preparing, attending and participating in Council meetings, Committee meetings, workshops, strategic briefings, deputations and inspections;
- Investigating issues/complaints regarding Council services raised by residents/ratepayers/visitors to the Council area;
- Undertaking approved professional development opportunities;
- Attending civic functions or events;
- Attending public/community meetings, presentation dinners, annual general meetings where invited as a Councillor;
- Attending a community event (e.g. school fete, community group awards and presentations, fundraisers) where a formal invitation has been received.

Participating in a **Ticketed Community Event** (other than where attending by formal invitation) or being a representative on a Board in a personal capacity, is not regarded as Council Business.

Council Representative shall mean the Mayor, or the Deputy Mayor should the Mayor not be available. If the Deputy Mayor is also unavailable, the Mayor will nominate a Councillor to attend on their behalf.

Councillors shall mean an elected representative, including the Mayor, of Mackay Regional Council.

Expense shall mean payments made by MRC to reimburse Councillors for their reasonable expenses incurred or to be incurred when discharging their duties as Councillors. These payments are not regarded as remuneration. The expenses may be reimbursed to Councillors or paid directly by Council for something deemed a necessary cost or charge when on Council Business.

Facility shall mean the 'tools of trade' provided by MRC, required to enable Councillors to perform their duties and at a standard appropriate to fulfil their professional role for the community.

Hospitality shall mean an expense defined in the Entertainment and Hospitality Policy and Corporate Standard.

Incidental expenses shall mean newspapers, magazines, snacks, tea and coffee, private phone calls and personal items whilst travelling on approved Council Business.

MRC shall mean Mackay Regional Council.

Professional development shall mean attendance by a Councillor at an event or conference where the Councillor expects to develop further skills and knowledge relevant to their role as a Councillor.

Representation shall mean attendance by a Councillor at various community and special interest representative groups meetings and events relevant to the role of Councillor.

Reasonable shall mean applying sound judgment and considering what is prudent, responsible and acceptable to the community when determining levels of facilities and expenditure.

Ticketed Community Event shall mean a sporting, entertainment, or charitable function that requires a ticket to be purchased for admission or attendance and does not fall within the definition of Council Business; however, the Councillor has identified a benefit in attending linked to community involvement/engagement.

3.0 Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed when any of the following occurs:

- The related documents are amended or replaced.
- Other circumstances are determined from time to time by a resolution of the Council.

Notwithstanding the above, this policy will be reviewed at intervals of no more than three (3) years.

4.0 Reference

- *Local Government Act 2009*
- *Local Government Regulation 2012 (sections 186, 249, & 250)*
- *Legal Assistance for Councillors and Employees Policy*

Version Control:

Version	Reason / Trigger	Change	Endorsed / Reviewed	Date
1	Review of Policy	Amendment to Policy	Council	20.10.10
2	Review of Policy	Amendment to Policy	Council	16.05.12
3	Review of Policy	Amendment to Policy	Council	06.04.16
4	Review of Policy	Amendments to Policy	Council	13.02.19
5	Review of Policy	Amendments to Policy	Council	22.07.20
6.	Review of Policy	Amendments to Policy	Council	11.04.24