



Councillor Expenses and Facilities

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Policy summary

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 *NSW Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) and *NSW Local Government (General) Regulation 2005* (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	Maximum amount	Frequency
General travel expenses	\$2,500 per councillor \$15,000 for the Mayor (inclusive of the Mayor's Council supplied vehicle)	Per year
Accommodation and meals	As per the NSW Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Reviewed Award 2009, adjusted annually	Per meal/night
Professional development	\$2,000 per councillor (excluding training delivered by Council staff).	Per year
Conferences and seminars	\$2,500 per councillor	Per year
ICT expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A desktop computer device or mobile computer device (laptop) up to \$2,000 (excl GST)• A mobile phone up to \$1,000 (excl GST) In the event of damage or loss, equipment may be replaced by Council subject to reasonable limits.	Per 4 year term
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For councillors, mobile phone expenses up to \$100 per month (excl GST) call and data charges• For the Mayor, mobile phone expenses up to \$150 per month (excl GST)	Per month
Carer expenses	\$3,000 per Councillor	Per year
Home office expenses	\$10 towards internet costs (where mobile data reception is inadequate at the principle place of residence)	Per month
Stationery and identification	\$200 Provision of business cards, paper and other stationery	Per 4 year term.
Access to facilities in a Councillor common room	Provided to all councillors	Not relevant

Expense or facility	Maximum amount	Frequency
Council vehicle and fuel card	Provided to the mayor	Not relevant
Reserved parking space at Council offices	Provided to the Mayor	Not relevant
Furnished office	Provided to the Mayor	Not relevant
Shared Executive Assistant supporting the Mayor and General Manager	Provided to the Mayor	Not relevant

Additional costs incurred by a councillor in excess of these limits are considered a personal expense that is the responsibility of the councillor.

Councillors must provide claims for reimbursement within three months of an expense being incurred and must be accompanied by tax invoices/receipts if applicable. Claims made after this time cannot be approved.

Reporting on the provision of expenses and facilities to councillors will be in accordance with the NSW Local Government Act 1993, the NSW Local Government (General) Regulation 2005.

Part A – Introduction

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The provision of expenses and facilities enables councillors to fulfil their civic duties as the elected representatives of Bellingen Shire Council.
- 1.2. The community is entitled to know the extent of expenses paid to councillors, as well as the facilities provided.
- 1.3. The purpose of this policy is to clearly state the facilities and support that are available to councillors to assist them in fulfilling their civic duties.
- 1.4. Council staff are empowered to question or refuse a request for payment from a councillor when it does not accord with this policy.
- 1.5. Expenses and facilities provided by this policy are in addition to fees paid to councillors. The minimum and maximum fees a 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.

2. Policy objectives

- 2.1. The objectives of this policy are 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
 - fulfil the council's statutory responsibilities.

3. Principles

- 3.1. 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.

4. Private or political benefit

- 4.1. Councillors must not obtain private or political benefit from any expense or facility provided under this policy.
- 4.2. 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.
- 4.3. Such incidental private use does not require a compensatory payment back to council.
- 4.4. 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 the council.
- 4.5. 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
 - fundraising activities of political parties or individuals, including political fundraising events.

Part B – Expenses

5. General expenses

- 5.1. 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.
- 5.2. Expenses not explicitly addressed in this policy will not be paid or reimbursed.

6. Specific expenses

General travel arrangements and expenses

- 6.1. All travel by councillors should be undertaken using the most direct route and the most practicable and economical mode of transport.
- 6.2. Travel expenses may include:
 - the use of a private vehicle or hire car
 - public transport fares

- parking costs for Council and other meetings
 - tolls
 - taxi fares
 - documented ride-share programs, such as Uber, where tax invoices can be issue
 - air fares (subject to additional requirements in this policy)
- 6.3. Allowances for the use of a private vehicle will be reimbursed by kilometre at the rate contained in the Local Government (State) Award (where this is the most practical and economical mode of transport).
- 6.4. 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. Copies of the relevant log book contents must be provided with the claim.
- 6.5. For all journeys by air, the class of air travel is to be economy class.
- 6.6. Bookings for approved air travel are to be made through the general manager's office.
- 6.7. For air travel on council business, councillors will not accrue points from the airline's frequent flyer program. This is considered a private benefit.
- 6.8. Wherever possible, Council will directly pay for expenses while councillors are undertaking approved travel or professional development. In the event that it is not possible for Council to directly pay for such costs, Council will reimburse councillors.

Travel arrangements and expenses for meetings and other authorised activities

- 6.9. Councillors will be reimbursed without prior approval for travelling to and from any activity listed in Appendix III to this Policy.
- 6.10. Each councillor may incur expenses up to a total of \$2,500 per year, and the mayor may incur expenses up to a total of \$15,000 per year (including the cost of owning and operating the Council supplied motor vehicle) for travel expenses incurred while undertaking official business within NSW.
- 6.11. This limit does not include direct or incidental expenses related to professional development or the attendance at approved conferences and seminars.

Interstate and overseas travel expenses

- 6.12. In accordance with Section 4, Council will scrutinise the value and need for councillors to undertake interstate or overseas travel. Councils should avoid interstate or overseas trips unless direct and tangible benefits can be established for the council and the local community. This includes travel to sister and friendship cities.
- 6.13. Councillors seeking approval for any interstate and long distance intrastate travel must submit a case using the Council supplied form, and obtain the approval of council by way of a resolution prior to travel.
- 6.14. Councillors seeking approval for any overseas travel must submit a case using the Council supplied form, and obtain the approval of council by way of a resolution at a full council meeting prior to travel.
- 6.15. 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
 - a detailed budget including a statement of any amounts expected to be reimbursed by the participant/s.

Travel expenses not paid by Council

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

Accommodation and meals

6.17. Council will cover the costs of accommodation and meals while councillors are undertaking prior approved travel or professional development outside the Mid North Coast area.

6.18. 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.

6.19. Councillors will not be reimbursed for alcoholic beverages.

Refreshments for council related meetings

6.20. 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.

6.21. 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

6.22. Expenses of up to \$2,000 per councillor annually will be provided to facilitate professional development of councillors through programs, training, education courses and membership of professional bodies.

6.23. This budget includes any travel, accommodation and meal expenses necessary for the programs, training or education course.

6.24. 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 Office of Local Government (OLG). The cost of the induction program will be in addition to the ongoing professional development funding above.

6.25. 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.

6.26. Approval for professional development activities is subject to a prior written request on the appropriate form to the general manager outlining the:

- details of the proposed professional development
- relevance to council priorities and business
- relevance to the exercise of the councillor's civic duties.
- relevance to the professional development program for the councillor prepared in conjunction with Council's Organisational Development Business Unit.

6.27. In assessing a councillor request for a professional development activity, the general manager must consider the factors set out in Clause 6.26, as well as the cost of the professional development in relation to the councillor's remaining budget.

Conferences and seminars

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

6.29. Council will set aside a total amount of \$2,500 per councillor per annum in its budget to facilitate councillor attendance at conferences and seminars.

6.30. This budget includes any travel, accommodation and meal expenses necessary for the conferences/seminars.

- 6.31. Approval to attend a conference or seminar is subject to a resolution of Council. In assessing a councillor request, the governing body 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.
 - the relevance of the topics and presenters to the professional development program for the councillor prepared in conjunction with Council's Organisational Development Business Unit.
- 6.32. Council will meet the reasonable cost of registration fees, transportation and accommodation associated with attendance at conferences approved by Council. 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 Clauses 6.17 - 6.19.

Information and communications technology (ICT) expenses

- 6.33. Council will provide with appropriate ICT devices and services as follows:
- A desktop computer device or mobile computer device (laptop) up to \$2,000 (excl GST)
 - A mobile phone and accessories up to \$1,000 (excl GST)
 - For councillors, mobile phone expenses up to \$100 per month (excl GST) call and data charges
 - For the Mayor, mobile phone expenses up to \$150 per month (excl GST)
- 6.34. Councillors are expected to exercise a reasonable standard of care with Council supplied ICT equipment.
- 6.35. In the event of damage or loss, equipment may be replaced by Council subject to reasonable limits. The General Manager shall determine whether a replacement is reasonable.
- 6.36. Communications devices and services are to be used for councillors to undertake their civic duties, such as:
- receiving and reading council business papers
 - relevant phone calls and correspondence
 - diary and appointment management.

Special requirement and carer expenses

- 6.37. 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 disabilities.
- 6.38. Transportation provisions outlined in this policy will also assist councillors who may be unable to drive a vehicle.
- 6.39. 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 a disability to perform their civic duties.
- 6.40. 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 up to a maximum of \$3,000 per annum for attendance at official Council business where such care is not funded from another source.
- 6.41. Child care expenses may be claimed for children up to and including the age of 16 years where the carer is not a relative.
- 6.42. 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

- 6.43. As Council provides ICT equipment to all councillors, and business papers are delivered electronically, Council does not reimburse home office expenses (with the exception expenses in accordance with clause 6.43).
- 6.44. Where a councillor's (including the Mayor's) principal place of residence receives inadequate mobile phone reception for the purposes of receiving data via the Council supplied mobile phone, Council will pay a maximum of \$10 per month to 'top-up' the councillors internet data allowance through their Internet Service Provider/Retail Service Provider.

Stationery and identification

- 6.45. Councillors will be provided with business cards.
- 6.46. Councillors will be provided with a name tag.
- 6.47. Councillors may be provided with an annual diary.

7. Insurances

- 7.1. In accordance with Section 382 of the Local Government Act, Council is insured against public liability and professional indemnity claims. Councillors are included as a named insured on this Policy.
- 7.2. 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.
- 7.3. Council shall pay the insurance policy excess in respect of any claim accepted by council's insurers, whether defended or not.
- 7.4. Appropriate travel insurances will be provided for any councillors travelling on approved overseas travel on council business if considered required in the view of the General Manager.

8. Legal assistance

- 8.1. 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 Local Government 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
 - 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.
- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. 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.

- 8.4. 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
 - for legal proceedings that do not involve a councillor performing their role as a councillor.
- 8.5. 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.

Part C – Facilities

9. General facilities for all councillors

Facilities

- 9.1. Council will provide the following facilities to councillors to assist them to effectively discharge their civic duties:
- personal protective equipment as required for use during site visits
 - a name badge which may be worn at official functions, indicating that the wearer holds the office of a councillor and/or mayor or deputy mayor.
- 9.2. Councillors may book the “Red Room” in Council’s administration building for official business at no cost. Rooms may be booked through the Executive Assistant to the General Manager and Mayor or the Customer and Business Services Team.
- 9.3. The provision of facilities will be of a standard deemed by the general manager as appropriate for the purpose.

Stationery

- 9.4. As a general rule, Council does not supply stationary for councillor use.

Administrative support

- 9.5. As a general rule, Council does not supply administrative support to councillors (other than the Mayor).

10. Additional facilities for the mayor

- 10.1. 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.
- 10.2. The Mayor may use the vehicle for private purposes within NSW and shall pay a fee \$50 per annum to council for that private use.
- 10.3. 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.
- 10.4. Council will provide the mayor with a furnished office, including a telephone and meeting space.
- 10.5. In performing his or her civic duties, the mayor will be assisted by the Executive Assistant to the General Manager and Mayor.
- 10.6. As per Section 4, the Executive Assistant to the General Manager and Mayor is expected to work on official business only, and not for matters of personal or political interest, including campaigning.

Part D – Processes

11. Approval, payment and reimbursement arrangements

- 11.1. Expenses should only be incurred by councillors in accordance with the provisions of this policy.
- 11.2. Approval for incurring expenses, or for the reimbursement of such expenses, should be obtained before the expense is incurred, except in accordance with clause 6.9 and Appendix III.
- 11.3. Up to the maximum limits specified in this policy, approval for carer costs may be provided after the expense is incurred.
- 11.4. Final approval for payments made under this policy will be granted by the general manager or their delegate.

Direct payment

- 11.5. Council may approve and directly pay expenses. Requests for direct payment must be submitted to the Deputy General Manager Corporate and Community for assessment against this policy using the prescribed form, with sufficient information and time to allow for the claim to be assessed and processed.

Reimbursement

- 11.6. 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 Deputy General Manager Corporate and Community.

Notification

- 11.7. If a claim is approved, council will make payment directly or reimburse the councillor through accounts payable.
- 11.8. 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

- 11.9. If council has incurred an expense on behalf of a councillor that exceeds a maximum limit, 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.
- 11.10. 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

- 11.11. Unless otherwise specified in this policy, councillors must provide all claims for reimbursement within two months of an expense being incurred. Claims made after this time cannot be approved.

12. Disputes

- 12.1. If a councillor disputes a determination under this policy, the councillor should discuss the matter with the general manager.
- 12.2. 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.

13. Return or retention of facilities

- 13.1. 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.
- 13.2. 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.
- 13.3. The prices for all equipment purchased by councillors under Clause 13.2 will be recorded in Council's annual report.

14. Breaches

- 14.1. Suspected breaches of this policy are to be reported to the general manager.
- 14.2. 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.

PART E – Appendices

Appendix I: Related legislation, guidance and policies

Relevant legislation and guidance:

- Local Government Act 1993, Sections 252 and 253
- Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, Clauses 217 and 403
- Guidelines for the payment of expenses and the provision of facilities for Mayors and Councillors in NSW, 2009
- Local Government Circular 09-36 Guidelines for Payment of Expenses and Facilities
- Local Government Circular 05-08 legal assistance for Councillors and Council Employees.

Related Council policies:

- PO-00042-Internet, E-mail and Computer Use Policy

Draft

Appendix II: Definitions

The following definitions apply throughout this policy.

Term	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
appropriate refreshments	Means food and beverages, excluding alcohol, provided by council to support councillors undertaking official business
Act	Means the <i>Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)</i>
clause	Unless stated otherwise, a reference to a clause is a reference to a clause of this policy
Code of Conduct	Means the Code of Conduct adopted by Council or the Model Code if none is adopted
Councillor	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
General Manager	Means the general manager of Council and includes their delegate or authorised representative
incidental personal use	Means use that is infrequent and brief and use that does not breach this policy or the Code of Conduct
long distance intrastate travel	Means travel to other parts of NSW of more than three hours duration by private vehicle
maximum limit	Means the maximum limit for an expense or facility provided in the text and summarised in Appendix 1
NSW	New South Wales
official business	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"> • meetings of council and committees of the whole • meetings of committees facilitated by council • civic receptions hosted or sponsored by council • meetings, functions, workshops and other events to which attendance by a councillor has been requested or approved by council
professional development	Means a seminar, conference, training course or other development opportunity relevant to the role of a councillor or the mayor
Regulation	Means the <i>Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (NSW)</i>
year	Means the financial year, that is the 12 month period commencing on 1 July each year

Appendix III: Pre-Approved Items for Travel Expenses

The following items are considered to be pre-approved for the purposes of Clause 6.9.

A-1	Ordinary Meetings of Council.
	Extraordinary Meetings of Council.
	Meetings of any committee of Council to which the councillor is a delegate by a resolution of Council.
	Meetings of the Committee of the Whole.
	Meetings of any committee of any external body to which the councillor has been nominated as a delegate by a resolution of Council.
	Regular meetings of any the three chambers of commerce located within the Shire.
	Meetings, inductions, training, workshops, site-visits or activities which have been scheduled by way of an electronic calendar invitation by the General Manager's Office.
	For the Mayor, any activity where the Mayor is representing Council.
	For the Deputy Mayor, any activity where the Deputy Mayor is representing Council on behalf of the Mayor.