

Councillor Interstate and Overseas Travel Policy

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1. POLICY OBJECTIVE (OR PURPOSE)

This policy has been developed to ensure that interstate and overseas travel undertaken by Councillors in their official roles as Elected Members remains transparent, accountable and in the best interests of the Greater Dandenong community.

This Policy ensures:

- Transparent approval process for Councillors undertaking interstate and overseas travel;
- That all travel contributes to the achievement of Council objectives and the Council Plan;
- Effective reporting mechanisms are in place; and
- Outlines the process for reimbursement of expenses associated with such travel.

2. BACKGROUND

Changes to the *Local Government Act 2020* (LGA2020) made in 2024 require Councillors to participate in ongoing annual professional development (s33A). To achieve this, on occasion, it may be necessary for Councillors to undertake interstate and overseas travel.

Council also recognises that on occasions, Councillors may need to undertake interstate and overseas travel for official business pertaining to the function of Council and Local Community.

The matters set out in this policy, link to s42 of the LGA2020 (Resources and facilities for the Mayor and Councillors) and s40 of the LGA2020 (Reimbursement of expenses of Councillors). A register showing the details of Councillor interstate and overseas travel is published under the provisions of Council's Public Transparency Policy, which is required under s57 of LGA2020.

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Greater Dandenong City Councillors undertaking interstate or overseas travel in their official capacity as an Elected Member.

4. DEFINITIONS

In this policy:

Official Business means business conducted on behalf of, and approved by Greater Dandenong City Council, to either fulfil a legislative requirement or to achieve a benefit for the municipality.

Interstate Travel means travel within Australia.

Overseas Travel means travel outside of Australian and New Zealand.

5. POLICY

5.1 Advance Approval Prior to Travel

Pre-approval for all interstate and overseas travel by a Councillor seeking to attend events such as Councillor development opportunities (i.e. training, conferences and seminars) and representation at other events that provide significant benefits to the City, should be by resolution of the Council.

The Governance Business Unit will prepare a Council Report which must identify the following:

- Background;
- Purpose of the travel;
- Type of travel (interstate or overseas);
- How the travel meets Council objectives in line with the Council Plan;
- How the travel meets the requirements of ongoing professional development for the Councillor;
- Benefits to Council and/or Community or legislative requirements;
- Transferability of relevant learning outcomes that will occur by undertaking the travel;
- Proposed cost of travel (airfare, accommodation, event registration, meals etc); and
- Name(s) of Councillor(s) to undertake the travel.

Where interstate travel is to be undertaken and timeframes do not permit for approval in advance by resolution of Council, written approval must be sought from the Mayor in consultation with the CEO. In the case of travel by the Mayor, joint written approval must be sort from the CEO and Deputy Mayor.

Councillor's must seek approval for all interstate and overseas travel in a timely manner to allow Council to take advantage of early bird discounts.

Where a Councillor undertakes interstate or overseas travel of their own accord, they must not represent Council in any official capacity, without the prior approval via a Council resolution.

5.2 Principles for Approving Travel

When considering the appropriateness of interstate and overseas travel requests, the Council or where appropriate the Mayor in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer must consider:

- Advice from the Commonwealth Government Smart Traveller service regarding any safety or security matters for the destination;
- Whether it is appropriate for Council to be funding the travel;
- Will the travel contribute to the achievement of Council objectives and the Council Plan; and
- Is the proposed means of travel cost effective.

5.3 Air Travel

When travelling for official business travel arrangements must represent best-value to Council.

Class of Service - Interstate

Air travel will be by economy class for all Councillors, unless otherwise determined by way of Council resolution or as per Workplace Adjustment Guidelines.

Councillors may upgrade the class of travel at their own expense.

Councillors may accept offers to upgrade by airlines provided there is no extra cost to Council.

Council's, Coordinator Mayor and Councillors Office will be responsible for booking interstate travel.

Airline tickets are not transferable and cannot be used for defraying or offsetting any other costs, including the costs of other persons accompanying a Councillor.

Class of Service - Overseas

When travelling overseas Premium Economy or where this is not available or appropriate business class travel is permitted subject to the best available airfare options being sourced.

Councillors may upgrade the class of travel at their own expense.

Council's, Coordinator Mayor and Councillors Office will be responsible for booking all overseas travel.

Rewards and Loyalty Programs

Councillors are not permitted to use flights paid for by Council to accrue personal travel or loyalty rewards.

5.4 Ground Travel and Transfers

For transfers between the airport and accommodation, the most cost-effective option should be taken (e.g. airport/hotel bus, train or other form of public transport) wherever possible.

For interstate travel, taxi vouchers can be obtained from the Coordinator Mayor and Councillor Office. Any unused taxi vouchers must be returned to the issuing officer immediately after the proposed travel event, including where part or all the proposed travel has not taken place.

Rideshare services may be used if they are determined to be the most practical and cost-effective mode of transport. The cost of travel for rideshare service will need to be paid up front by the Councillor and costs will be reimbursed on presentation of a tax invoice.

Rental Car

If a rental car is required, a car is to be arranged bearing in mind cost and travel requirements.

Parking Fees

Where costs for parking are less than the cost of a return taxi or rideshare fare from the Councillor's private residence to the Airport, Council will meet the cost of airport parking, including the travel cost of the Councillor's private vehicle for the duration of the trip based on Council's travel expenses reimbursement practices.

Use of Private Vehicle

Where a Councillor uses their private vehicle to attend an approved interstate meeting, conference, seminar or engagement the total reimbursement for use of the vehicle shall not exceed the cost of air travel at the specified class including transfers.

Use of Council Vehicle

Permission will be required for use of Council vehicles to travel interstate so long as the cost of the use of the Council vehicle does not exceed the cost of air travel at the specified class including transfers.

Use of Council vehicle must be in accordance with Council's Motor Vehicle Code of Practice.

Where practical it is preferred that Councillors use public transport to move around the area they are located in.

Infringements

The cost of any penalties incurred by the Councillor for road, traffic or parking infringement, or other similar penalties or fines, will not be reimbursed by Council and remain the personal responsibility of the relevant Councillor.

Councillors are also responsible for ensuring they hold the appropriate licenses to drive a vehicle whether hire or personal and must adhere to the local laws both interstate and overseas in relation to driving including blood alcohol limits and drug use etc.

5.5 Accommodation

When travelling for official business travel arrangements must represent best-value to Council.

Accommodation will be at standard hotel/motel business class/4 star in single room accommodation where reasonably possible.

Where possible all accommodation must be pre-booked prior to Councillor travel, with the accommodation venue to charge expenses back to Council.

The cost of non-essential room extras such as the mini bar or in-house movies will not be reimbursed by Council. Refer to section 5.8 *Non-Allowable Expenditure* of this policy.

Where deemed appropriate one (1) additional night's accommodation pre or post event may be approved.

5.6 Meals

Reasonable daily meal costs will be reimbursed by Council on presentation of a tax invoice.

Reasonable daily meals would be considered breakfast lunch and dinner and a light refreshment for morning and afternoon tea, where not otherwise provided.

Reasonable daily meal costs will be based on the Australian Taxation Office's annual determination for Meals and Incidentals when undertaking business related domestic or overseas travel.

5.7 Reimbursement of Incidental costs

All reasonable out-of-pocket expenses will be reimbursed by Council on presentation of a tax invoice. No reimbursement will be made without a tax invoice. Guidelines for the reimbursement of costs to Councillors is detailed in the Councillor Support, Reimbursement and Accountability Policy.

Reasonable expenses include:

- Ground Transfers
- Accommodation
- Meals
- Parking
- Event Registration
- Immigration visa entry and exit fees
- Immigration departure taxes
- Laundry expenses where the travel period exceeds 5 days

Where a Councillor has incurred additional cost not covered by this policy, the Councillor must reimburse Council within 14 days upon return.

5.8 Non-Allowable Expenditure

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

- Passports associated with overseas travel
- alcohol
- Snacks (except items in 5.6 of this policy)
- Costs associated with accommodation that are outside room and breakfast (ie mini bar, tips and gratuities, (except items in 5.6 of this policy)
- Laundry where the period of travel is less than 5 days,
- Excess baggage claims that are for personal use
- Lost or stolen items (not covered under Council's Travel Insurance Policy)
- Tourism related costs (i.e. Day trips, Sightseeing)
- Reading materials (including newspapers and magazines)
- Traffic, parking or speeding infringement and the like.
- Travel costs not associated with the approved travel
- Entertainment
- Personal gifts, goods, services or souvenirs
- Any cost incurred for family or other persons travelling with the Councillor

5.9 Spouse, Partners and Carers

In instances where a spouse or another family member accompanies a Councillor on an approved trip, the Councillor shall meet the full cost incurred for the accompanying party. These costs should be paid for in full to Council prior to the trip being undertaken, if practicable. Any additional costs incurred by the Councillor, spouse or family member shall be reimbursed to Council within 14 days of return from travel.

Exceptions

If there is no additional accommodation cost for the spouse/family member then Council will bear the full cost of the accommodation.

Where the accompanying person is a person who provides fulltime carer support to the Councillor, council will cover the costs of the accompanying person in accordance with the conditions outlined in this policy and the Councillor Support and Reimbursement Policy.

5.10 Passport and Visas

Councillors travelling overseas are responsible for ensuring they have a current passport and relevant visas.

Costs associated with obtaining and maintaining individual passports will not be reimbursed by Council.

Immigration visa entry and exist fees will be reimbursed by Council.

5.11 Travel Insurance

Council provides comprehensive business travel insurance through JLT Risk Solutions Pty Ltd for all Councillors.

Individual Councillor are responsible for checking the applicability of the travel insurance provided by Council against their personal needs. If a Councillor requires additional coverage the cost will be borne by the Councillor.

5.12 Injury or Illness

Councillors who suffer from injury or illness preventing them from attending pre-approved travel, should notify the Mayor and CEO in writing immediately, preferably with enough notice for Council to either substitute an alternative Councillor or to cancel the intended travel and accommodation arrangement and any associated fees.

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

5.13 Council Owned Devices and Network Access

In accordance with Council's Information Security Policy, Council owned devices (iPhones, iPads, Laptops etc) must not be taken overseas. Councillor not located in Australia will be blocked from accessing the Council network remotely.

In accordance with Council's Mobile Device Policy global/overseas roaming for international calls will NOT be enabled for Council issued devices.

Exemption to this directive may be granted on a case-by-case basis. Requests for exemptions must be submitted in writing to the Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Information Officer. The request will be reviewed based on necessity and security measures in place. Approval must be obtained prior to taking any Council owned device overseas. Failure to comply may result in a breach of the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

5.14 Reporting Requirements and Public Register Compliance

A post detailed written report must be submitted to Council by the Councillor(s) who have travelled interstate or overseas on official business within three (3) Council Meetings upon return. The report shall provide comment on the following:

- Summary of the purpose of the travel;
- How the travel contributed to the achievement of Council objectives and the Council Plan;
- Contribution to Councillor's professional development;
- Contribution to the Local Community;
- Learning Outcomes; and
- Recommendations for further action (if relevant).

Where a Councillor has attended an interstate training, conference or seminar (professional development) the Councillor must give a verbal report at an open meeting of Council during Reports from Councillors/Delegates and Councillor Questions at the first available Council Meeting upon their return, noting a report will be submitted to a subsequent Council Meeting.

Where more than one Councillor has attended the same interstate training, conference or seminar a nominated Councillor may speak on behalf of all Councillor attendees.

Councillors who have undertaken interstate or overseas travel are responsible for submitting a Travel Register form within 14 days upon return, including all supporting documentation and tax invoices (or equivalent for overseas travel) relating to the cost of the travel to the Governance Business Unit for inclusion in Council's Travel Register.

The date and minute number of the resolution of Council approving interstate or overseas travel must be recorded in the Interstate and Overseas Travel Register. Where travel has been approved by the Mayor, CEO and/or Deputy Mayor the approving authority and date approved must be recorded in the Interstate and Overseas Travel Register.

5.15 Remote attendance

Where available and appropriate Councillors are encouraged to attend interstate and overseas training, conferences and seminars remotely to reduce costs to Council.

6. RESPONSE TO THE OVERARCHING GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2020

The overarching Governance Principles of the Local Government Act 2020 have been considered and addressed in the development of this Policy.

7. HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND CHILD SAFE COMPLIANCE

Greater Dandenong City Council policies comply with the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, the Gender Equality Act 2020, the Climate Change Act 2017 and the Child Safe Standards contained in the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Amended).

Response to Climate Change

When making transport arrangements for all interstate and overseas travel strong consideration must be given to offsetting carbon emissions in line with Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES

Councillors are responsible for:

- Ensuring they understand and comply with the requirements of this Policy;
- Providing relevant information to the Co-ordinator Mayor and Councillors Office to assist with the preparation of a report to Council seeking approval for travel;
- Ensuring they have the relevant current travel documents (passport, visa);
- Ensuring the applicability of Council's travel insurance against their personal needs;
- Ensuring they confirm all flights before travel and arrive in a timely manner to proceed through check-in and security procedures;
- Submitting a post travel report to Council outlining the outcomes and benefits of the travel within three (3) Council Meetings of returning; and
- Submitting a Travel Register form to the Governance Business Unit within 14 days upon return.

Governance Business Unit is responsible for:

- The maintenance of the Interstate and Overseas Travel Register on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer.

Co-ordinator Mayor and Councillors Office is responsible:

- Preparing a report to Council seeking pre-approval for Interstate and Overseas travel to be undertaken by a Councillor; and
- For booking all pre-approved interstate and overseas travel and accommodation for Councillors.
- Co-ordinating the reimbursement of any costs between Council and Councillors.

9. BREACH OF THIS POLICY

A breach of this policy may constitute a breach of the *Local Government Act 2020* and/or the Model Councillor Code of Conduct.

Penalties apply for false or incomplete travel expenses, and for failing to lodge within the time frames.

10. REPORTING, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Reporting A Councillor who has undertaken interstate or overseas travel in an official capacity must complete and submit a Travel Register Form within 14 days of returning.

A Councillor who has undertaken interstate or overseas travel in an official capacity must provide details of their travel by way of a verbal and then written report to Council on their attendance, in accordance with section 5.14 *Reporting Requirements and Public Register Compliance* of this policy.

Monitoring The Manager Governance Legal and Risk is responsible for the monitoring of this policy.

Review This policy will be reviewed by the Manager Governance Legal and Risk 6 months prior to a Local Government Election or because of changes to applicable legislation.

11. REFERENCES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

Legislation

- *Carers Recognition Act 2012*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- *Child Safe Standards*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Model Councillor Code of Conduct*

Related Council and Other Policies, Procedures, Strategies, Protocols, Guidelines

- Greater Dandenong City Council Access, Diversity and Equity Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Climate Change Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 2020-30
- Greater Dandenong City Council Councillor Expenses, Support and Accountability Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council International Relations Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Mobile Devices Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Motor Vehicle Code of Practice

- Greater Dandenong City Council Public Transparency Policy
- Greater Dandenong City Council Travel Register Form
- Greater Dandenong City Council Workplace Adjustment Guidelines
- Greater Dandenong City Certificate of Currency - Travel

Administrative Updates

It is recognised that from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, the change to an existing policy or document referred to in this policy and minor updates to legislation and the like which does not have a material impact. All changes or updates which materially alter this policy must be made by resolution of Council.