

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**Report by Strategic Lead - Regulatory****Meeting of West Dunbartonshire Council : 25 November 2020**

Subject: Guidance on Councillors' Expenses**1. Purpose**

1.1 To seek the Council's approval of new Guidance on Councillors' Expenses.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Council is asked to approve the new Guidance on Councillors' Expenses as shown in the Appendix to this report.

3. Background

3.1 Following an audit of Councillors' expenses in 2019 by the Council's Internal Audit Team, it was recommended that a clear set of guidance be developed for Members' travel and subsistence to ensure consistency of approach for all Elected Members. The revised guidance was presented to the Council in August 2020 when it was agreed to continue the matter to a future meeting of Council to allow Elected Members to submit comments on the guidance before a final report was brought for debate and decision.

3.2 The proposed document was circulated to all Members for comment in September 2020 and the attached guidance and its appendices have now been revised to take into account some of these comments.

4. Main Issues

4.1 At present, there is no singular document which covers all aspects of Councillors' travel and subsistence claims. The proposed Guidance document brings together all of the existing rules, regulations and protocols in one document and addresses issues raised by the Internal Audit Team following its audit of the process.

4.2 The following comments were received from elected members:

- a) the council car should be referred to as the 'Provost's car' as had been the case in previous years;
- b) the role of senior councillor be added to the list of officials who can use the Provost's car for official journeys;
- c) the protocol on the use of the Provost's car should be amended to include the civic role of the Bailie;

- d) the Guidance should make clear that all civic journeys in the Provost's Car will not be recorded against an individual elected member but will be recorded as 'civic use';
- e) the date for implementation of the new rule on submission of expenses within three months from the date of the first journey should be changed as discussed at the Council meeting; and
- f) that the three month rule as referred to above be removed from the Guidance.

4.3 All of the proposed changes, with the exception of the suggestion to remove the three month rule as referred to in paragraph 6.1 of the Guidance, have been made to the attached Guidance. Officers are of the view that this rule is necessary to reduce errors and improve budgetary control of the expenditure. It is now proposed that this rule be introduced with effect from 1 April 2021.

4.4 In addition to the above, one elected member asked if Councillors' expenses could be submitted online and officers have agreed to look at the feasibility of implementing this proposal.

5. People Implications

5.1 The recent audit of expenses identified that officers have found it difficult to verify claims due to insufficient information on claim forms. The proposed changes will make this process considerably easier for officers resulting in greater accuracy and efficiency thus ensuring value for money.

6. Financial and Procurement Implications

6.1 There are no procurement issues arising from this report. The new Guidance will help ensure that future claims are accurate and processed more efficiently.

7. Risk Analysis

7.1 There are no significant risks arising from the recommendations of this report. However, failure to approve the Guidance could result in further errors being identified in future claims which could impact on the reputation of individual elected members and on the Council as a whole.

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1 There are no impacts on any equality groups arising from the recommendations of this report.

9. Consultation

9.1 Officers from Legal and Finance Services have been consulted on the contents of this report.

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1 The implementation of the new Guidance for elected members will not have a direct impact on the Council's strategic priorities but will improve the efficiency of the process.

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Date: 20 October 2020

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Appendix: Guidance on Councillors' Expenses.

Background Papers: Members' Expenses Audit 2019/20 (Ref. No. S.008.20 (Dec 2019

Wards Affected: None.

