

Information

for County Councillors

Sheet Number: 2013-17/204

From:	Julian Gale, Strategic Manager – Governance and Risk
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Date:	20 January 2016
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To:	All County Councillors
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Member Allowances

This is a helpful reminder for Members regarding the key criteria and information when submitting any claims for reimbursement under the Scheme of Member Allowances (which can be viewed on the Council's website at <http://www.somerset.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/councillors/member-allowances/>).

Hardcopies of the Scheme have been previously provided to every Member but please contact me if you require one.

Key things to remember for claims:

- The Council restricts the payment of subsistence allowances to official duties outside of Somerset – this means, for example, that expenses for meals or refreshments cannot be claimed for duties undertaken at County Hall or in other premises within Somerset. There are limits for any subsistence meal claims and these are set out in the Scheme. For any parking & subsistence/taxi fares etc.-you need to attach original receipts to your claim forms as payroll will not accept photocopies.
- The Council only reimburses Members travel and subsistence for attendance at meetings of outside bodies where the member has been appointed as an official representative of the Council. This means, for example, that only members appointed by the Council to the Local Government Association (LGA) will be entitled to claim travel and subsistence for LGA duties.
- The need to minimise travel by combining trips, sharing transport, undertaking business by 'phone, including by conference calls, or by email. Additional payments of 5p per person per mile are payable for instances where one Member transports other Members to the same meeting.

- The car mileage rate may be claimed for any journey, providing the following criteria can both be met:
 1. travel by car represented the best option in order to undertake the approved duty
 2. travel by car could be justified on cost grounds
- The relevant Political Group Leader, or his or her Deputy Leader, is required to approve travel to a destination outside Somerset or the surrounding counties, prior to the journey being undertaken.
- A Member who is claiming mileage should always bear in mind the need to be able to demonstrate that the journey was wholly and necessarily in relation to his/her role as a Member.
- Contact Rebecca Dunstan in Community Governance for any planned rail travel as early as possible and at least 1 week before the journey so that the Council can purchase the cheapest tickets. Members need to provide fixed times where possible for travel as open tickets are more expensive.
- Train Fares are reimbursed at 2nd Class rate. Members who are aged over 60 and who regularly use the train for Council business may reclaim the cost of a Senior Rail Card.
- Claims should be made on a monthly basis rather than accumulated unless you have been identified as a low claimer and it has been agreed in advance that you can submit claims quarterly.
- Any travel claims by car that are not supported by a valid fuel VAT receipt will be paid but at a lower rate with the VAT element removed. Acknowledging that some Members may be low claimers it is acceptable for a single VAT receipt to cover more than one claim providing the VAT receipt pre-dates the first date being claimed for
- Travel and subsistence claims cannot be submitted where they relate to attending political group meetings (unless there are Council officers present providing an official briefing), constituency meetings and business, where an outside body that a Member is appointed to pays their expenses (e.g. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service) political conferences or social functions.
- Claim forms need to be sent to Rebecca Dunstan in Community Governance (B3 East, County Hall) and **not** Payroll by the **8th of each month** if you want the claim to be reimbursed that month. Else your claim will be paid the following month.
- Claims older than 3 months will not be reimbursed.
- Incomplete claim forms will not be processed for payment

As always officers in Community Governance are willing to sit down and answer any questions you may have about the Scheme of Members Allowances or any claims that you wish to submit. Please contact Rebecca Dunstan or Andrea Hussey in the first instance.

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