

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Policy Review and Amendments – Purchasing Policy; Employee Expense Policy; and Recording and Devices in Long-Term Care Policy

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Corporate Services

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Purchasing Policy 6.07, as attached to Report CS 2024-30, be approved and updated in the General Policy Manual, effective September 11, 2024;
2. And further, that the Employee Expense Policy 6.02, as attached to Report CS 2024-30, be approved and updated in the General Policy Manual, effective September 11, 2024;
3. And further, that the new Recording and Monitoring Devices in Long-Term Care Policy 8.15, as attached to Report CS 2024-30, be approved and added to the General Policy Manual, effective September 11, 2024.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The Purchasing Policy is updated to reflect the approval authority for unspecified capital or one-time funding projects that do not have prior budget approval
- The Expense Claim Policy has been reviewed by staff and is updated in response to a comprehensive review of claims over the past year
- A Recording and Monitoring Devices in Long-Term Care Policy is proposed to govern the use of audio and video recording devices in our Woodingford Lodge homes

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Subject to Council's approval of the new and revised policies will take effect immediately. Staff, Woodingford Lodge residents, families and visitors will be appropriately informed and the policies will be updated in the General Policy Manual.

Financial Impact

The recommendations in this report do not impact the current year’s approved budget.

Communications


The new policy and amended policies will be communicated to staff and Woodingford Lodge residents, families and visitors.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendations in this report supports the following strategic goal.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
		<p>Goal 3.1 – Continuous improvement and results-driven solutions</p> <p>Goal 3.2 – Collaborate with our partners and communities</p> <p>Goal 3.3 – Attract, retain and engage staff</p> <p>Goal 3.4 – Financial sustainability</p>

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

The Purchasing Policy 6.07, originally established in 2004, sets out guidelines for the County to ensure that all purchases of goods and services provide the best value including, where appropriate, lifecycle costs consistent with the required quality of service. Since its inception, there have been numerous revisions with the most recent being April 12, 2023.

The Employee Expense Policy 6.02 was introduced in 2013 to establish guidelines for the provision of payment of authorized expenses incurred to attend professional development opportunities or perform work on behalf of the County, applying to employees and Councillors. The latest revision to the Employee Expense Policy was approved in July 2021.

A new policy has been developed to address an issue that long-term care homes have been experiencing over the past few years – Recording and Monitoring Devices in Long-Term Care 8.15. With more frequent use of video monitoring and recording devices within our communities, public spaces and buildings to protect public safety and property, so has the use of these devices in and outside of individual's homes. That said, long-term care homes are being asked by resident's substituted decision makers, families and visitors if they can install monitoring and recording devices in a resident's room. In response, staff have prepared a draft policy for Council's consideration.

Comments

Purchasing Policy

This proposed revisions to the Purchasing Policy are contained in Section 4.0 Purchasing Responsibilities and Section 5.0 Approval Authority related to unspecified capital or one-time funding projects that have not been approved in the budget. More specifically, the amendments authorize staff to approve unspecified capital or one time funding projects up to \$25,000, with any exceeding \$25,000 requiring Council approval.

Employee Expense Policy

Over the past year, Finance staff have conducted a review of all employee expense claims to assess compliance with the Employee Expense Policy. The review unveiled a number of inconsistencies in interpretation that have been addressed in the following most prominent amendments:

- Definitions
 - Performing work outside of Oxford County - is removed as it is no longer relevant, historically related to Public Health employees.
 - Paid time – for attending professional development limitation is removed to allow compensation for the time incurred, as approved by their Supervisor.

- Regular place of employment – is added to ensure clarity and consistency in calculating mileage claims.
- Section 3 - Responsibilities – added clarity that it is the Approval Authority's (direct supervisor) responsibility to ensure expense claims are compliant with the Policy.
- Section 4 Eligible Expenses
 - Use of personal credit card – clarifies personal credit cards may be used for business related travel, meals and accommodations where pre-payment by a County issued credit card is not an option.
 - Clarity added that where a collective agreement or contract is in place with provisions related to expense claims, the collective agreement or contract will prevail.
 - Personal vehicle use – wording added to remind employees to consider the most economical mode of travel.
 - Clarifies how to calculate the distance travelled eligible for claiming an expense to provide consistency in claims, and
 - Meals – clarifying wording to ensure consistency in the claim amount and what can be claimed when attending conference or training events where meals are included in registration fees.
 - Accommodation expenses – clarifies when an overnight accommodation claim would be eligible for a one-day meeting or business event.
 - Ensuring the County of Oxford name appears on accommodation registrations and invoices to ensure government or corporate rates are reflected.
- Section 6 – clarifies that Expense Claims must be supported by detailed receipts and interac transaction slips from the establishment to identify tax amounts in order for the County to claim Investment Tax Credits.
- Sections 8 and 9 – wording added to the policy for foreign exchange and cash advances related to business travel.

Recording and Monitoring Devices in Long-Term Care Policy

In recent years, the use of audio and video recording devices has become increasingly common in various settings, including residential care facilities, assisted living facilities, and private homes. While these devices can offer security and monitoring benefits, they also raise significant concerns regarding the privacy and autonomy of individuals.

Several incidents across the country have highlighted potential misuse of such devices, leading to privacy breaches and violations of residents' rights. In response, many jurisdictions have implemented policies to regulate or prohibit the use of these devices in private living spaces. In preparing this Policy, staff have given careful consideration to the following:

Privacy Concerns

The installation of audio and video recording devices in residents' rooms can infringe upon their privacy rights. Residents have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their personal living spaces, and the presence of recording devices may cause discomfort, anxiety, and a sense of surveillance.

Legal Considerations

There are existing laws and regulations that protect individuals' privacy rights, including MFIPPA, PHIPA and the Criminal Code of Canada. This policy would ensure that the County complies with these legal requirements, avoiding potential legal challenges and protecting the rights of our residents.

Ethical Considerations

From an ethical standpoint, it is important to respect the autonomy and dignity of residents. The use of recording devices in their personal spaces can be seen as an intrusion and a lack of respect for their independence. By prohibiting these devices, the Woodingford Lodge demonstrates our commitment to upholding ethical standards in the care and treatment of our residents.

Other Risks

The use of recording devices in residents' rooms can also pose a significant risk to the reputation of Woodingford Lodge's long-term care services. Instances where recordings (outside of the County's control) are leaked, misused, or perceived as invasive could lead to public outcry, legal challenges, and negative media coverage.

A single incident involving the misuse of recording devices can severely damage the trust that residents, their families, and the broader community place in our Woodingford Lodge services, leading to loss of public trust, negative media attention, and legal and financial repercussions.

The proposed policy not only protects residents' privacy and dignity but also helps to maintain and enhance the reputation of Woodingford Lodge by proactively addressing this issue, an important step to ensure continued trust and confidence from the community.

Nothing in the proposed policy will prevent Woodingford Lodge from continuing to provide video surveillance where necessary for the purposes of public safety, crime prevention and stewardship of publicly owned assets, in entrances/exits, common spaces, hallways and parking lots, in accordance with the County's Video Surveillance Policy 8.09.

CONCLUSIONS

Upon Council approval of the proposed new policy and policy amendments, they will be posted in the General Policy Manual and circulated to inform staff, Woodingford Lodge residents, their families and visitors as necessary.

SIGNATURES

Departmental approval:

Original signed by

Lynn S. Buchner, CPA, CGA
Director of Corporate Services

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Purchasing Policy 6.07, as amended
- Attachment 2 – Employee Expense Policy 6.02, as amended
- Attachment 3 – Recording and Monitoring Devices in Long-Term Care Policy 8.15