

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 10.00 am on Friday, 29
August 2014

Present:

Members

Councillor P Hetherton (Chair)

Councillor C Fletcher

Councillor K Mulhall

Employees (by Directorate)

Resources:

C Bradford, C Forde, G Paddan

Independent Person:

K Sloan

Mr Sloan was welcomed to the meeting.

Public Business

1. **Apologies**

Councillor Andrews

2. **Declaration of interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

3. **Minutes**

3.1 **To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2014**

- a) The minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2014 were signed as a true record.

3.2 **Matters Arising**

- a) There were no matters arising.

4. **Code of Conduct - Update**

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services), which updated members of the Committee on alleged and upheld breaches of member Codes of Conduct on a national and local level.

The report made reference to a number of national cases in respect of disclosure of confidential information, declarations of interest and bringing the office of the local authority into disrepute. Further discussions ensued on being transparent and having the understanding of addressing questions to circumvent disclosing confidential information; this was considered to be a training matter. Whilst members were provided with training on confidentiality, it was noted that the general public would benefit from being advised that confidential matters were not there to prohibit information being made available. Consideration was given to the

necessity of understanding the balance between ethical behaviour and democratic engagement in public life; training was determined as a mandatory requirement to elude any notion of improper conduct.

Following discussion, it was agreed that:

- a) The Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services) be requested to ensure that training on the Code of Conduct becomes mandatory and includes a section on confidentiality.
- b) The Ethics Committee to be informed of attendances at mandatory training sessions, especially for Licence & Regulatory Committee and Planning Committee.
- c) Members' Bulletin to include a section on alleged and upheld breaches of Member Code of Conduct on a national and local level.
- d) The Assistant Director Legal and Democratic Services be requested to report back to the next meeting of the Committee with amended wording for the Code of Conduct making explicit the need to maintain confidentiality.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee considered the cases referred to within the report and made consequential recommendations deemed appropriate; as per the list above.

5. **Ethics Training for Members**

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services), which provided an overview of the current training programme and suggestions as to how this would be modified to ensure that the matters identified by the Committee were included.

A number of options were considered in respect of the training programme and the draft training slides for Council conventions and traditions were discussed. Members noted that information held on personal electronic devices was open to Freedom of Information requests, if the subject matter related to Council business.

A copy of the Council's procedure rules was circulated at the meeting.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee considered the contents of the report and provided feedback on the development of a short training session for members on protocols and conventions at meetings of full Council and the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services) was asked to consider a review of the Standard for Acceptable Use of ICT Facilities for Members.

6. **Review of arrangements for Members Gifts and Hospitality**

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services), which set out a summary of areas for consideration in connection with Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality and suggested that a revised declaration of Gift and Hospitality form, along with guidance to be issued to Members. Committee Members were asked to consider the draft form and the guidance and advocate any amendments required before the launch of any form. Consideration was also given to the form being online.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

- 1. Approved the draft declaration of Gift and Hospitality form and associated guidance at Appendix 2 and 3, as attached to the report, subject to there being no requirement to declare gifts or hospitality offered but declined and the documents being amended accordingly.**
- 2. Considered that the Members' Register of Gifts and Hospitality should not be made available for public inspection online but information about how and where the hard copy register could be inspected should be included on the Council's website;**
- 3. Requested that the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services) report back to the next meeting of the Committee on the operation of recording the receipt of gifts and hospitality by the Lord Mayor.**
- 4. Delegated authority to the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services) in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee to arrange a launch of the form accompanying guidance and any training required for Elected Members; and**
- 5. Considered the Gifts and Hospitality register entries received in this municipal year to date.**

7. Work programme for the Ethics Committee

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director (Legal and Democratic Services), advising that at the last meeting held on 20th February 2014, the Committee approved a work programme for the Municipal Year 2014-15. This report provided the Committee with an opportunity to review the work programme and make any changes/amendments.

The report made reference to the Committee's Terms of Reference as set out in the Council's Constitution and included the consideration of matters which were relevant to the ethical governance of the Council. Members considered the Work Programme as per the appendix and agreed to the listed items for discussion for this municipal year.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee reviewed the work programme attached as Appendix 1 (to the report) and agreed to the items listed for consideration.

8. Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as matters of urgency because of special circumstances involved

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.20pm)