

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 9.30 am on Tuesday
10 March 2015

Present:

Members

Councillor P Hetherton (Chair)
Councillor A Andrews
Councillor C Fletcher
Councillor K Mulhall

Employees (by Directorate)

Resources:

J Bilan, C Bradford, C Forde, G Paddan

Independent Person:

K Sloan

Apologies:

Councillor D Gannon

Public Business

19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

20. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 August 2015 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

21. Code of Conduct Update

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, which provided an update on national issues in relation to the ethical behaviour of elected members and local position in Coventry with regard to Code of Conduct issues. It also set out the actions taken in connection with the Code of Conduct matters arising from the previous meeting of this Committee.

The report indicated that the Monitoring Officer had received three new complaints, since the last meeting of the Ethics Committee. It was noted that all complaints had been handled in accordance with the agreed Complaints Protocol.

The Committee gave consideration to training and ways of encouraging members to attend. It was suggested that the Monitoring Officer draft an email for the Chair to circulate to all members on the importance of attending training sessions. The comments received from Mr Ken Sloan were considered.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

22. **Proposed Amendment to Code of Conduct for Elected and Co-opted Members**

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services on the proposed amendment to the Code of Conduct for elected and co-opted members. At the meeting held on 29 August 2014 the Committee had considered a report on the Code of Conduct during the course of which it was decided that it should recommend to Council that the Code of Conduct should be amended to draw members' attention to the requirement not to disclose confidential information. The report provided the Committee with suggested wording for an amendment and the Committee considered the wording and made recommendation to full Council.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities that he recommends to full Council that it approves the additional wording to the Code and that Part 4A of the Council's Constitution be amended accordingly; following approval by full Council.

23. **Review of the Operation of the Code of Conduct for Employees**

The Committee considered a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services on the operation of the Code of Conduct for Employees and considered review recommendations made at the meeting. The report set out the current Employees' Code of Conduct in full and provided some back ground to its use and updating.

The Code of Conduct for Employees was amended by full Council in January 2014 as part of the overall review of the Constitution and all employees were made aware of the Code and where to find it. The report noted that the current Code was being reviewed by officers as part of a wider review of HR policies. The Committee considered the position of politically restricted posts and the implications.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee include the Review of the Operation of the Code of Conduct for Employees on the Work Programme for the municipal year 2015/16 and an update on the current review of the Code.

24. **Review of Lord Mayor's Gifts and Hospitality**

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services on the review of Lord Mayor's gifts and hospitality. The report noted that at the last meeting held on 29 August the Committee had considered a report on a review of the procedure dealing with gifts and hospitality for elected members and the Committee had decided that it would like to review the procedure for accepting and registering gifts and hospitality offered to the Lord Mayor. Also to view details of gifts and hospitality received in the current Municipal year together with the current practices and gifts received to date. However, it was noted that there was no formal, approved policy on the receipt of gifts and hospitality by the Lord Mayor and an informal policy had developed over the years and this has been applied by the Lord Mayor's Office to gifts and hospitality received.

RESOLVED that after due consideration of the report and the matters raised at the meeting, the Committee noted the report and made no changes to current practices.

25. Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services regarding the entries in the Registers of Officers' gifts and hospitality for the first six months. The report set out the current practice in relation to gifts and hospitality received by officer; between 1 May to 31 October. It also included an extract from the Employees' Code of Conduct which set out the guidance for employees on the acceptance of gifts or hospitality.

RESOLVED that after consideration of the report and the matters raised at the meeting the Officers' Gifts and Hospitality be updated and presented at the next meeting.

26. Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services, which set out details of declarations of gifts and hospitality made by members since the Committee last reviewed these at its meeting on 29 August 2014. The report noted that in total eleven declaration forms had been received from five individual elected members and there had been no requests by members of the public to view the register during this period.

RESOLVED that the gifts and hospitality register entries received from 29 August to 13 February be noted.

27. Review of Operation of Ethical Standards in Parish Councils

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services on how parish councils operate and the operation of the ethical standards regime in parish councils within the City. In particular, the Committee had requested for information about whether parish councils within Coventry had any information on their websites on how to deal with complaints, their register of interests and general information such as parish precepts and members allowances.

The report noted that there are around 9,500 parish councils in England but these only cover about 30% of the population and they are mainly found in rural areas. Within Coventry there are two parished areas: Allesley and Keresley and they each meet around eight times a year. Both Parish Councils had adopted the Code of Conduct as required by the Localism Act 2011. Neither of the Parish Council had any information on their websites about how members of the public could complain about councillors. Both had information about how to contact the Parish Clerk.

RESOLVED that:

a) The report be noted.

b) The Monitoring Officer to contact both Parish Clerks in terms of publishing information on their website on the process of making a complaint against a councillor and that regularly updating Disclosable Pecuniary Interests forms by parish councillors would be good practice.

28. Committee on Standards in Public Life: Annual Report for 2013-14

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services, which outlined the matters raised in the Annual Report for 2013-14 of the Committee on Standards in Public Life to inform the Ethics Committee of relevant matters of concern in their work area on a national level.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

29. Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2015/16

The Committee received a report of the Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services, which suggested areas of work for the Ethics Committee for the Municipal year 2015-16. The Committee considered the draft work programme and requested that the following item be included in the work programme - Review of the Operation of the Code of Conduct for Employees

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee reviewed the work programme attached as Appendix 1 to the report and agreed to the items listed for consideration with the addition of 'Review of the Operation of the Code of Conduct for Employees' to the work programme for the first meeting in the 2015/16 municipal year.

30. 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 11.40 am)