

**Time and Date**

10.00 am on Thursday, 29th September, 2022

Place

Diamond Room 1 and 2 Council House, Coventry

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 16)
 - a) To agree the Minutes of the previous meetings held on 30 June and 8 July, 2022
 - b) Any matters arising
4. **Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship Review** (Pages 17 - 58)
Report of the Director of Law and Governance
5. **Six Monthly Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality (including declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year)** (Pages 59 - 86)
Report of the Director of Law and Governance
6. **Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality (including declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year)** (Pages 87 - 100)
Report of the Director of Law and Governance
7. **Code of Conduct Update** (Pages 101 - 108)
Report of the Director of Law and Governance
8. **Local Government Association Briefing on Changes to Disqualification Criteria for Councillors** (Pages 109 - 114)
Report of the Director of Law and Governance
9. **Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2022/23** (Pages 115 - 120)

Report of the Director of Law and Governance

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

Julie Newman, Director of Law and Governance, Council House, Coventry

Wednesday, 21 September 2022

Note: The person to contact about the agenda and documents for this meeting is Suzanne Bennett Tel: 024 7697 2299 Email: suzanne.bennett@coventry.gov.uk

Membership: Councillors P Hetherton, S Nazir (Chair) and D Welsh

Independent Persons: S Atkinson, A Barton, R Wills, P Wiseman

Substitute Members: Councillor M Mutton, P Seaman

Public Access

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Suzanne Bennett

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Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 30
June 2022

Present:

Councillor P Hetherton (Chair for meeting)
Councillor M Mutton (substitute for Councillor Walsh)
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor D Welsh

Independent Persons: A Barton, R Wills, P Wiseman

Employees (by Service Area)

Law and Governance: J Newman (Director), S Bennett, S Harriott

Apologies: Councillor S Walsh and S Atkinson

Public Business

1. Chair

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor S Walsh, the meeting was chaired by Councillor P Hetherton.

2. Councillor J Mutton

The Committee held a Minute's silence as a mark of respect for Councillor J Mutton, a former Member of the Committee, who had sadly recently passed away.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 April, 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

5. Annual Report of the Ethics Committee 2021/22

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which set out the work of the Committee over the last Municipal Year. In particular, the report detailed:-

- The Committee's review of the Complaints Protocol
- Guidance on Declarations of Interests
- Civility in public life, intimidation in public life and digital citizenship
- The operation of the new Code of Conduct

As well as receiving regular reports on ethical standards cases across the country, the Committee has also maintained a watching brief of work being undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and on work being done locally on supporting Members in dealing with challenges associated with public life, particularly in relation to intimidation and abuse.

The report also detailed the Work Programme for 2022/23.

The Ethics Committee approved the Annual Report for 2021/221.

RESOLVED that the City Council be recommended to:

- a) **Note the Annual Report of the Ethics Committee for 2021/22**
- b) **Consider whether there is any work within the Committee's terms of reference that Council would wish the Committee to undertake**

6. **On Line Safety Bill Update 2022**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which indicated that the Committee has been keeping a watching brief on the programme of work coordinated by the Local Government Association (LGA) entitled "Civility in Public Life". This work is in response to the increasing concern about intimidation and toxicity of debate and the impact this has been having on democratic processes.

To support this work the LGA has now started to develop a range of guidance and tools to support Councillors and candidates in their online communications (also known as their "Digital Citizenship") as it is now recognised that online communication is intrinsic to democratic engagement. Both Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship remain part of the Committee's Work Programme and the report provided an update of that local response.

Related to these topics, in February 2022, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) issued a press release, entitled: "New plans to protect people from anonymous trolls online". In summary, the Government have made additions to the Online Safety Bill to give Social Media users more control over what they see online and who can interact with them in an effort to fight against anonymous "trolls". The primary focus of the Bill has been preventing and protecting children and young people from exposure to harmful material on line, however the Bill has evolved since it was initially published last year to take into account the exponential rise in online trolling.

The Committee expressed their deep concern regarding on line abuse and the impact that this has on individuals. Assurances were sought and received in relation to support provided and action taken locally to protect Coventry Councillors.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

1. **Notes and welcomes the content of the Press release: “New plans to protect people from anonymous trolls online”;** and
2. **Requests that this item remains as a high priority on the Work Programme for continued review alongside the ongoing work around Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship.**

7. **Report on the Government's March 2022 Response to Committee on Standards in Public Life Report of 2019**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which outlined the Government's March 2022 Response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life Report (CSPL's) report of 2019, entitled “Local Government Ethical Standards”.

The 2019 report had provided assurance that the arrangements in place in local authorities were promoting and maintaining standards expected by the public and that the majority of local Councillors do maintain high ethical standards. However, the CSPL recommended that some improvements were required, in particular, the need for maximum independence in local complaints processes and the need for greater sanctions, where appropriate, in the rare cases of significant or repeated breaches of the code of conduct, and 24 Recommendations were considered by the Government.

One of the CSPL's key recommendations was that there should be a non-mandatory model Code of Conduct which has now been produced by the Local Government Association, and which the Council have adopted a revised version of with effect from the 2021/22 municipal year.

The report provided a summary of the Government's responses to the 24 Recommendations. In particular, the Committee expressed their concern and disappointment in relation to the Government's response to the following Recommendations:-

Recommendation 2: The Government agrees with the principal not to require public disclosure of home addresses for candidates and councillors and will engage with interested parties to ensure such disclosure is not required (whilst noting that it is important to register internally with the Monitoring Officer). This is therefore under review and has not been implemented.

Recommendations 10, 13, 14 and 16: These Recommendations all cover sanctions, power to establish decision making standards committees, right of appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman and its power to investigate, together with 6-month suspension powers.

The Government affirmed that the lack of suspension sanction was a deliberate policy decision by the coalition Government at the time of the Localism Act, to differentiate the new regime from that of the previous Standards Board stating that the Standards Board had a ‘chilling effect on free speech’ and that it would be ‘undesirable to have a Government quango to police the free speech of councillors’.

The Government's position is that Councillors are 'ultimately held to account via the ballot box' and that the Government has already recommended that every political party 'establish their own code of conduct for party members including elected representatives'. Further the response insisted that "on the rare occasions" where notable breaches of the code of conduct had occurred, local authorities were not without sanctions under the current regime.

The Government has recommended that every political party establish their own code of conduct for party members, including elected representatives. The Government has promised to engage with sector representative bodies of Councillors and officers of all tiers of local Government "to seek views on options to strengthen sanctions to address breaches of the code which fall below the bar of criminal activity and related sanctions but involve serious incidents of bullying and harassment or disruptive behaviour".

The CSPL had also called on the Government to clarify if Councils may lawfully bar Councillors from council premises or withdraw facilities as sanctions.

In relation to the Government's response to Recommendation 23, the Government has recommended that local authorities publish their whistleblowing policies and named contact as best practice and consideration was given as to how this could be achieved locally.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- (1) Notes the content of the responses
- (2) Formally record their concern and disappointment in relation to the Government's response, particularly in relation to Recommendations 2, 10, 13, 14 and 16 as outlined above, and requests the Monitoring Officer to explore all options available in relation to lobbying for a change in the Government's stance on these issues.
- (3) Notes that the Monitoring Officer will consider options in relation to Recommendation 23 relating to whistleblowing policies as outlined above.
- (4) Requests that the Monitoring Officer to continue to monitor the national picture in relation to standards and report back on any issue which may be of relevance to the Council on a local level.

8. Code of Conduct Update Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided an update on national issues in relation to the ethical behaviour of elected Members and the local position in Coventry with regard to Code of Conduct issues.

In addition, the report indicated that the Association of Electoral Administrators has issued guidance on the appropriate actions to take when a Council member fails to attend any meeting for six consecutive months. A copy of the guidance was appended to the report.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1. Notes the position with regard to matters concerning local authorities nationally.**
- 2. Notes the local position relating to the operation of the Council's Code of Conduct and delegates any actions arising from these to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.**
- 3. Requests that consideration be given to incorporating the guidance in relation to Councillor's non attendance at meeting in the City Council's Constitution.**

9. Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2022-23

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance appended to which was the Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal year 2022/23.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme for 2022/23 be noted.

10. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business.

There were no items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.00am)

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Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 10.00 am on Friday, 8 July
2022

Present:

Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor M Mutton
Councillor S Nazir
Councillor P Seaman

Independent Person: P Wiseman (Chair)

Other Members: Councillor A S Khan

Employees (by Service Area):

Law and Governance J Newman (Director), S Bennett, S Harriott

Others Present: R Foster, Browne Jacobson LLP Solicitors (via hybrid)

Apologies: Councillor S Walsh and D Welsh

Public Business

11. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Chair of Meeting

In accordance with the Committee's standard procedure for Code of Conduct Hearings, the meeting was chaired by Peter Wiseman, Independent Person.

13. Hearing into Alleged Breach of the Code of Conduct

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which detailed complaints made against Councillor AS Khan (the "Subject Member"). The complainants made a number of allegations including that that the Subject Member had breached the Code of Conduct for Elected Members by "seeking to exert influence over officers in the Council with a view to receiving preferential treatment"

A Stage One review of the complaints concluded that an Independent Investigator should be appointed to investigate the complaints. An Independent Investigator was duly appointed to carry out the investigation and produced a report which concluded that one of the complaints did not engage the Code of Conduct and was not therefore considered in the investigation. The Investigator put the remaining complaints into three categories, which were numbered Allegations One, Two and Three in her report. She found that there was no evidence on the

balance of probabilities to substantiate Allegations One and Three. However, she found that there was evidence to confirm that Allegation Two was founded on the balance of probabilities.

The Committee carefully considered the following:-

- a) Presentation of the Investigation report
- b) Presentation of the Subject Member's response to the Investigation report
- c) Summing up from both the Investigating Officer and the Subject Member
- d) Written views and submissions of the Independent Person

The Committee then determined the complaint and concluded:-

- 1) That they concurred with the Investigating Officer and that there had been no breaches of the Code of Conduct in relation to Allegation 1 for the reasons set out in the Investigation report
- 2) That, whilst they recognise the influence of the Subject Member, they did not consider that the Subject Member's actions were seeking to use his position to influence officers but rather were to inform and be transparent in relation to the issues he was facing and that therefore that there had been no breaches of the Code of Conduct in relation to Allegation 2
- 3) That they concurred with the Investigating Officer and that there had been no breaches of the Code of Conduct in relation to Allegation 3 for the reasons set out in the Investigation report

Having considered these matters, the Committee considered that there should be more guidance and clarity for elected Members when dealing with matters that relate to their own personal interests that need to be raised with the Council.

RESOLVED :-

- 1) That the conclusion of the Committee in relation to this matter be as set out in the Decision Notice as attached as Appendix 1 to these Minutes.**
- 2) That the provision of more guidance and clarity for elected Members when dealing with matters that relate to their own personal interests that need to be raised with the Council becomes part of the Ethics Committee Work Programme for 2022/23 to be addressed in the Officer/Member protocol.**

14. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 1.45 pm)

exert influence over officers in the Council with a view to receiving preferential treatment.

2.4 The hearing was therefore concerned with the Committee:

- (1) Hearing the complaints against the Subject Member and determining whether he has breached the Code of Conduct in relation to any or all of the complaints;
- (2) If the Committee considered that there has been a breach or breaches of the Code of Conduct, determining what sanction or sanctions, if any, should be applied; and
- (3) Authorising the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of Ethics Committee, to publish the Full Decision on the Council's website at the same time that copies are made available to the parties to the hearing.

E Hearing

3.1 The Ethics Committee consisted of:

- Cllr Shakila Nazir
- Cllr Mal Mutton
- Cllr Patricia Seaman
- Cllr Patricia Hetherton

The hearing was chaired by Peter Wiseman, one of the Council's Independent Persons. Mr Wiseman took no part in the Committee's discussions or the decisions that it reached with regard to whether there had been a breach or breaches of the Code of Conduct.

3.2 Cllr Khan attended the hearing.

3.3 The Independent Investigator, Ms Foster attended the hearing virtually. Ms Foster outlined the evidential landscape and background to the investigation, the investigation itself and her conclusions. She expressed that the three allegations were distilled in paragraph 16 of her Report. She stressed that she had reviewed a large amount of evidence and her findings were based upon the written evidence, and less weight was given to the witness testimonies. She clarified that she only investigated matters relating to the Code of Conduct and that any matters in relation to Planning, determination of the Civil issues in dispute and / or potential Criminal Offences were beyond her remit. She answered questions from both the Committee and from Cllr Khan.

3.4 Cllr Khan presented his case. He gave some background to the dispute and indicated that the property belonged to his son but that he was advocating on his behalf. He stated that the neighbour had undertaken a number of works without permission / in breach of Planning Control and that the situation had escalated and Police had been called more than once. He said that the individual identified as Person H in the

Investigator's Report (ie the spouse of the Owner of the neighbouring property and a Witness) was an unreliable witness. He said that Person H had lied in their witness evidence, and he stood by this.

3.5 In relation to the Allegations, he said the following:

1. Allegation One:

The Subject Member said that he had no special relationship with the Police, despite his position as Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities. He said that he did not know the officers who attended at the properties, and he denied making comments about taking a Superintendent / Sergeant for dinner.

2. Allegation Two:

The Subject Member denied that he sought to exert influence over officers in the Council with a view to receiving preferential treatment. He said that he contacted the Council because the Council was the proper authority to deal with the issues raised in his communications which included issues in respect of the Temporary Stop Notice on the neighbouring land and potential breaches of the same. He expressed that he was open and transparent about his interest in the property and dealt properly with Officers and was not trying to communicate in a "sideways" manner. He stated that it is standard practice to inform the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive Officer if there are any challenging issues that may make it to the press.

3. Allegation Three:

The Subject Member denied using his position to seek to persuade the neighbours to sell him land in the way as alleged or at all. He said that he did not sit on the Planning Committee, never had, and had no influence over their decision making as they were completely separate from his decision-making responsibilities. If anything was said about his position by a third party, this statement was made without his authority and he could not be held responsible for this.

F Consultation with Independent Person

4.1 The Independent Person, Steve Atkinson was not present for the hearing and sent his apologies. His pre-written evidence was relied upon. The Monitoring Officer read this to the Committee. It was noted that he had not heard the evidence that was presented orally at the Committee.

4.2 Mr Atkinson concurred with the findings of the Investigating Officer in the Investigator's Report, particularly with regard the findings in respect

of Allegation Two.

F Findings

5.1 After considering the submissions of the parties to the hearing and the views of the Independent Person, the Committee reached the following decision(s):

5.2 ***On the question of whether Cllr Khan had breached the Code of Conduct in relation to any or all of the complaints:***

Having carefully considered the Investigator's Report and submissions at the hearing of Ms Foster and Cllr Khan as well as the comments of Mr Atkinson on the Investigator's Report, the following conclusions were made:-

1. Allegation One – the Committee concurred with the Report of the Independent Investigator and considered that the allegation did not meet the threshold for this to be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct.
2. Allegation Two – the Committee recognised the influence of the Subject Member however it did not consider that his actions were seeking to use his position to influence Officers but rather he was informing and being transparent in relation to the issues he was facing. The Committee therefore did not agree with the findings in the Report of the Independent Investigator and considered that the allegation did not meet the threshold for this to be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct.
3. Allegation Three – the Committee concurred with the Report of the Independent Investigator and considered that the allegation did not meet the threshold for this to be considered a breach of the Code of Conduct.

G Reasons

6.1 **The Committee's reasons for reaching its decision are as follows:**

6.2 The Committee were clear that it did not matter who the Subject Member was, their focus was on the three salient points at Paragraph 16 of the Investigator's Report, namely Allegations One, Two and Three.

The Committee noted that the Subject Member had detailed some of the background to the events in the Investigator's Report, which provided some context and suggested that there were challenging circumstances in the background (although it was appreciated that none of the Complainants had attended and given oral evidence).

1. Allegation One – the Committee agreed that there was no evidence to substantiate this allegation, as outlined by the Investigating Officer, who said that a witness alleged that the Subject Member made comments about knowing the Superintendent / Sergeant but there was no documentary evidence to support this.

2. Allegation Two – when interacting with Officers the Subject Member was honest and said he had an interest in the property, and this is also declared on his Register of Interests. He was therefore open and transparent. The Officers contacted by the Subject Member do not appear to have been unduly influenced from the way that they responded. The Committee considered that lots of Councillors are involved in disputes at some point. These are difficult to prove because it is often one person's word against another. The Committee agreed that it is standard practice at Coventry City Council for Councillors to keep the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive Officer updated if there is an issue that could potentially be high profile. The Committee felt that the opinion of the Investigating Officer in relation to the tone of the email, dated 30 March 2021 was subjective and unsubstantiated. The Committee concluded that on their reading, the email does not amount to an instruction but a request for clarification from a position of frustration where there has been a perceived injustice. The Committee commented that there should be more guidance and clarity for Elected Members when dealing with matters that relate to their own personal interests that need to be raised with the Council as there does not appear to have been any other way that the Subject Member could have expressed his concerns.

3. Allegation Three – the Committee agreed that there was no evidence to substantiate this allegation, as outlined by the Investigating Officer who said that a witness alleged that the Subject Member made comments about influence at Planning Committee. The Investigating Officer saw footage of a heated argument where comments were made. However none of these comments came from the Subject Member directly and he cannot be held responsible for unauthorised statements made.

6.3 The Committee further added that having considered these matters it considered that there should be more guidance and clarity for Elected Members when dealing with matters that relate to their own personal interests that need to be raised with the Council.

The Committee recommends: that this issue becomes part of the Ethics Committee Work Programme to be addressed in the Officer/Member Protocol.

H Appeal

7. There is no right of appeal against the Committee's decision.

I Notification of decision

8. This decision notice is sent to:

- The Complainants
- Councillor Abdul Khan
- Ms Ros Foster
- Ms Julie Newman
- Steve Atkinson

The decision will also be published on the Council's website.

J Additional help

9. If you need additional support in relation to this decision notice or future contact with the City Council, please let us know as soon as possible. If you have difficulty reading this notice, we can make reasonable adjustments to assist you, in line with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. We can also help if English is not your first language.

Ethics Committee

Coventry City Council

8 July 2022



Ethics Committee

29 September 2022

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship Review

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

The Ethics Committee has been monitoring the work of the Local Government Association (LGA) programme around Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship. This work is in response to the increasing concern about intimidation and toxicity of debate and the impact this has been having on democratic processes. A report was last provided to the Committee on 9 December 2021.

This work remains part of the Committee's work programme and this report is to provide an update of the work undertaken by LGA and the local response.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the work that has been undertaken by the LGA in promoting Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship;
2. Consider signing the "Debate Not Hate" public statement to support the work of the LGA which seeks to act as a call to action for the relevant Government department to form a working group to address this issue;

3. Note the work that has been undertaken locally in respect of the Council's *Debate Not Hate* Campaign promoting Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship; and
4. Request that this item remains on the work programme of the Ethics Committee for continued review.

List of Appendices included:

- A. "Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy", 28 June 2022, <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-impact-abuse-local-democracy>;
- B. Coventry City Council "Debate Not Hate" leaflet.

Other useful background papers can be found at the following web addresses:

- Item 14: Report of the Director of Law and Governance, entitled Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship, presented to the Ethics Committee on 9 December 2021 (with minutes): <https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=161&MId=12535&Ver=4>
- LGA "Debate Not Hate public statement: Councillors, MPs and organisations: Add your voice to our Debate Not Hate public statement": <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-sign-our-public-statement>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship

1 Context (or background)

1.1 The Council's Ethics Committee has requested that Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship remains part of the committee's work programme.

1.2 *Update on the work of the LGA*

1.2.1 The LGA's Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship work was established following the publication of the Committee for Standards in Public Life reports into Intimidation in public life in 2019. The work is, primarily aimed at:

- articulating good standards for anyone engaging in public and political discourse
- understanding the scale and impact of intimidation and abusive behaviour on membership organisations, and developing recommendations for achieving positive debate and public decision-making on a local level
- supporting LGA members and all democratically elected local representatives in addressing intimidation and abuse, so they deliver the best on behalf of their communities
- recognising that daily interactions continue to take place online and new technologies of information are constantly used to facilitate communication with citizens, officers and councillors. Online abuse and intimidation of local councillors and supporting officers working with them is a major challenge to local democracy and to the diversity of local representatives.

1.2.2 As reported to the Committee last year, the LGA commissioned a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors, which was launched in October 2021. On 28 June 2022, the LGA published "Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy" (the LGA Report), a copy of which has been attached to this report at Appendix 1 and can also be found online at the following link: <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/debate-not-hate-impact-abuse-local-democracy>. LGA have identified that 7 out of 10 Councillors (ie the majority) have reported abuse. The LGA Report contains recommendations from the evidence gathered over the first 6 months.

1.2.3 As identified in the LGA Report common themes amongst the evidence are as follows:

- **“Variability of support** – The support offered by councils, political parties, and the police varied across the country. In particular, respondents identified a lack of proactive support from some councils and responses from some police forces to threats made against councillors and their families.
- **Targeted abuse** – Evidence from the qualitative responses indicated that councillors and candidates with protected characteristics were more likely to

receive personalised abuse. Misogyny, racism and homophobia were particularly highlighted in the responses.

- **Personal and democratic impacts** – Abuse and intimidation can significantly impact councillors and their families, and the wider community. Several respondents described the negative impacts of ongoing abuse on their mental health and wellbeing. In addition, respondents supported the idea that abuse can impact councillors' willingness to stand for re-election or deter others from considering standing for public office.
- **Vulnerability of councillors** – Many respondents highlighted the visibility and accessibility of councillors in their local community, particularly when councillors' home addresses are available online. Councillors are therefore vulnerable to physical abuse, particularly compared to national politicians who may have greater protections and access to specialist police support.
- **Normalisation** – There is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised. Attitudes around councillors expecting abuse and being expected to manage abuse with little support were prevalent in the responses.”

1.2.4 The Recommendations made are as follows:

- **“Recommendation 1:** Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.
- **Recommendation 2:** The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.
- **Recommendation 3:** Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.
- **Recommendation 4:** The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.
- **Recommendation 5:** The LGA should work with political parties, election and democratic officers, and organisations responsible for guidance to raise awareness of the options currently available and promote the practice of

keeping home addresses private during the election process and once elected.

- **Recommendation 6:** Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.
- **Recommendation 7:** The relevant Government department should convene a working group, in partnership with the LGA, to bring together relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.”

1.2.5 In respect to Recommendation 7, LGA have provided a link as follows: <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-sign-our-public-statement> to its “Debate Not Hate public statement” for Councillors, MPs and organisations to sign to support the work of the LGA and act as a call to action for the relevant Government department to form a working group.

1.3 *Local picture*

1.3.1 The Council launched a campaign commencing on 5 September 2022 called “Debate Not Hate” as follows:

- The first part of the “Debate Not Hate” programme from week commencing 5 September included:
 - Digital Citizenship – Campaign running from week commencing 5 September 2022;
 - At Full Council on 6 September 2022 leaflets were distributed to Councillors and the campaign publicised (a copy of the leaflet can be found at Appendix B);
 - Infographics have been provided to share on Member Webpages (ie banners that Councillors can add to their social media pages);
 - Advice that further information is available on Members Webpage;
 - Information that this campaign has been led by the Ethics Committee Work Programme;
 - Advice that inclusion week starts 26 September - Sunday 2 October and Councillors can join the remote sessions provided by the Council including a session entitled “Civility Saves Lives” which is a one hour session held virtually on 27 September. The session discussed civility and respect and how people treat each other at work. It acknowledged that in highly pressurised workplaces, behaviours of incivility and disrespect can become common place and have a detrimental impact on staff wellbeing and customer care. The session, designed and delivered by NHS England, aimed to support and promote cultures of civility and respect, creating positive working environments that are kind, compassionate and inclusive for all.

- The second part of the “Debate Not Hate” programme will include:
 - Civility & Respect Pledge/Civility Matters;
 - Personal Safety training on 12 October 2022 to be provided by LGA, bespoke to the Council. Areas of work which will be discussed as part of the training will be personal physical safety but also psychological safety and wellbeing including the importance of respectful debate, handling online abuse, and the legal and practical remedies which can be used to resolve issues. The session will provide practical advice for members to encourage them to be proactive in considering personal safety issues.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

Ethics Committee are asked to:

1. Note the work that has been undertaken by the LGA in promoting Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship;
2. Consider signing the “Debate Not Hate” public statement to support the work of the LGA which seeks to act as a call to action for the relevant Government department to form a working group to address this issue;
3. Note the work that has been undertaken locally in respect of the Council’s “Debate Not Hate” Campaign promoting Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship; and
4. Request that this item remains on the work programme of the Ethics Committee for continued review.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 There has been no consultation as there is no proposal to implement at this stage which would require a consultation.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Any actions arising from this report will be implemented as soon as possible.

5. Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Governance

- 5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

6 Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impact at this stage.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage.

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Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Graham Clark	Lead Accountant – Business Partnering	Finance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Councillor S Nazir	Chair of Ethics Committee		20.09.22	20.09.22

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Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy



Our call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors was launched in October 2021. This report sets out the findings and recommendations for the future of local democracy.

[Communities](#)

28 Jun 2022

Executive summary and background

Councillors are at the centre of local democracy. Elected from amongst their local community and forming a vital link between councils and residents, it is a privilege and responsibility to be elected to public office. However, increasing levels of abuse and intimidation in political and public discourse are negatively impacting politicians and democracy at local and national levels.

Rights to object and constructive challenge are both key components of democracy, but abuse and intimidation cross the line into unacceptable behaviour and serve to silence democratic voices and deter people from engaging with politics.

There is a considerable volume of evidence of the impact of abuse, intimidation, and aggression at a national level, including extreme incidents such as the murder of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP.

To understand the impacts on local government and councillors, the LGA launched a call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors in October 2021. This report summarises the findings from the first six months of the call for evidence. It sets out what more could be done to improve support and responses to abuse and intimidation of councillors and reverse national trends around abuse and intimidation that are harmful to democracy.

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Key findings

Respondents to the call for evidence were asked to share their personal experiences of abuse and intimidation as councillors or candidates or abuse of councillors they had witnessed. This included **quantitative questions**

[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/lgas-call-evidence-quantitative-data\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/lgas-call-evidence-quantitative-data)

looking at frequency, location and circumstances of abuse. In addition, respondents were asking for details about triggers of abuse, impacts of abuse personally and more widely, and reflections on support and responses from relevant agencies.

The following themes were identified in the responses to the call for evidence:

- **Variability of support** – The support offered by councils, political parties, and the police varied across the country. In particular, respondents identified a lack of proactive support from some councils and responses from some police forces to threats made against councillors and their families.
- **Targeted abuse** – Evidence from the qualitative responses indicated that councillors and candidates with protected characteristics were more likely to receive personalised abuse. Misogyny, racism and homophobia were particularly highlighted in the responses.
- **Personal and democratic impacts** – Abuse and intimidation can significantly impact councillors and their families, and the wider community. Several respondents described the negative impacts of ongoing abuse on their mental health and wellbeing. In addition, respondents supported the idea that abuse can impact councillors' willingness to stand for re-election or deter others from considering standing for public office.
- **Vulnerability of councillors** – Many respondents highlighted the visibility and accessibility of councillors in their local community, particularly when councillors' home addresses are available online. Councillors are therefore vulnerable to physical abuse, particularly compared to national politicians who may have greater protections and access to specialist police support.
- **Normalisation** – There is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised. Attitudes around councillors expecting abuse and being expected to manage abuse with little support were prevalent in the responses.

Recommendations

In considering these findings, it is possible to set out some initial recommendations to improve the environment for current and prospective councillors. These recommendations range from relatively simple legislative changes to protect

councillors' privacy to creating a longer-term culture change which seeks to de-normalisation of abuse of politicians and other high-profile individuals.

Recommendation 1: Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.

Recommendation 2: The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.

Recommendation 3: Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.

Recommendation 4: The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.

Recommendation 5: The LGA should work with political parties, election and democratic officers, and organisations responsible for guidance to raise awareness of the options currently available and promote the practice of keeping home addresses private during the election process and once elected.

Recommendation 6: Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.

Recommendation 7: The relevant **Government department should convene a working group** [<https://www.local.gov.uk/debate-not-hate-sign-our-public-statement>], in partnership with the LGA, to bring together

relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.

Introduction

Councillors are at the centre of local democracy. Elected by residents in their neighbourhood and tasked with making decisions that affect the whole community, they are as much a part of the community as those they represent and form a vital and direct link between the council and residents.

It is a key democratic principle which all councillors champion, that local government should be open and transparent and that decisions made by elected councillors should be open to scrutiny and challenge. Residents who are unhappy with decisions made by the council or services that the council provides have every right to object and have their voices heard. This is a civil liberty that must be maintained and protected.

However, the growing levels of abuse, intimidation and harassment against elected politicians are a real threat to representative democracy. Comments and actions that cross the line from honest and respectful debate to abuse and intimidation are designed to silence democratic expression, constructive challenge, and free speech.

There is evidence that increasing levels of toxicity of debate and abuse against public figures are having an impact on our country's democratic processes at a national and local level. In 2017, the Committee for Standards in Public Life published a report on **Intimidation in public life**

[\[https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epjds/s13688-020-00236-9\]](https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epjds/s13688-020-00236-9) in which the Committee suggested that “the scale and intensity of intimidation is now shaping public life”. Since then, research into abuse toward parliamentary candidates has supported anecdotal concerns that levels of abuse are increasing and that women, ethnic minority and LGBTQIA+ politicians receive more discriminatory abuse related to their personal characteristics [1].^[#_ftn1]. During the general election in 2019, concerns were raised over a number of female MPs who retired from politics and cited abuse they faced as a key factor in their decision-making [2].^[#_ftn2].

Beyond abuse that may dissuade prospective politicians from standing for election, there are significant concerns about the risks to politicians' personal safety. Although rare, serious incidents do occur as shown by the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016 and Sir David Amess MP in 2021.

The ability to debate and disagree well, as set out in the Committee for Standards in Public Life 2017 report, is all the more important when there is significant division in viewpoints and politicians grapple with difficult decisions about how to manage complex local issues.

Councillors represent and serve their local communities and the majority do so without being negatively impacted by abuse and intimidation. Recent councillor census data shows that a large majority of councillors (79 per cent) would recommend being a councillor to others and 65 per cent intended to stand for re-election; almost a third said they had never experienced abuse or intimidation linked to their councillor role and 72 per cent said they had never felt at risk in their role.

Nevertheless, some councillors do experience significant abuse and intimidation and the intensification of these harmful behaviours are unacceptable and represent a real risk to democracy at all levels.

Work of the LGA Civility in public life programme

Following the publication of the Committee for Standards in Public Life reports into Intimidation in public life and Local government ethical standards, the LGA established the Civility in public life programme. The purpose of the programme is to address intimidation, standards of public and political discourse and behaviour in public office and provide support and advice to councils and councillors.

Since 2019, the LGA has developed a Model Councillors Code of Conduct and supportive guidance such as Digital citizenship guidance, Guidance for handling intimidation and abuse for councillors and case-studies on council support for councillors dealing with abuse and personal safety issues and run a series of evidence on councillor safety (grant-funded by the UK Government). The LGA launched this Call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors to formally record the experiences of councillors impacted by abuse and intimidation and develop a greater understanding of what could be done to improve civility in public life.

Work of the UK Government

In response to the Committee for Standards in Public Life's reports and national events, the Government established the Defending Democracy programme, a cross-Whitehall initiative focusing on four priorities including strengthening the integrity of

UK elections, protecting democratic processes and institutions, empowering British citizens and respecting open debate, and tackling disinformation. Under this programme, the Government has passed legislation to address intimidation of electoral candidates and campaigners and introduced legislation to create new offences related to threatening and harmful online communication and false information online.

We welcome progress in these areas, however, evidence gathered by the LGA indicates that greater attention needs to be paid to prevention to stop abuse and intimidation of elected politicians happening in the first place and reverse the impacts of an increasingly toxic political environment on current and prospective politicians.

About this report

In October 2021, the LGA launched an open call for evidence of abuse and intimidation of councillors by the public. The aim of the survey was to capture elected and prospective councillors' experiences and concerns about public abuse and intimidation and what the impacts of abuse are on them, those around them and democracy more generally. The survey was open to councillors, candidates and individuals who support candidates and councillors and might have witnessed relevant abuse. The Call for evidence remains open for submissions to capture experience of newly elected councillors.

In the first six months of the Call for evidence, 419 responses were received in relation to principal councils [3] [fn3] and these responses formed the basis of this analysis and recommendations. This report uses the lived experience of councillors to fill a data gap around the abuse that councillors receive while fulfilling their elected role, the impacts of abuse on people in public life and local government, and what more needs to be done to improve the state of public discourse.

[1] [fnref1] Gorrell et al., **Online abuse toward candidates during General Election 2019: Working Paper** [<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2001.08686.pdf>], Jan 2020

[2] [fnref2] Gorrell et al., **Which politicians receive abuse? Four factors illuminated in the UK general election 2019** [<https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epjds/s13688-020-00236-9>], July 2020

[3] [fnref3] A principal council is a local government authority as defined under the Local Government Act, section 270. Here it is used to mean any council across the UK which is not a parish and town council or combined authority, i.e. district, county,
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unitary, London borough, metropolitan etc.

Key facts and figures

The **call for evidence of abuse and intimidation**

[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/lgas-call-evidence-quantitative-data\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/lgas-call-evidence-quantitative-data) was an open survey targeted at candidates, councillors and officers who have witnessed abuse of councillors. Four hundred and nineteen respondents from principal councils responded to the Call for evidence in the first six months. A summary of the key statistics from the survey is set out below:

- 88 per cent of respondents said they had experienced abuse and/or intimidation, directed at them personally in relation to their role as a councillor or because they were a political candidate
- 98 per cent of respondents who said they had experienced abuse and/or intimidation said they had experienced such incidents on multiple occasions
- Most abuse was received via social media, with 73 per cent of respondents with multiple experiences said they received abuse by social media
- 64 per cent of respondents had been abused and/or intimidated in person
- 50 per cent of respondents said the abuse was ongoing
- 72 per cent of respondents said they had taken actions themselves to avoid intimidation and/or abuse, or to protect themselves
- 60 per cent of respondents said they were aware of others being unwilling to stand or re-stand for election, or take on leadership roles, due to anticipated abuse.
- 42 per cent of respondents said they would be standing for re-election at the next election.
- 27 per cent of respondents said they would not stand for the next election and 31 per cent were undecided, of those respondents 68 per cent said abuse and intimidation had influenced their position on whether to stand again.

The **2022 LGA Councillor census**

[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022) was a time-limited survey directed at all councillors in England

which took place between January and February 2022. The survey covered a range of areas including representation, councillor views and councillors' work. 5055 respondents responded to the survey which is response rate of 30 per cent. A summary of the key statistics relating to the experiences and impacts of abuse and intimidation of councillors from the survey is set out below:

- 70 per cent of respondents thought that the council had effective arrangements for dealing with inappropriate behaviour by council officers, 57 per cent by councillors and 55 per cent by members of the public
- 28 per cent of respondents had either frequently or occasionally felt at risk personally in their role as a councillor, 45 per cent felt at risk rarely and only 26 per cent never felt at risk
- 65 per cent of respondents thought that council arrangements for protecting councillors personally were either very or fairly effective
- 7 in 10 respondents experienced abuse or intimidation in last twelve months; 10 per cent experienced it frequently, 29 per cent occasionally, 33 per cent rarely. Only 27 per cent had never had any such experiences
- 63 per cent of respondents felt that the arrangements in place for protecting councillors personally were effective
- 79 per cent of respondents would recommend the role of councillor to others
- 65 per cent of respondents intended to stand for re-election

Detailed examination of the responses to the call to evidence

According to the recent LGA Councillor census ^[1] [\[#_ftn1\]](#), which gathers key demographic data and perceptions from serving councillors 10 per cent of councillors have experienced abuse and intimidation frequently, with a further 29 per cent experiencing it occasionally. Only 27 per cent said they have never had any such experiences. To get a clearer understanding of how abuse against councillors usually presents, what kinds of abuse councillors experience and why people abuse councillors, councillors and those around them were asked to share their experiences of abuse and intimidation of councillors by the public.

Experiences of abuse

Respondents were from across the political spectrum, from different council types, and geographical areas, including submissions from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. 88 per cent of respondents had experienced abuse and/or intimidation directed against them personally due to their role, with the majority receiving both; 76 per cent had witnessed abuse and/or intimidation of this nature. Respondents to the survey were from a range of demographic groups in terms of age, sex and other protected characteristics; although it was not possible to do further statistical analysis to look for particularly at prevalent groups in the data due to the sample size. Together this could suggest that all councillors may be at risk of experiencing abuse and intimidation during their political career and that some councillors both experience and witness abuse. However, there is evidence from the qualitative responses to the survey that councillors with protected characteristics are more likely to experience personal attacks and abuse. Later in the report we will consider in more depth whether some councillors are targeted with different kinds of abuse.

The abuse described by respondents was multi-faceted and took place in both the online and in-person spaces. Death threats, abusive and discriminatory language, character assassination and intimidatory behaviour, such as encroaching on personal spaces, were common forms of abuse. Destruction of property, physical assault and serious ongoing harassment like stalking or sexual harassment were reported, but these forms of abuse were rarer and more likely to result in some form of police involvement.

Overall, when the reports of abuse were grouped as either offline abuse (in-person or via telephone or post) or online abuse (social media, virtual meetings, or other online communication) they were equal, showing that online abuse happens just as much as offline abuse. However, 73 per cent of respondents said that multiple incidents of abuse they experienced took place on social media, making it the most common place for abuse to occur. Respondents were much more likely to report that abuse had occurred on multiple occasions and involved multiple perpetrators, than multiple incidents by one person or a single incident. This was particularly the case with online communication and on social media, referred to as “the Wild West” by one respondent.

Respondents felt that the increased use of unregulated social media platforms had increased the likelihood of abuse and hurtful comments. Respondents mentioned ‘pile-on’ abuse which is when a number of different individuals sending harassing communication to one victim in a public (social media platform) or semi-public space (messaging service like WhatsApp). Significant amounts of abuse can accumulate very quickly in this way through individual posts, which can be difficult to remove. Page 18 of 28

the platform but nevertheless have a cumulative harmful effect. The immediacy and 24-hour nature of social media and the reach into personal spaces was also cited as an area of concern, with councillors feeling targeted within their own homes and unable to disengage from abuse being directed at them online. Respondents also suggested that the anonymity of social media emboldened perpetrators to be more extreme on social media and allowed them to set up multiple accounts for the purpose of abusing or 'Trolling' others with impunity.

Whilst the Government's Online Safety Bill may help to address some forms of serious harmful online communication by introducing new communication offences and by introducing a duty to protect adults from harmful content, most online abuse would probably not meet the threshold for criminal prosecution or might fall below the scope of what content should be removed under this duty. We therefore have concerns that these provisions will not have the intended impact and more is needed to address non-criminal but nonetheless harmful online abuse and misinformation.

Councillors have many in-person interactions with residents. Respondents report that single incidents were more likely to happen in person than online and even single incidents had a significant impact on victims. Respondents repeatedly highlighted how visible and locally accessible councillors are to the public, particularly compared to national politicians. In their formal role, councillors attend clearly advertised council events like council meetings and make decisions about highly emotive local issues like planning, licensing and service provision that affect a lot of residents. Council meetings are rightly open to the public, but there is generally little or no security or police presence to handle incidents when they occur. This is often down to the level of resource available, and some respondents indicated that even when the police accepted there were heightened risks at certain council meetings, they often could not guarantee police support due to resourcing issues. As a consequence, some reported council meetings being adjourned or postponed due to safety concerns.

By comparison members of parliament conduct their official parliamentary role in the highly secure Houses of Parliament and often have formal offices and staff to support their local role and surgeries in their constituency. Members of parliament have a high local and national profile, representing thousands of constituents and are at significant risk of abuse and serious threats. It is therefore right that they have the appropriate facilities and protection to keep them safe as they fulfil their elected role. However, councillors, particularly those with special responsibilities, make decisions affecting hundreds of thousands of people and may experience similar levels of abuse and threats as MPs. Councillors should therefore receive support appropriate to the level of risk associated with their role and their particular situation, just as MPs do.

Councillors also engage less formally with their local community by holding ward surgeries, door-knocking and visiting residents in their homes. Advice from political parties and the LGA is that these activities are not carried out alone, but responses from the survey indicated that many had done so before an incident occurred, and many rely on volunteers to support these activities. Respondents highlighted that in-person abuse takes place in both formal and informal settings and includes verbal abuse such as threats and discriminatory language and other physical abuse amounting to criminal incidents. Spitting was a common and upsetting form of physical abuse, but respondents also reported more serious physical assaults.

Threats were a consistent theme throughout the responses and ranged from threats to smear a councillor's reputation to threats to the physical person, family or property of the councillor. These threats were seen to be more serious due to the public availability of councillors' personal information, such as home addresses on council websites, making councillors more vulnerable to serious incidents and high-profile incidents over the past few years.

“I have been abused on the street and threatened by being told, I know where you live...and I've been told to watch my back.” *Anonymous respondent*

In addition, some felt this accessibility of information increased the risks of threats being made online translating into real violence. One respondent gave an example of a death threat being made online where multiple individuals suggested councillors should be shot, one social media user posted that they would be willing to 'pull the trigger, just tell me where they live', while another signposted to councillors' home addresses on the council website. In another case, threats were implied by leaving a live bullet on the doorstep of a councillor's house. This is a rare example, however, many respondents had less extreme examples of online communications leading to real world threats, such as multiple 'poison pen' letters being delivered to councillors homes and orchestrated demonstrations outside a councillors home.

Normalisation

Respondents who said they had experienced multiple incidents were asked to describe how often they received abuse from more than once a day through to less than once a month. The responses indicated that a high frequency of abuse was common. For example, one in ten respondents said they experienced abuse due to their role once a day or more than once a day and 36 per cent of those who experienced multiple incidents of abuse, said they experienced abuse once a week or more frequently. Almost half the respondents who experienced multiple incidents said the abuse was ongoing and many described it as constant. A third said the abuse was not ongoing and some said described abuse not as regular but as direct, Page 35

specific engagement activities, such as posting online. Nevertheless, there was a clear theme that a certain level of abuse and intimidation is a feature of political life which is both expected and accepted by councillors and those around them.

Normalisation of abusive behaviour towards councillors was also evident in the qualitative responses councillors gave to the call for evidence. Some respondents said that although they were initially shocked by the prevalence and level of abuse when they were elected, the accepting attitude of their councillor colleagues, council staff and political officers quickly led to a shift in their expectations and norms. Consequently, respondents expressed a perception that councillors ought to be able to manage the majority of abuse themselves and that when they struggled to cope, they were concerned people would judge them or say they were not cut out for politics. This might partly explain why 37 per cent of respondent did not seek support in relation to their experiences. A few challenged this perception, recognising that councillors should not have to suffer personal attacks to represent their communities.

“ All organisations could take it more seriously; being robust enough to handle personal attacks should not be a pre-requisite for public office. *Anonymous respondent* ”

In relation to council staff or political officers, responses showed this normalisation playing out in two distinct and opposing ways. One approach accepted that abuse of councillors by the public is expected and normalised such that very little individual support was offered; abuse is so every day and constant that trying to address it would be a huge and never-ending effort without much benefit. The second approach to increased abuse by the public was for councils to put in place varying levels of support for councillors including specific training, guidance, support, and policies to deal with abuse from the public and bespoke risk assessments of councillors' personal safety. There is a similar divergence of experience in relation to police response to abuse and intimidation of councillors. In some cases, normalisation of abuse of elected members has led to some poor practices where genuinely criminal or threatening behaviour has not been investigated or addressed because of the victim's role as a councillor.

“I think there is an element of not being believed, that you are exaggerating, that you have to put up with it, and that if you do not like it, you can change your role and give to someone else.” *Anonymous respondent* ”

Normalisation of abuse by councillors themselves may also have led to some councillors not reporting serious abuse or threats when they occurred. Some respondents were clearly self-categorising abuse as tolerable or serious enough to report to the police, with little in between. In addition, some councillors said that their more experienced councillor colleagues seemed more resilient to abuse and described being told they would get used to abuse after a while. In some cases, this high tolerance had led to councillors not reporting serious incidents, which the police later advised were criminal, should have been reported, and may have put the councillor at risk of harm.

The idea that councillors and other people in high profile public roles should expect and grow used to abuse, that they learn to cope with threats and intimidation, and that there is little to be done to curb abuse is a pervasive narrative at local and national levels. In the aftermath of the murder of Sir David Amess MP, the Government rightly reviewed arrangements for MP's security to assess the provision available and bring consistency across different areas of the country. The LGA welcomed this prioritisation of elected members security, however, the Government chose not to widen the scope of the review to include councillors and other local politicians, despite repeated calls from them to do so. In addition, all police forces were instructed to make direct contact with MPs in their area to discuss their safety and provide advice and support. By comparison councils coordinated support for councillors locally; police input relied on existing relationships rather than a national directive and therefore varied across different areas.

Finally, councillors are leaders of their local community and often act as role models for future leaders; most are striving in good faith to exemplify high levels of discourse and respect debate. However, some respondents commented that rising level of general abuse and disrespectful debate at the national level was coarsening debate in the council chamber. Others said they felt abuse from fellow councillors and political party members was on the rise, despite there being common and well understood standards of behaviour and conduct based on the Nolan principles and principles of respect.

Large scale reviews of standards in local government, such as the Committee for Standards in Public Life 2019 report, have found little evidence of a widespread standards problem. However, there was evidence of misconduct by some councillors related to bullying and harassment. The LGA is committed to maintaining high standards of conduct and creating a consistency of approach by councils when dealing with councillor standards and behaviour. In 2020, the LGA developed a Model

Councillor Code of Conduct in consultation with the sector to set out a common standard of behaviour and support councillors to role model positive behaviours, and respectful conduct.

The normalisation of abuse and intimidation of people in public life has had a negative impact for many, including councillors. If this normalisation of abuse is symptomatic of a wider toxification of society and public discourse, further consideration will need to be given to solutions that will address this within the sphere of local government and in wider society.

Targeted abuse towards councillors with protected characteristics

Targeted abuse towards councillors with protected characteristics was a recurring theme in the responses to the call for evidence, whether through first-hand experience or as a witness. The qualitative evidence from the survey indicated that councillors with protected characteristics may experience more personal attacks, compared to others who experience more general abuse.

Some respondents suggested that councillors with protected characteristics were more likely to experience more extreme and a higher volume of abuse; due to the number of responses and style of the survey it has not been possible to confirm this claim through statistical analysis of these results. However, this would follow trends seen at national levels. For example, in a 2020 study looking at ‘Which politicians receive abuse?’ in the run up to the 2019 UK general election, Gorrell et al. found that women received more sexist abuse, whereas men received more general and political abuse.

Misogyny, racism and homophobia were all mentioned by respondents, although misogyny and reference to women’s personal characteristics or making threats designed to specifically impact women were particularly common.

“Initially when I became a councillor, I was told by a colleague that I should never hold a surgery alone as I was at risk... I was told that with me being disabled, I would be the target of negative treatment by people.” *Anonymous female respondent*

Many councils, political parties and organisations, like the LGA, are working hard to increase the diversity of representation in local government and this requires a greater variety of candidates to stand at local election. So, it’s important to note here that many respondents directly linked abuse associated with personal characteristics with

reluctance to stand for election or re-election; some described women choosing to take on back-office roles in the local party rather than run for office because of concerns about what abuse they would face.

Some argue that this kind of targeted abuse is symptomatic of wider inequality and discrimination in society and the solution in the long run is to tackle the root cause. Personal and discriminatory abuse of candidates and councillors with protected characteristics undoubtedly hampers efforts to improve local representation and if it continues may have a negative impact on the limited diversity we currently have in local government. So, in the meantime, actions to address those symptoms and reduce the excessive amount and severity of abuse women and other people with protected characteristics receive could help reverse the trend of underrepresentation of these groups in local and national politics.

Triggers of abuse

To better understand the reasons why perpetrators direct abuse at councillors, respondents were asked to comment on whether they felt there were triggers that acted as catalysts of abuse and what those triggers might be. This covered specific to non-specific events and processes and picked up where abuse was not triggered but appeared to be generalised.

59 per cent of respondents believed the abuse was triggered by specific events. Others were not sure or felt there was not a specific trigger event except being in public life. These triggers can broadly be categorised into abuse related to decisions of the council, abuse linked to political party or individual political stances, abuse aggravated by other factors, like perceived poor performance of the council or a misunderstanding of the role of councils and councillors, and abuse linked to the councillor's role in public life. Abuse, triggered by a specific event or otherwise, could also be aggravated by certain myths and perceptions about councillors.

The most common and easy to identify trigger was contentious council decisions; respondents highlighted abuse related to unsuccessful planning and licensing applications and objections to general planning and parking decisions as common triggers. Planning and licensing are an integral part of council business and can be very emotive issues as these decisions can have an impact on individuals and the whole community. Councillors appointed to committees dealing with these issues will generally receive training on the technicalities of planning and licensing and making these decisions before they take up the role. However, there is no strengthened level of support for councillors sitting on these committees, or training for planning staff who support councillors, to help them deal with abuse linked to the types of decisions they make.

Another trigger for abuse was wider council policy on topical issues and in some cases, these were associated with certain types of councils, for example **Low Traffic Neighbourhood issues** [<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/stakeholder-engagement-emergency-lessons-low-traffic-neighbourhoods>] were clearly associated with urban rather than rural councils. However, there were many triggers, like Covid-19 vaccinations and climate change, that traversed geography across all types of councils.

Here it is useful to examine the different kinds of behaviours respondents said residents displayed and clarify the distinction between appropriate objections to council decisions and policy or complaint about council services. Respondents reported a range of behaviours from continuous and repeated complaints and objections to personalised verbal abuse and intimidatory comments and physical aggression intended to inappropriately influence individual councillors and local decision-making. Residents have a right to object to policies they are unhappy with; these civil liberties are a vital democratic principle and must be maintained. Further to this, the LGA actively encourages residents to engage with their local council and the decisions that affect their communities. However, actions that amount to harassment and devolve into personal attacks or are intended to intimidate a councillor into changing their position or actions are not acceptable and this is happening far too often.

Campaigning and canvassing in the community were also highlighted as high-risk activities by respondents. One respondent labelled door-knocking as “particularly harrowing”, with some councillors saying they had concerns about their own safety and wellbeing, as well as their volunteers while campaigning. Many respondents stated that this abuse was connected to the policy positions of their political party or their own views on particularly divisive issues, such as leaving the European Union. Respondents described how disagreement and opposing views were then reflected in the form of aggression, threats, and personal abuse. Some commented that this has become steadily worse in recent years and that personalised abuse between national and local politicians had set a precedent that has filtered down into conversations with members of the public.

Responses to the questionnaire indicate that it is sometimes possible to anticipate what events or activities might trigger abuse and aggression towards councillors. Consequently, it may be possible to put in place measures to prevent abuse from taking place or mitigate the impacts of abuse. Council officers often work with their councillors ahead of contentious or high-profile decisions to ensure that they are handled sensitively and that councillors know how to respond to online abuse. For example, councils can remove the option for comments on social media posts for a

set period of time and advise councillors to do the same. Allowing time before opening up for comments can reduce ‘knee-jerk’ reactions and allow time for consideration, while still allowing people to have their say at a later point.

Aggravating factors

There was a clear theme running through the qualitative responses about factors that served to aggravate and intensify abuse. These were chiefly based on preconceptions about the role and powers of the councillors, levels of council performance and the public’s right to abuse people in public office.

Respondents commented that it was common for abuse to be rooted in a misunderstanding of the role of the council and councillors, particularly where councils are required to implement government policy. Confusion about responsibility and functions of different levels of government was compounded by residents’ incorrect assumption that councillors have the power to immediately influence national policy and change local policy independently of the rest of the council. Respondents also commented that councillors are more accessible and available to residents than members of parliament and therefore were often the first port of call for disgruntled residents.

“Council is always seen as the bearer of bad news whilst MP’s who are often responsible for setting the policy are deemed as a hero.” *Anonymous respondent*

Change, reduction or closing of local discretionary services was a common theme in responses, this was linked to these services being vulnerable to reduction in central funding from Government and often being highly visible physical infrastructure in the community, such as library services. Respondents commented that it was sometimes difficult to control the narratives around service changes and even positive changes, such as transferring library services to local community groups, was sometimes seen as an abdication of responsibility.

21 per cent of respondents felt that the abuse they experienced was not triggered by a specific event. Many of those felt that abuse was related solely to being a figure in public life and that abusing politicians was seen as fair game.

“ “ The problem is that abuse often starts as low level... This creates a sense that local councillors are easy game for abuse. *Anonymous respondent*

They particularly highlighted running for election, being elected and taking on additional responsibilities as points where abuse started or intensified. This is supported by the fact that 72 per cent of respondents said they had additional responsibilities as a councillor. A further 19 per cent of respondents were not sure whether abuse was related to specific events or not and some said it was a combination of ongoing abuse and events that exacerbated abuse, such as engaging with resident online or at ward surgeries.

Councils and political parties have a role in supporting candidates and councillors representing them. The evidence suggests abuse is becoming more common, consistent and normalised in the eyes of the public, councillors and public organisations; one in five respondents to the survey said the abuse or intimidation was ongoing. To ensure this trend does not continue, organisations that support councillors should be proactive in handling serious abuse and referring incidents to the police where necessary, as well as actively supporting councillors to handle abuse that falls below the criminal level.

Personal impacts of abuse and intimidation of councillors

A critical part of the call for evidence asked respondents to share what the impacts of abuse and intimidation had been on them and other councillors. Evidence from these responses shows that abuse and intimidation of councillors has a significant impact on individual councillors and those around them.

Three broad categories of impacts emerged; impacts on the individual, impacts on the individual's family and friends, and impacts on local democracy and the community. These categories were influenced by how public the abuse was, who the councillor shared their experiences with and how the abuse influenced the councillors' choices.

Many respondents described how their experiences of abuse had negatively impacted their mental health and their ability to function in their councillor or other professional and personal roles. Depression and anxiety were commonly reported and some even reported being suicidal due to the levels of abuse. Some had to seek medical advice to deal with the physiological impacts of stress, and in extreme cases respondents described being so scared of verbal and physical abuse that they stopped going out or would only leave the house if accompanied by someone else.

Due to the public or threatening nature of the abuse, many respondents were concerned for their loved ones. These concerns ranged from family members being distressed by the amount of public abuse directed towards the councillor to fears for their safety or the safety of the family home.

“[Threats have] made me more aware of both mine and others safety and [the] importance of protecting myself and my family home...we all have to be careful.” *Anonymous respondent*

Respondents commented that in small communities it is very easy to identify a councillor’s family members and friends and sometimes they encounter abuse because of this association. These included grandchildren being bullied by other children at school, family members being ostracised from community spaces, and family businesses losing custom. Family members also worried about the councillor’s safety and asked them not to stand for election again.

“ My stress affects my family and I fear that they will be tainted too by the accusations levelled at me. *Anonymous respondent*

Democratic impacts of abuse and intimidation of councillors

To understand the full implications of abuse and intimidation of councillors, it is important consider impacts beyond the immediate and personal to the knock-on impacts on democracy and local representation.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they would stand for election again and 42 per cent said they would stand again and 27 per cent were not decided. 43 per cent of respondents went on to answer a question about whether the possibility of abuse and intimidation had influenced their position on whether to stand again and over two-thirds said it had.

Many respondents added their comments saying that the impact of abuse and intimidation on them personally and their family had directly influenced their decision on whether to stand at the next local election. Some described the lack of structural support for councillors or way to challenge poor behaviour as a contributing factor.

“I could not run in another election ...I would not want to put my family through the stress and anxiety...”

“ Unfortunately in politics it is perceived by some that councillor are ‘fair game’ and should have a thick skin. Even a thick skin can be penetrated. *Anonymous respondent*

Further to this, respondents said that some councillors were resigning before their term had finished and potential candidates were being discouraged from running for election by the levels of abuse. 60 per cent of respondents said they knew others who were unwilling to run for election or take on leadership roles due to anticipated abuse. Elections are naturally highly stressful, but some respondents said that the line between political competition and personal attacks had been crossed.

On the other hand, a few respondents said they found that abuse had spurred them on to “fight harder”, particularly when the abuse related to personal characteristics rather than objections to their policies or decisions. In general, these cases should be taken as the exception not the rule and certainly not an expectation of the majority of councillors. It is therefore still vital that abuse against councillors it treated seriously, and that councils and police challenge the normalisation of this kind of abuse.

Support from relevant agencies and self-protection

As part of the call for evidence respondents described whether and how they sought support for abuse and how relevant agencies, such as the police, council officers and political parties, responded when they ask for help or reported an incident. This helped clarify the range of opinions, approaches and responses that councillors experience when they seek support to handle abuse and intimidation and in particular brought out the variety of provision at different councils.

63 per cent of respondents sought support in relation to the abuse they experienced, and many received support from multiple sources. However, out of those who sought support almost a third sought informal support from councillor peers, friends and family and by employing a barrister or solicitor to give legal advice. Respondents were most likely to seek support from their peers but many went to multiple agencies, such as their own political party, council officers or the police over the abuse they experienced. Some looked for support from other sources, including national organisations like the LGA, the Suzy Lamplugh Trust, the Local Government Ombudsman, and social media companies. Some also described handling these issues alone and managing their own personal safety.

When asked how helpful different types of support were, respondents said that support from friends and family was by far the most helpful, followed by peer support. This is particularly challenging finding as friends and family are likely to be the least well equipped to provide effective solutions to public abuse, apart from compassion and empathy. The police and the council were similarly ranked but respondents said they were not as helpful as family and peers. Support from political parties was ranked lowest out of all the options.

There were significant inconsistencies in the level and efficacy of responses to abuse of councillors from relevant agencies. Councillors themselves take a mixture of different approaches to dealing with these issues and responses from relevant agencies were equally mixed. In some cases, respondents reported an excellent experience, with prompt and effective action for those involved.

“Officer and member colleagues were very helpful and supportive. The police were fantastic – took a statement, gave me advice and helped me enhance security at my home, put me on an emergency call list.” *Anonymous respondent*

However, this was not universally the case and a common theme from respondents was a lack of coordination and partnership working between the council and political parties. Some councillors felt they were falling through the gaps between different agencies, with no one taking responsibility for councillor safety and wellbeing.

“Both officers listened and offered me moral support. However, neither have been able to stop the residents’ abuse. The council would not take legal action on my behalf against the worst abuser and advised me against taking a personal case against the individual. The police have seemed powerless to help me. My party haven’t really been of any help... Some members of my family have given me lots of moral support.” *Anonymous respondent*

In general, councillors sought support from their council in relation to misinformation online, abusive communications and physical safety or to request that their personal information, such as home addresses, be removed from the public domain. The response from councils was variable with no one set way of doing things. Some councils focused on equipping councillors to handle abuse and intimidation themselves with training and guidance, while others took a more involved approach, treating councillors similarly to employees and offering lone worker equipment and 24/7 support. Some councils had developed a successful collaborative approach working with political parties and the police to offer support and triage risk to councillors and offering bespoke risk assessments for ward surgery venues and private homes.

“This [incident] happened over a weekend, the chief executive rang me, in fact my phone never stopped ringing, messages of support from the police and senior officers... I felt truly supported by county staff and councillor colleagues.” *Anonymous respondent*

Support for councillors needs to be flexible to the specific situation and context, therefore it is expected that this offer will look different in different places. However, respondents also shared examples where they received little or no support at all and in particular, highlighted the lack of pastoral care available to councillors. It is becoming more common for political parties to actively record and deal with abuse against their members and some councils now allow their councillor to access staff wellbeing and counselling offers. However, many respondents said that council officers told them to ignore abuse and were apathetic towards addressing these incidents, particularly when they took place online.

There was a similar theme around the police classifying abuse against councillors as political or free speech and refusing to get involved as they would with other citizens. Threats against councillors' safety was generally, although not consistently, treated seriously by the police with some form of action being taken. However, this did not always result in a cessation of the threats and abuse or a warning or prosecution and so perpetrators continue with impunity.

A consistent theme from respondent's experiences was that the police often do not consider online abuse as their responsibility and believe that councillors who willingly stand for office should “expect to receive more abuse than a member of the public”. Due to this perception, respondents described not being taken seriously by the police, struggling to get their complaint investigated and consequently no action being taken against the perpetrators. Councillors do expect more abuse than members of the general public and often have very high tolerances for abuse, however, this does not mean abuse should be treated as acceptable or that councillors should not expect police to investigate crimes committed against them. In time, new offences in the Online Safety Bill may improve the police and prosecution response. The bar for criminal sanction has rightly been set very high to ensure legitimate free speech is protected, nevertheless the new offences may act as a deterrent to perpetrators and encourage police to investigate reports of online harm or misinformation more thoroughly.

37 per cent of respondents did not seek support for the abuse they experienced. Some respondents said this was due to the abuse being a “one-off” event or the abuse being at a tolerable level, such that seeking formal support felt

disproportionate. This description adds to the argument that abuse against politicians has become normalised; while abuse may be tolerated, it is still not acceptable.

However, there were some more extreme examples of abuse, intimidation and threats where respondents still did not seek formal support. This was mainly due to a perception that the onus was on them as the victim to protect themselves from abuse and poor behaviour and that there are few or no structural mechanisms in place to protect them from abuse. This feeling was summarised well by a response who said that councillors are “very much left to provide their own security.”

Further to this, some said they had little faith that the council could help them deal with the abuse affecting them. This is borne out to an extent by the 2022 councillor census data, where 45 per cent of councillors did not feel that their council had effective arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour by the public or didn't know what those arrangements were and 37 per cent did not feel that the arrangements their council had in place to protect them personally were effective.

Finally, some councillors commented that some perpetrators were known to have mental health problems and were known to council services and the police. Respondents mentioned that social care teams could be helpful in risk assessing and facilitating interactions between councillors and residents with additional needs to ensure those residents are able to access their elected representative. However, respondents also expressed frustrations that action was often not taken against some perpetrators because of their mental health problems. While a person's mental state may influence their behaviour, this does not lessen the impact abuse has on the victim or threats made by people with mental health problems should be taken as seriously as any other threat.

Councillor safety

Abuse and intimidation form part of a spectrum of abuse which can include very serious assaults and evidence suggests abuse is to be shifting towards the more extreme end of this spectrum. In the recent councillor census less than a third of respondents said that they had never felt at personal risk when fulfilling their role as councillor. Respondents to the call for evidence commented that it felt like abuse was getting worse and risks of running for office were increasing.



Local politics is a far more dangerous place now that it ever was in the past. *Anonymous respondent*

72 per cent of respondents to the survey had taken some action to avoid intimidation and abuse. These actions were usually around moderating or managing planned and unplanned engagement with the public, specifically using the options on social media to block abusive accounts, holding wards surgeries in public buildings, never working alone, and installing home security equipment. Some respondents commented that their approach had been to disengage from social media entirely and move to holding appointment only surgeries or “walking surgeries” held outside.

Over the last few years, high profile incidents like the murder of Jo Cox MP and Sir David Amess MP outside their respective ward surgeries have highlighted the vulnerability of elected politicians to serious assaults. This has rightly reignited concerns about the safety of councillors, mayors and police and crime commissioner and some historic practices that could put them at additional risk, such as the publication of politicians’ home addresses.

As mentioned earlier, there was a centrally coordinated programme of support for MPs following the death of Sir David Amess MP. This was a high-risk period for MPs and there were real concerns for their safety; a direct police response was a reasonable expectation from MPs. However, there was no expectation from central government that police would contact councillors in the same way. Instead, councils worked with their local police forces to reinforce their approaches to councillor safety. This was light touch in some cases, updating and reissuing councillor safety guidance or rerunning training designed to help councillors keep themselves safe. However, others recognised that councillors cannot control everything around them and that other agencies have a clear role in enhancing personal safety councillors are as safe as possible while going about their day-to-day council business.

Leeds City Council, for example, took the step of risk assessing all venues that councillors use as ward surgeries whether or not they were council-owned and worked with the councillors and venue providers to mitigate any risks identified. Many councils now provide personal alarms or systems for councillors to use when they are out in the community, in a person’s home and at their ward surgeries. These alarms vary in functionality, but usually they can provide a way to alert council officers to an incident taking place. Officers can then respond appropriately, starting with a welfare check and escalating to calling the police to attend the councillor’s location if necessary. Some alarm systems can also audio-record what is going on for evidence or have a mechanism to allow the councillor to silently alert the police that they need help.

In the past councils have routinely displayed councillor home addresses on their websites and until March 2019 councillors were required to publicly declare their home address on the ballot paper when they ran for election. Election practice has changed in line with recommendations made by the Committee for Standards in Public Life 2017 and 2019 reports into **Intimidation in public life** [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life>] and **Local government ethical standards** [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-ethical-standards-report>] that making councillors' home addresses public was unnecessary and put them at risk of incidents in their home. Evidence from respondents suggests that just the idea of having to publish a home address can also put people off standing for election and this is out of step with the way we treat personal data in every other sphere of life.

The practice of putting councillor addresses on council websites has reduced as councillors' attitudes have changed. However, councillors may still be required to publicise their home addresses as part of declaring their pecuniary interests on the public register of interests. Councillors may apply for a dispensation from their monitoring officer if they feel disclosing their address would put them or a member of their household at risk of violence. However, the monitoring officer has the discretion to decide whether this test has been met and this has led to inconsistent approaches in different councils. Some monitoring officers have taken the proactive view that all councillors are at risk of violence due to their public role and allow all councillors a dispensation, while others require a specific reason or incident to occur before they will remove an address. Effectively this means that someone could run for election without declaring their address and within 21 days of being elected be required to put it on a public document. Clarity that dispensation may be applied without a specific incident taking place would help create consistency of approach across different councils and reassure prospective councillors that they will have this protection if they are elected. In the view of the LGA, legislative change is required to put this beyond doubt.

Changes to allow councillors to withhold their home addresses from the public register of interests would be in line with changes rules on publishing home addresses for candidates running in elections. Prior to 2018, candidates in local elections were required to declare their home address on the ballot paper; now candidates may choose to opt out of sharing their address. Some councillors still choose to declare their home address. However, feedback from members and safety experts is increasingly moving towards the idea that candidates and councillors' personal information should be protected and that they should have to opt-in to sharing information like homes addresses as is the case with private citizens.  **Page 49**

In recognition of the concerns in the sector and the real risk to councillors, the LGA ran three 'Personal safety for councillors' events for over 500 attendees between December 2021 and March 2022, updated the Councillor guide to handling intimidation, and produced case studies outlining how councils can support councillors with their safety and wellbeing.

Beyond the role of councils, political parties and individual councillors to manage councillor safety, there is a wider issue about how violence and threats against councillors are dealt with by the police. Earlier we mentioned some examples of councillors having excellent experiences where the council and the police worked together to mitigate risks to councillor safety. However, the overwhelming feedback was that concerns raised by councillors were not taken seriously enough or were outright dismissed by police as part and parcel of political life.

Councillors have the same legal rights and protections as any other member of the public and some would argue councillors have an enhanced risk profile when it comes to physical abuse which should be considered when they report abuse, threat and intimidation. Despite this, some believe that the bar for police to investigate and act when a crime is reported appears to have been set higher for councillors.

This should be considered in relation to other elected politicians, such as members of parliament. Members of parliament have a dedicated team based in the Metropolitan Police called the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigations Team to handle crime on the parliamentary estate in Westminster and liaise with Single Points of Contact (SPoC) in local constabularies to deal with crime and security of members of parliament in their home constituencies. This can include doing specialist risk assessments of MPs homes and offices and handling improved security measures like the installation of better locks and lighting and digital doorbells or CCTV.

By comparison there is no single team or functionality in police forces that are equipped with the specialist knowledge required to triage and handle crimes committed against local politicians because of their role as an elected official. In addition, although informal relationships may exist between councils and police in relation to councillor safety this does not always translate into a coordinated approach to addressing crimes against councillors. For example, some police forces will not accept a report of a crime from the council on the councillor's behalf but insist on a report from the councillor as a citizen. This risks taking the complaint out of context and can lead to an incorrect assessment of the associated risks to the complainant. On the other hand, some councils have proactively established partnerships and collaborative forums to ensure there are strong links between local emergency services in case of incidents or emergencies. One council, for example, holds regular

collaborative meetings with the Neighbourhood Safety Team, local police, local fire and rescue service and Police Community Support Team where they share latest intelligence and resources and complete a joint risk assessment for an individual councillor's activities. This can help prevent incidents taking place, but can also support councillors if an incident does occur.

Councils and police services have a duty to work together to formulate and implement strategies to tackle local crime and disorder under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This is usually facilitated through a Community Safety Partnership. So, relationships should already exist that could help to manage crime against councillors. However, this does not always seem to be working. One respondent shared that the only reason their complaint was dealt with was because they mentioned it in passing to the police and crime commissioner and chief constable of the local police force.

Actions to abuse or intimidate councillors stifle democracy and the voice of elected leaders and threats to councillors' personal safety is a crime. We recognise that there is significant pressure on the police and the Crown Prosecution Service and that it is not always appropriate to pursue prosecution for all crime. However, as with MPs, councillors should expect to have their complaints are taken seriously, and for police to use all available and appropriate tools at their disposal against perpetrators.

[1].[\[#_ftnref1\]](#) LGA 2022 Councillor census data

[\[https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022\]](https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022)

Summary and recommendations

The call for evidence has revealed an ongoing issue with abuse and intimidation of councillors and concerns about the safety of local politicians that are having an impact on councillors and local democracy more widely. It is important that we address these issues to ensure that they do not have a detrimental impact on councillors, councils and local democracy in the future.

There are clear gaps and inconsistencies in the support and response mechanisms available to councillors to deal with these issues, including council support, support from political parties and preventative support from local police. There is also evidence of a normalisation and acceptance of abuse of councillors that should be challenged. However, there is some evidence of good practice around risk assessing

ward surgery venues and home locations for councillors, building partnerships with local police, wellbeing support and having clear policies for dealing with communications from abusive residents.

Recommendation 1: Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors' mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors' safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.

Recommendation 2: The LGA should continue to gather and disseminate good practice from across the sector, consider what more can be done to prevent abuse and intimidation of councillors through the Civility in public life programme, and support councils and councillors when these incidents occur.

There is evidence of inconsistency in the response of the police to incidents of abuse, intimidation and aggression towards councillors and a normalisation of unacceptable conduct against politicians. There is also a perception that in some cases the threshold for intervention has been set higher for councillors than other members of the public. However, there were examples of good practices by police who took a proactive and coordinated approach to councillor harassment and safety. This worked best when police took a risk-based approach, took the public nature of the councillor role into account, and used all the powers at their disposal to disrupt abusive behaviour before it became more serious.

Police could consider replicating successful approaches taken with MPs or candidates during elections and providing a specialist Single Point of Contact for councillors in the local police force. Another approach would be having a Safety Liaison Officer as is provided for journalists across many forces in England; SLOs oversee cases related to crime against journalists and intervene only when necessary.

Recommendation 3: Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse of and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that factors in the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country.

The availability of councillors' personal information can make them vulnerable in their own homes and the current legislation lacks clarity in relation to when home addresses can be withheld from the public register of interests. There is also an ongoing presumption that councillors should share their home address, and this can put people off from standing for election. Instead, it may be better for the sector to move towards a presumption that councillors do not share their home addresses publicly and councillors should have to actively 'opt-in' to having this information shared as with private individuals and their personal information.

Recommendation 4: The Government should prioritise legislation to put it beyond doubt that councillors can withhold their home address from the public register of pecuniary interests.

Recommendation 5: The LGA should work with political parties, election and democratic officers, and organisations responsible for guidance to raise awareness of the options currently available and promote the practice of keeping home addresses private during the election process and once elected.

It is clear in the responses from the call for evidence that councillors experience a lot of abuse online and that social media can be a fertile ground for abuse and intimidation. There were significant concerns about the availability of personal information online and how easily online abuse can translate into physical harm. Common concerns were about the cumulative impact of 'pile-on' abuse and how online abuse can transcend traditional boundaries into personal spaces 24 hours a day. The Online Safety Bill currently going through Parliament will aim to better

regulate online spaces through protecting users from illegal and harmful content. The LGA welcome the Bill and will work to ensure it can protect users from harmful abuse and misinformation that might otherwise fall below the criminal level as currently written.

Recommendation 6: Social media companies and internet service providers should acknowledge the democratic significance of local politicians and provide better and faster routes for councillors reporting abuse and misinformation online.

There is currently no clear offer of support or leadership from the Government in relation to the safety of local councillors, despite serious incidents taking place in the last year and concerns about the vulnerability of councillors and the impact of abuse on local democracy. This is in contrast to the centrally coordinated support provided to MPs in relation to abuse, harassment and personal safety.

Recommendation 7: The relevant Government department should convene a working group, in partnership with the LGA, to bring together relevant agencies to develop and implement an action plan to address the issue of abuse of local politicians and their safety.

More publications about Communities

[Debate Not Hate: The impact of abuse on local democracy](#) [\[publications/debate-not-hate-impact-abuse-local-democracy\]](#)

[National census of local authority councillors 2022](#) [\[publications/national-census-local-authority-councillors-2022\]](#)

[Polling on resident satisfaction with councils: Round 32 - June 2022](#) [\[publications/polling-resident-satisfaction-councils-round-32-june-2022\]](#)

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Debate not hate

Across the UK, there are growing concerns about the impact an increasing level of public intimidation and toxicity of debate is having on our country's democratic processes.

One of the most pressing concerns facing those in public office at the moment is the increasing incidents of public intimidation and abuse. These attacks risk the personal safety of elected members, undermine local democracy and decision-making, and can put off prospective candidates from standing.

While debate and having different views is all part of a healthy democracy; abuse, public intimidation and threats are designed to undermine democratic decision making by generating fear in those who represent it.

Responding to these concerns, the Local Government Association (LGA) is leading on 'civility in public life' campaign which has formed part of the work programme for Coventry City Council's Ethics Committee this year.

Working with the LGA, a range of advice and assets have been created to help and advise members – particularly those using social media – of good practice and tips on how best to act when faced with such issues.

For more information visit the members' pages on the intranet.

Handling online abuse



Rule 1:

Set expectations – point people to your rules and apply them consistently (see example below)



Rule 2:

Lead by example – do not post comments that could be considered abusive and never post false or unverified information



Rule 3:

Defuse conflict – waiting to respond can take the heat out of situations



Rule 4:

Know when to step back – remember you do not have to engage with abusive or threatening behaviour. Set the record straight with factual information if you wish, but step away when you want to



Rule 5:

Understand privacy settings – there is a range of settings to help you manage who can see or comment on your posts



Rule 6:

Record abuse – screenshot comments and keep a record of threatening or abusive communications



Rule 7:

Report serious issues – if you feel unable to deal with online abuse yourself or have any concerns about your safety, report this to the council or to police

An example of the downloadable asset available on the members' intranet pages:

Debate not hate

Welcome to my Facebook page, which aims to communicate my activities as a councillor.

If you wish to be part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.



Rule 1:

Debate and disagreement are welcome but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.



Rule 2:

Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.



Rule 3:

Posts should not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.



Rule 4:

Posts should not spread false or unverified information.



Rule 5:

For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.



If any of these rules are broken, I reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report the content to the police if necessary.



It may not be possible to respond to all questions due to time constraints. If you do have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.

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Ethics Committee

29 September 2022

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A- Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Six Monthly Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality (including declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year)

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report sets out details of declarations of gifts and hospitality made by Members for the period 1 January to 30 June 2022 as well as the entirety of Member Declarations in relation to the City of Culture Year. The Committee reviewed the gifts and hospitality register entries received from 1 July to 31 December 2021 at its meeting on 5 April 2022. The Committee is asked to consider the most recent declarations.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to consider the gifts and hospitality register entries received from 1 January to 30 June 2022 as well as the entirety of Member Declarations in relation to the City of Culture Year and to make any recommendations that it considers appropriate.

List of Appendices included:

- Appendix 1: General Declarations of gifts and hospitality received between 1 January to 30 June 2022
- Appendix 2: City Of Culture Declarations of gifts and hospitality received between 1 January to 30 June 2022
- Appendix 3: Table of all Members City of Culture Declarations from 2021- 2022

Other useful background papers:

Six Monthly Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality from 1 July to 31 December 2021 (agenda item 24):

<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=161&MId=12536&Ver=4>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Six Monthly Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality

1. Context (or background)

1.1 The Ethics Committee has, as part of its Work Programme, decided to review on a regular basis the declarations of gifts and hospitality made by Members. Appendices 1 and 2 contain copies of all declarations received from Members from 1 January to 30 June 2022. Appendix 3 contains the entirety of Member Declarations in relation to the City of Culture Year.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

2.1 The declarations received between 1 January to 30 June 2022 have been separated into two categories and are attached as follows:

- 1) General Declarations (Appendix 1) – 9 forms from 4 Councillors;
- 2) City Of Culture Declarations (Appendix 2) – 9 forms from 6 Councillors; and

2.2 In total 18 forms have been received from 10 elected Members. There have been no requests by members of the public to view the register during this time.

2.3 A Table of all Members' City of Culture Declarations for Coventry's City of Culture year has been attached at Appendix 3.

2.2 The Committee is recommended to consider the declarations made in the first six months of 2022 as well as the entirety of Member Declarations in relation to the City of Culture Year and to make any recommendations that it considers appropriate.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 None.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

Any recommendations of the Committee will be implemented within an appropriate time frame.

5. Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

Members are required to declare Gifts and Hospitality under section 4 of the Code of Conduct for Elected Members at Part 4 of the Council's Constitution. Whilst there is

currently no statutory requirement for members to declare in this way, maintaining a process and register aids transparency and assists the Council in promoting and maintaining high standards of ethical behaviour as is required under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

6 Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's Plan?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report, but a failure to implement and maintain a system of Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality can impact on the organisation's ethical behaviour and transparency.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

The routine declaration of gifts and hospitality received should assist in protecting Elected Members from unfounded allegations of bias and facilitate good and clear transparent decision making.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage

Report author(s): Julie Newman

Name and job title: Monitoring Officer, Director of Law and Governance

Directorate: Law and Governance

Tel and email contact: 024 7697 7271 julie.newman@coventry.gov.uk

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Service Area	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Sarah Harriott	Corporate Governance Solicitor	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Graham Clark	Lead	Finance	20.09.22	20.09.22

	Accountant			
Julie Newman	Director of Law and Governance	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Cllr S Nazir	Chair of Ethics Committee		20.09.22	20.09.22

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Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

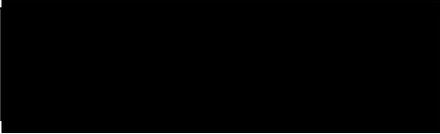
Name of Elected Member	Cllr George Duggins
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Leader of Coventry City Council
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	Saturday 12 th February 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Wasps
Full details of what was received	2 x tickets to Wasps Vs Bath and hospitality.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£150
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To represent the City Council as Leader.
Signature of member:	
Date:	14/02/22

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

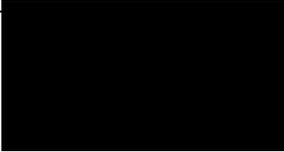
Name of Elected Member	Councillor Ridley
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Leader of the Conservative Group (Leader of the Opposition).
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	26/2/22
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Coventry City Football Club
Full details of what was received	Attendance at Coventry City FC v Preston North End at the CBS Arena in the boardroom.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	In excess of £200.00, offered as 'complimentary' with no guide price so this is an estimate.
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To foster improved relations between the club and the council following the end of protracted legal proceedings.
Signature of member:	
Date:	05.03.22

Reviewed September 2021

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

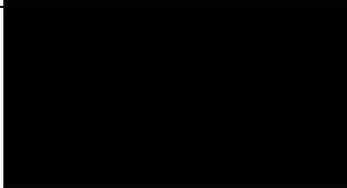
Name of Elected Member	Councillor Ridley
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Leader of the Conservative Group (Leader of the Opposition).
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	15/4/22
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Ian Dutton Managing Director, Birmingham City FC
Full details of what was received	Attendance at Birmingham City v Coventry City FC in the boardroom.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	In excess of £200.00, offered as 'complimentary' with no guide price so this is an estimate.
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To represent the city at a key local sporting event and build links with other key regional stakeholders.
Signature of member:	
Date:	25.04.22

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Cllr George Duggins
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Leader of Coventry City Council
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	Friday 22 nd April 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Wasps
Full details of what was received	2 tickets to Wasps Hall of Fame Dinner
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£125 per ticket
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Representing the Council as the Leader and maintaining the relationship with a key partner.
Signature of member:	
Date:	25/04/2022

September 2015

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

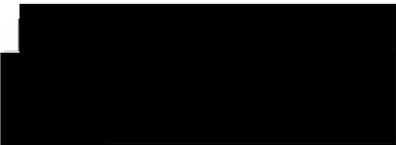
Name of Elected Member	Councillor Abdul Salam Khan
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Policing and Equalities
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	22 nd April 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Wasps RFC
Full details of what was received	Wasps Legends Dinner for myself and a guest.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£90 (3 course banquet menu at £35 per person plus soft drinks)
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To represent the City Council as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for events at the Wasps Hall of Fame 2022 Dinner.
Signature of member: Date: 4 th May 2022	

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

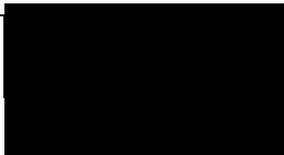
Name of Elected Member	Councillor Pervez Akhtar
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Deputy Cabinet Member, Policing and Equalities
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	11 th May 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Wasps RFC
Full details of what was received	Wasps Dinner for myself.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£45 (3 course banquet menu at £35 per person plus soft drinks)
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To represent the City Council as Deputy Cabinet Member for events at the Wasps End of Season Awards Evening, 2022.
Signature of member: Date: 11 th May 2022	

September 2015

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

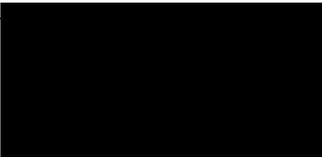
Name of Elected Member	Councillor Abdul Salam Khan
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member, Policing and Equalities
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	11 th May 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Wasps RFC
Full details of what was received	Wasps Dinner for myself.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£45 (3 course banquet menu at £35 per person plus soft drinks)
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To represent the City Council as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for events at the Wasps End of Season Awards Evening, 2022.
Signature of member: Date: 11 th May 2022	

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Ram Lakha
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Chair of Audit & Committee
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	19 th May 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Emma Driver – Coventry Music
Full details of what was received	Cultural Cantata Big Singing Event Invitation for 28 th June
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£5.00 per ticket
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Special invite sent to Cllr
Signature of member:	
Date:	10.06.22

Reviewed September 2021

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Cllr George Duggins
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Leader of Coventry City Council
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	Friday 20 th May 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Wasps
Full details of what was received	A ticket to Wasps vs Sale plus hospitality.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£75.00
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Representing the Council as the Leader and maintaining the relationship with a key partner.
Signature of member:	
Date:	23 rd May 2022

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Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	ANGELA HOPKINS
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Elected Member
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	19/05 05/06/2021
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	CITY OF CULTURE
Full details of what was received	Invitation to participate in Coventry Moves with Women Cllrs
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	NIL
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Representing women elected to office as part of City of Culture opening.
Signature of member:	
Date:	19/05/22

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	ANGELA HOPKINS
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	ELECTED MEMBER
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	27/10/2021
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	CITY OF CULTURE
Full details of what was received	TICKET AND HOSPITALITY AT THE WALK - COVENTRY EMBRACES
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	TICKETS - NIL HOSPITALITY - APPROX. £7
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	To meet with representatives of City of Culture in and local dignitaries to meet Little Amal, the puppet representing refugee children who travelled from Syria
Signature of member:	
Date:	19/05/2022

Reviewed September 2021

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Patricia Hetherton
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Cabinet Member for City Services
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	5 th December 2021
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Organisers of MOBO Awards
Full details of what was received	1 x ticket to attend MOBO Awards including entrance, dinner and refreshments
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£120
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Representing the Council as Cabinet Member.
Signature of member:	
Date:	27 th April 2022

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Ram Lakha
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Chair of Audit & Procurement Committee - Labour Party
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	13 th April 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Emma Segal, Development Events Manager, Coventry City of Culture Trust
Full details of what was received	Invitation to VIP Launch Party of The Reel Store.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	Estimated £50.00 (taking into account ticket cost, catering and bar).
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Invited to attend by Coventry City of Culture Trust
Signature of member:	
Date:	04.05.22

Reviewed September 2021

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Peter Male
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	13 th April 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Emma Segal, Development Events Manager, Coventry City of Culture Trust
Full details of what was received	Invitation to VIP Launch Party of The Reel Store.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	Estimated £50.00 (taking into account ticket cost, catering and bar).
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Invited to attend by Coventry City of Culture Trust
Signature of member:	
Date:	21.04.22

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Gary Ridley
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Leader of the Conservative Party
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	13 th April 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Emma Segal, Development Events Manager, Coventry City of Culture Trust
Full details of what was received	Invitation to VIP Launch Party of The Reel Store.
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	Estimated £50.00 (taking into account ticket cost, catering and bar).
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Invited to attend by Coventry City of Culture Trust
Signature of member:	
Date:	26.04.22

Reviewed September 2021

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Peter Male
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	11 th May 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Chenine Bhathena, Creative Director, Coventry City of Culture Trust
Full details of what was received	3 x Tickets The Awakening by Gratte Ciel, Saturday 14 May
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	xx
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Invited to attend the event as Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group.
Signature of member:	
Date:	

Reviewed September 2021

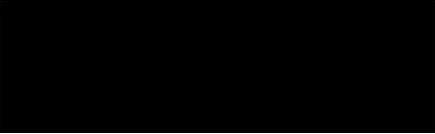
Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

	24.05.22
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Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Cllr Linda Bigham
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Elected Member
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	Received: 24 May 2022 Made in Dagenham the Musical – x2 VIP tickets at Warwick Arts Centre on 17 June 2022 at 7.30pm
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Three Spires Guildhall Musical Theatre Invitation from the President A. Clive Benfield
Full details of what was received	Invite to VIP night plus guest on 17 June 2022
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	Value of tickets - £21 pp
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Support for Coventry's leading amateur musical society. Show is based on the film about the struggle for equal pay and conditions by the female upholstery machinists at the Ford Dagenham factory.
Signature of member:	Linda Bigham
Date:	27.05.22

Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality under Members' Code of Conduct

Name of Elected Member	Councillor Peter Male
Position held e.g. cabinet member, shadow cabinet member, elected member etc.	Deputy Leader of the Conservative Party
Date on which gift or hospitality was offered and received or accepted	25 th May 2022
Person or organisation offering or providing the gift or hospitality and link to the Council if appropriate	Clive Benfield, President, Three Spires Guildhall
Full details of what was received	2 x tickets - VIP night - Three Spires Guildhall 'Made in Dagenham – The Musical', at the Warwick Arts Centre on 16 th June 2022 at 19.30pm
Actual cost or estimated cost e.g. face value of tickets, price of set menu at venue etc.	£18.00 per ticket – totalling £36.00
Justification for accepting the gift or hospitality	Invited to attend the event as Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group.
Signature of member:	
Date:	10.06.22

Reviewed September 2021

City of Culture 2022

Event	Date	Councillor	Estimated Cost Per Person	Amount of tickets
Coventry Moves	05/06/2021	Cllr A Hopkins	£0	
Assembly Gardens – Partner Night	08/07/2021	Cllr L Bigham	£17	X2
Circolombia	08/07/2021	Cllr P Seaman	£25	X2
		Cllr G Duggins	£25	X2
Choir of Man	08/07/2021	Cllr B Gittins	£25	X2
Show 360	20/08/2021	Cllr R Lakha	£40	X1
Coventry Embraces	27/10/2021	Cllr A Hopkins	£7	X1
Turner Prize	01/12/2021	Cllr P Male	£60	X1
MOBO Awards	05/12/2021	Cllr A S Khan	£120	X1
		Cllr P Akhtar	£120	X1
		Cllr K Caan	£120	X1
		Cllr G Duggins	£120	X1
		Cllr K Sandhu	£120	X1
		Cllr P Hetherton	£120	X1
Damon Albarn	07/12/2021	Cllr J Innes	£18	X2
Ghosts in the ruin	18/01/2022	Cllr P Male	£52	X1
	26/02/2022	Cllr G Ridley		
Launch party Reel Store	13/04/2022	Cllr P Male	£50	X1

	13/04/2022	Cllr G Ridley	£50	X1
		Cllr P Lakha	£50	X1
The Awakening of Gratta Ciel	11/05/2022	Cllr P Male	N/A	X3
Dagenham Musical	24/05/2022	Cllr L Bigham	£36	X1
		Cllr P Male	£36	X1
		Cllr G Ridley	£36	X1



Ethics Committee

29 September 2022

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A- Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality (including declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year)

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

In its work programme, the Committee has decided to review entries in the Registers of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality every six months. This report sets out the entries in the Registers for the period 1 January to 30 June 2022 and all Gifts and Hospitality received by Officers in relation to the Coventry City of Culture Year.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to consider the entries of gifts and hospitality received by officers for the first six months of 2022, as well as all Gifts and Hospitality received by Officers in relation to the Coventry City of Culture Year, and make any recommendations that it considers appropriate.

Appendices included:

Appendix 1: Table of Gifts and Hospitality received by Officers: 1 January to 30 June 2022

Appendix 2: Table of Gifts and Hospitality received by Officers in relation to the Coventry City of Culture Year: 1 January to 30 June 2022

Appendix 2: Table of all Gifts and Hospitality received by Officers related to the Coventry City of Culture Year

Other useful background papers:

Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality from 1 July to 31 December 2021 (agenda item 25):

<https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=161&MId=12536&Ver=4>

Has it been, or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been, or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Committee's work programme includes an item for this meeting to review entries on the registers of officer gifts and hospitality every six months.
- 1.2 The Code of Conduct for Employees sets out the requirements for employees when being offered or accepting gifts or hospitality. The basic rules are:
 - (a) *Gifts*
 - Personal gifts should never be accepted unless they are modest and are of token value (less than £50). The manager's permission must be obtained
 - Items such as coffee mugs, diaries, calendars, pens or other promotional materials can be retained if they are in use in the office and can be considered to form part of the general mailings of a company.
 - Where small gifts, such as chocolates, are given as thanks for a service provided, these can be accepted if they are shared within the Team or raffled for charity.
 - Gifts worth more than £50 should be refused. If this is not possible, the manager should dispose of them to charity and record the fact in the register.
 - (b) *Hospitality*
 - Hospitality consisting of light refreshments, working lunch or other meals which are part of a visit, conference, meeting or promotional exercise is acceptable.
 - Invitations to social events offered as part of normal working life, or where the Council should be seen to be represented, may be accepted if authorised in advance by the appropriate Assistant Director.
 - Invitations to other types of hospitality which are not directly linked to the City Council's functions should not be accepted.

The rules relating to gifts and hospitality were amended by the Committee in July 2016 and those changes were accepted by full Council in September 2016.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Directorates have been asked to provide details of gifts and hospitality received during the first 6 months of 2022. The position for each directorate is set out in the Table in the Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.2 Gifts and Hospitality received by Officers in relation to the Coventry City of Culture Year: 1 January to 30 June 2022 are set out in the Table in the Appendix 2 to this report.
- 2.3 As requested by the Ethics Committee declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year in their entirety have also been included in this report and are set out in the Table in the Appendix 3 to this report.
- 2.4 The Committee is recommended to make any recommendations that it considers appropriate.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

Each Directorate was asked to provide details of their registers.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Not applicable.

5. Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and the Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. However, reviewing the gifts and hospitality offered to employees on a regular basis will help to demonstrate that the Council continues to monitor and review ethical standards within the Council.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's Plan?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Reviewing gifts and hospitality received by employees will help to reduce the risk of acceptance of inappropriate gifts or hospitality.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Keeping matters such as this under review will help to promote high standards amongst elected members and employees in accordance with the Localism Act.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage

Report author(s): Julie Newman

Name and job title: Monitoring Officer, Director of Law and Governance

Directorate: Law and Governance

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Service Area	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Usha Patel	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Sarah Harriott	Corporate Governance Solicitor	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Graham Clark	Lead Accountant		20.09.22	20.09.22
Julie Newman	Director of Law and Governance	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Cllr S Nazir	Chair, Ethics Committee		20.09.22	20.09.22

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APPENDIX 1: REGISTER OF OFFICER GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY 1 JANUARY 2022 TO 30 JUNE 2022

Officer	Date	Description	G or H?	£	Provided by	Justification	Any conflict or future tender?	Approved by	Date
Senior Leadership Team									
Chief Operating Officer	10th and 11th March 2022	Society of Municipal Treasurers AGM and Conference	H	£200	The Society of Municipal Treasurers	This is a professional organisation for Local Authority Section 151 officers which provides access to networks, analysis and information.	No - SMT is not an organisation that provides services.	Chief Executive	05.05.22
People									
Social Worker	11.05.22	Foster carers that Lyndsey works with provided her with a card which has £25 meal voucher inside. Lyndsey tried to refuse this however they were adamant that they wanted her to have this citing that they would have been unable to get through this difficult period without her.	G	£25	Internal Coventry City Council Foster Carers	Challenging period, did not want to be rude by refusing	No the foster carers supervising social worker will be notified	Team Leader	12.05.22
Consultant in Public Health	20.05.22	Love2Shop voucher from the DISC Study team	G	£50	Dr Nushrat Khan Senior Research	Involvement in research - my own time but within working day. Council's willingness to	No	Director of Public Health	23.05.22

					Fellow, GOS Institute of Child Health Research Fellow, Institute of Health Informatics University College London	be involved in research - no request for payments made			
Place									
Lawyer, Legal and Procurement Services	07.05.22	Ticket to the Birmingham Black Lawyers Summer Ball held on 16 July 2022, Eastside Rooms, Woodcock Street, Birmingham	H	£75	Trowers & Hamlins Law Firm (Trowers and Hamlins are one of the Sponsors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the City Council at a high profile event within the West Midlands • Opportunity to network within the industry 	No	Director of Law and Governance	23.05.22
Trainee Lawyer, Legal and Procurement Services	07.05.22	Ticket to the Birmingham Black Lawyers Summer Ball held on 16 July 2022, Eastside Rooms, Woodcock Street, Birmingham	H	£75	Trowers & Hamlins Law Firm (Trowers and Hamlins are one of the Sponsors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the City Council at a high profile event within the West Midlands • Opportunity to network within the industry 	No	Director of Law and Governance	23/05.22
Systems Lead	14.06.22	Was offered a prize for being the most engaged at the conference. Consisted of bars of chocolate, a mug and hot chocolate powder	G	Circa £20	Bromcom staff member	Gift refused	Possibly, company may be involved in tender exercise in Autumn 2022. Officer involved is not decision	Head of ICT and Digital	16.06.22

							maker but will coordinate project.		
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City of Culture 2022

Event	Date	Officer	Estimated Cost Per Person	Amount of tickets
Choir of Man	01/07/2021	Strategic Lead of City of Culture	£15	X1
	27/08/2021	Project Manager	£15	X1
	27/08/2021	Strategic Lead, City Centre	£15	X1
Ed Sheeran	25/08/2021	Director of Business, Investment & Culture	£50	X1
	25/08/2021	CEO	£50	X1
Turner Prize gala dinner	01/12/2021	CEO	£75	X1
	01/12/2021	Director of Business, Investment & Culture	£75	X1
	0/12/2021	Strategic Lead of City of Culture	£75	X1
MOBO	05/12/2021	Strategic Lead of City of Culture		
		Director of Business, Investment & Culture		
Ghost in the ruins	27/01/2022	Strategic Lead of City of Culture	£15	X1

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APPENDIX 1: REGISTER OF OFFICER GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY 1 JANUARY 2022 TO 30 JUNE 2022 (CITY OF CULTURE DECLARATIONS)

Officer	Date	Description	G or H?	£	Provided by	Justification	Any conflict or future tender?	Approved by	Date
Strategic Lead – City of Culture, Acting Head of Sport, Culture & Destination	27.01.22	Ghost in the Ruins performance	G	£15	City of Culture Trust	Promote event of civic interest and support City of Culture agenda, including hosting of city visitors from key partners.	No	Director of Business, Investment & Culture	11.02.22

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Ethics Committee

29 September 2022

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Code of Conduct Update

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report updates the Ethics Committee on any national issues in relation to the ethical behaviour of elected members and the local position in Coventry with regard to Code of Conduct issues.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the position with regard to matters concerning local authorities nationally;
and
2. Note the local position relating to the operation of the Council's Code of Conduct and to delegate any actions arising from these to the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Code of Conduct Update

1. Context (or background)

1.1 The Council's Ethics Committee has agreed that the Monitoring Officer will provide a regular update on cases relating to the Members' Code of Conduct on a national basis. This is to facilitate the Ethics Committee's role in assisting the Council with its duties under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of Member conduct.

1.2 The National Picture

1.2.1 Mayor of London, Greater London Authority (GLA)

The Mayor of London issued a press statement on 4 May 2022 - the day before elections for London's 32 boroughs - that service on the delayed Elizabeth Line would begin on 24 May.

The Transport Secretary, complained to the Monitoring Officer that he had made an improper announcement during the pre-election period (also known as *purdah*).

The Monitoring Officer for GLA has confirmed that the complaint will be investigated in accordance with its procedure.

1.2.2 Councillor D, Eden District Council, Cumbria

Eden District Council found Cllr D had breached the local authority's Code of Conduct over posts he published on Twitter and his blog.

However, the Councillor said that the content of the Twitter post was "not aligned to my role as a councillor and was a personal expression of a view and opinion". The Councillor has now sent a pre-action protocol letter to Eden District Council after alleging that its Code of Conduct assessments did not follow Local Government Association Guidance and the findings regarding comments he made online amounted to a breach of his human rights, particularly the right to Freedom of Expression.

Eden District Council in a statement confirmed that it stood by its decision and will respond to the pre-action letter.

Further updates will be provided as and when reported.

1.2.3 Unidentified Councillor, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council

Councillors were considering an application for the construction of retirement living apartments during a Planning Committee meeting at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council when it came to the attention of the Monitoring Officer (MO) that an

unidentified document, that was not part of the Planning papers was being handed out amongst Members.

The MO immediately adjourned the meeting to investigate and conducted interviews with each Committee Member in respect of procedural irregularities. The MO concluded that the document circulated was a previous plan from 2020 which did not form any part of the application before the committee.

During the investigation it became apparent that a Member lacked: "the requisite skills and understanding of the planning process". The Member was removed from the Committee and will be provided with further training.

The MO concluded that the integrity of the planning process had not been undermined and the committee members had not been influenced by the plan being shared.

The application has been "struck through" and the process will now start again afresh in September, to ensure transparency.

1.2.4 Former Councillor D, Pembrokeshire County Council

Former Councillor D has been disqualified from holding office as a Councillor for three years by the Adjudication Panel for Wales (Welsh cases being centrally adjudicated) after having made false accusations against fellow Members. A finding was made that former Councillor D breached the Code of Conduct in five separate incidents that concerned false accusations and posting misinformation online including a false accusation of a Councillor sharing a pornographic video of a girl under the age of 17 (which was repeated), accusing a member of the public of being an ex-offender and accusing another member of the public of being a sex offender.

In response to complaints concerning former Councillor D, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales conducted an investigation into his behaviour. It told the hearing that the former Councillor misled the investigation by fabricating posts on social media. This also amounted to a breach of the Code of Conduct, the tribunal concluded.

The tribunal decided by unanimous decision that former Councillor D, should be disqualified for three years from being or becoming a member of Pembrokeshire County Council or of any other relevant authority.

The former Councillor did not appear at the tribunal, nor was he represented.

1.3 The local picture

Complaints under the Code of Conduct

- 1.3.1** The Ethics Committee has requested that the Monitoring Officer report regularly on any complaints received relating to Members of Coventry City Council.

- 1.3.2** The Monitoring Officer has received 5 complaints since the date of the last meeting (30 June 2022) as at the date this report was written). In four cases the Chief Executive and Monitoring officer have decided to take no further action. A Stage 1 Decision Notice is pending on the remaining complaint.
- 1.3.3** The Monitoring Officer will update the Committee on any further complaints received before the meeting and progress on those already received.
- 1.3.4** All complaints are handled in accordance with the agreed Complaints Protocol. No findings have been made by the Local Government Ombudsman in relation members of Coventry City Council.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

Members of the Committee are asked to:

1. Note the position with regard to matters concerning local authorities nationally;
2. Note the local position relating to the operation of the Council's Code of Conduct and to delegate any actions arising from these to the City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

There has been no consultation as there is no proposal to implement at this stage which would require a consultation.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

Any actions arising from this report will be implemented as soon as possible.

5. Comments from the Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

6 Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impact at this stage

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage

Report author(s): Julie Newman

Name and job title: Monitoring Officer, Director of Law and Governance

Directorate: Law and Governance

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Service Area	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	07.09.22	09.09.22
Sarah Harriott	Corporate Governance Solicitor	Law and Governance	07.09.22	09.09.22

Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Graham Clark	Lead Accountant	Finance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Councillor S Nazir	Chair of Ethics Committee		20.09.22	20.09.22

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Ethics Committee

29 September 2022

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

None

**Title: Local Government Association Briefing on Changes to Disqualification
Criteria for Councillors**

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

The Terms of Reference of the Ethics Committee under the Constitution at Part 2E - Functions of Ethics Committee, paragraph 4 a) and i) are as follows:

The Ethics Committee will have the following terms of reference:-

- (a) Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Elected Members and co-opted Members;...**
- (i) Considering any other matters which are relevant to the ethical governance of the Council, its Members or Employees.**

In light of the above, this report is to advise the Committee that the Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022 came into force on 28 June. From this date, individuals subject to the notification requirements in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 (on the sex offenders register) or to Sexual Risk Orders, are disqualified from holding elected office or standing for election as councillors.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the content of the briefing released by the Local Government Association and the changes to the law.

List of Appendices included:

- A. The Local Government Association briefing on the Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022, 4 August 2022:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/local-government-disqualification-act-2022>

Other useful background papers can be found at the following web addresses:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Local Government Association Briefing on Changes to Disqualification Criteria for Councillors

1. Context (or background)

- 1.2 The Local Government Association (LGA) has issued a briefing on the updates to the Local Government (Disqualification) Act 2022 (the “Act”).
- 1.3 The Act updates the disqualification criteria for local authority Members to explicitly disqualify individuals who are subject to relevant notification requirements or orders due to sexual offences such as Sexual Harm Prevention Orders and Sexual Risk Orders from standing for or remaining in office.
- 1.4 Previously a Councillor would be disqualified from standing for election or holding public office if they had been convicted of any offence and had received a sentence of imprisonment (suspended or not) for a period of no less than three months or more in the five-year period before the relevant election.
- 1.5 Recently new offences and sentencing regimes were implemented, meaning that some sexual offences, registration on the Sex Offenders Register and other offences such as anti-social behaviour do not result in a custodial sentence, eg they might require a notification or an Order may be made. Therefore, Councillors convicted of offences, which previously would have resulted in disqualification, were able to retain their role if elected or run for election even if recently convicted.
- 1.6 The Act updates the disqualification criteria so that sexual offences that had unintentionally fallen out of the scope of the disqualification criteria were brought back into scope.
- 1.7 The Act is not retrospective, meaning its disqualification will not apply to a person subject to any relevant notification requirements or a relevant order before 28 June 2022.
- 1.8 Candidates for election to local government must declare they are not disqualified from standing using prescribed 'Consent to Nomination' forms at nomination. The briefing highlights that it is a criminal offence to make a false statement on nomination papers.

2. Implications

- 2.1 Councillors convicted of sexual and other offences meeting the criteria of the Act **during their term of office** are automatically disqualified from being a Member of the Council. The wording at section 1 states the following:

A person is disqualified for being elected or **being a member** of a local authority in England if the person is subject to—
(a) any relevant notification requirements, or
(b) a relevant order.

2.2 Currently section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that if an individual has been convicted and received a prison sentence (or suspended sentence) of three months or more in the five years before the election, they are unable to stand in the election and if they are in office, they are no longer a Member and must wait 5 years before standing again (ie they must step down). This applies to all offences of whatever nature and would include "Public Order" offences.

This '5 year rule' applies even if the prison (or suspended) sentence becomes "spent". This is because of section 7 (1)(d) of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Conversely the disqualification criteria do not currently apply if 5 years have passed and the conviction is classed as "unspent".

As at the time of writing updates are awaited to section 80 of the Local Government Act 1972 in respect of the 5 year period in relation to the new disqualification criteria in the Act, namely how long a Member can be prevented from standing again and whether "spent" / "unspent" convictions are taken into account.

This issue will be brought back to the Ethics Committee again as and when more information is obtained.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

The Committee are asked to:

1. Note the content of the briefing released by the Local Government Association and the changes to the law.

4. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 There has been no consultation as there is no proposal to implement at this stage which would require a consultation.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Any actions arising from this report will be implemented as soon as possible.

5. Comments from Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

6 Other implications

None.

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

No direct impact at this stage.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage.

Report author: Julie Newman

Name and job title: Julie Newman, City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

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Contributors:				
Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	07.09.22	09.09.22
Sarah Harriott	Corporate Governance Solicitor	Law and Governance	07.09.22	09.09
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Graham Clark	Lead Accountant – Business Partnering	Finance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Councillor S Nazir	Chair of Ethics Committee		20.09.22	20.09.22

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Ethics Committee

29 September 2022

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A- Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law and Governance

Ward(s) affected:

Not applicable

Title:

Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2022/23

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report sets out the previously approved work programme for the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2022/23. The Committee is asked to consider the work programme and make any suggestions for additional or alternative reports.

Recommendations:

The Ethics Committee is recommended to review the Work Programme attached as Appendix 1 and make any changes or amendments that the Committee considers appropriate.

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1: Work Programme

Other useful background papers:

None

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Work Programme for the Ethics Committee for 2022/23

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 The Committee's Terms of Reference are set out in the Council's Constitution and include the consideration of matters which are relevant to the ethical governance of the Council, its members or employees. This report attaches the previously approved programme of work for the Committee, designed to assist the Committee to meet its objectives set out in the Terms of Reference, and to ensure that the Council complies with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst elected and co-opted members.
- 1.2 The Committee's work programme takes account of the need to promote standards and addresses this in a number of ways. It is flexible in terms of suggestions from members of the Ethics Committee as to additional or substitute areas which they would want to consider and receive reports on.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Work Programme was approved by the Committee at its meeting on 5 April 2022 with the inclusion of the following items:
- 1) The Government's response to the recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life regarding ethics in local government.**
 - 2) Members' and Officers' declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year and the Commonwealth Games 2022.**
- 2.2 The Committee is asked to consider whether there are any other matters that they would want to consider during the year or items that they would want to defer.

2.3 Recommendation

The Ethics Committee is recommended to review the work programme attached as Appendix 1 and make any changes or amendments the Committee considers appropriate.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

None

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 Not applicable

5. Comments from Comments from Chief Operating Officer (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Governance

5.1 Financial implications

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

5.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report, as there is no statutory obligation on the Committee to adopt a work programme. However, the Council must comply with its obligations under section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 and the continuation of a clear programme of work would assist in compliance for the Council as a whole, in its duty to promote high standards of ethical conduct.

6. Other implications

None

6.1 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

Not applicable.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

If implemented, the work programme will facilitate the promotion of high standards amongst elected members in accordance with the Localism Act.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None at this stage

Report author(s): Sarah Harriott

Name and job title: Sarah Harriott, Corporate Governance Solicitor, Regulatory Team, Legal Services

Directorate: Law and Governance

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Contributor/approver name	Title	Directorate or organisation	Date doc sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	07.09.22	09.09.22
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Graham Clark		Finance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Legal: Julie Newman	City Solicitor and Monitoring Officer	Law and Governance	20.09.22	20.09.22
Councillor S Nazir	Chair: Ethics Committee		20.09.22	20.09.22

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Appendix 1

Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2022/23

Meeting no. and date	Topics
2022/3	
1. September 2022	
	Monitoring Officer/Code of Conduct/ Members Complaints Update
	Officers Gifts and Hospitality -Inspection of Registers for first 6 months of 2022 (to include declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year)
	Members Gifts and Hospitality -Declarations for first 6 months of 2022 (to include declarations of gifts and hospitality following the City of Culture 2021 Year)
	Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship Review
	Disqualification of Councillors - Update to Legislation
	Work Programme 2022/23
2. December 2022	
	Monitoring Officer / Code of Conduct / Members Complaints Update
	Local Government Ombudsman Annual Report
	Annual Report on Parish Councils
	Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report
	Officer / Member Protocol Review
	Work Programme 2022/23
3. March 2023	
	Monitoring Officer/Code of Conduct/ Members Complaints Update.
	Officers Gifts and Hospitality -Inspection of Registers for last 6 months of 2022 (to include declarations of gifts and hospitality following the Commonwealth Games 2022)
	Members Gifts and Hospitality -Declarations for last 6 months of 2022 (to include declarations of gifts and hospitality following the Commonwealth Games 2022)
	Work Programme 2023/24