

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 10.00 am on
Thursday, 30 March 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor M Mutton (Substitute for Councillor Welsh)

Independent Members: A Barton, R Wills, P Wiseman

Employees (by Service):

Human Resources N Powell

Law and Governance J Newman (Chief Legal Officer), S Harriott, T Robinson,
M Salmon

Apologies: Councillor D Welsh

Public Business

33. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

34. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2022 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Further to minutes 24 and 26, the Committee requested that, after the Local Elections have taken place on 4th May 2023, communication be made with Political Groups regarding cross party representation on the Committee.

35. "Civility Matters" - Grievance and Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer that outlined how Human Resources were introducing 'Civility Matters' into two of 'people' policies and procedures as part of the ongoing work to embed the values into the organisational culture.

Civility Matters was a campaign that initially began at Coventry and Warwick Hospital that has subsequently widened within the NHS and showed the benefits to service delivery that could be gained from engaging positively, using appropriate language when carrying out role/duties. There was research that showed that by adopting and reinforcing such an approach it improved performance and outcomes. An overview of Civility Matters and the details of the NHS initiative that had shown to improve the quality of care was attached as an Appendix to the report.

Amending the 'people' policies would result in better outcomes for those involved in either process and lead to a change in culture through changes in language and approach. The current policies had not been reviewed for several years so a reconsidering of the content and approach was appropriate.

The new policies would form part of a larger roll out, with the intranet pages being updated with toolkits and guides for managers. The Employee Relations Team were also creating, training and guidance for managers to give them the knowledge and skills to have difficult and sensitive conversations where and when issues arose with confidence. A brief overview would also be included in Managers inductions for all new managers joining the organisation.

A launch was planned for May/June 2023 and further training for managers would take place across the organisation during the summer.

The Committee outlined their concerns relating to the inappropriate use of cameras at meetings and events for which Members required guidance and noted that this would be included in the proposed Members 'Chamber Skills and Etiquette' training that would be held in June 2023.

RESOLVED that the Ethic Committee:

- 1) Notes the revised policy and the inclusion of Civility Matters as part of the ongoing development of the organisational culture and embedding the values.**
- 2) Agrees that training for Members on the appropriate use of cameras at meetings and events be included in the 'Chamber Skills and Etiquette' training being held in June 2023.**

36. Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship Update

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer that provided an update of the local response regarding

The Committee had been monitoring the work of the Local Government Association (LGA) programme around Civility in Public Life and Digital Citizenship. This work was in response to the increasing concern about intimidation and toxicity of debate and the impact this had been having on democratic processes. A report was last provided to the Committee on 15th December 2022 (minute 28 referred) and remains part of the Committee's Work Programme.

The report covered:

- Work undertaken by the LGA including a new toolkit to help combat abuse of Councillors, aimed at putting an end to the increasing intimidation being reported by Councillors. The toolkit outlined different ways Councils and Councillors could support the Debate Not Hate Campaign objectives and take action. It was felt that at this time the resources from the LGA be kept for future reference and used as required.

- Work of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and county associations on revisions to the Local Government Association (LGA) Code of Conduct Supporting Guidance “to better reflect the sector's needs” covering the general principles of Councillor conduct and application of the model Councillors' Code of Conduct.
- The Council’s own campaign that commenced on 5th September 2022 called “Debate Not Hate” and the virtual session held on 27th September 2022 entitled “Civility Saves Lives” held as part of National Inclusion Week and open to all Councillors and Council staff. The session discussed civility and respect and how people treat each other at work.
- Training for Members on Chamber Skills, rules of debate and standing orders, especially for new Members joining following the May elections, to be delivered by a training provider who could offer the following to be held in June before the first full Council meeting after the elections:
 - a) 'Chamber Skills - Coaching for the Mayor' to be firm, fair, efficient, and effective - delivered in the Chamber with the Mayor, Deputy, and support colleagues, including 'Speaking at public events' if time permits
 - b) 'Chamber Skills and Etiquette' training for administration and opposition groups (separately) tailored to prepare Members for the first full Council meeting in June and meetings thereafter. It would cover the application of Council procedure rules, common errors, speaking and the types of behaviour expected of Members in the Chamber.
- Social media training took that took place on 14th March 2023 which covered the variety of different social media platforms, separating personal and public accounts, as well as the positives of social media as well as how to address some of the negatives, including support from the Council as well as guidance and links to the Debate Not Hate campaign. A follow-up is to be arranged looking at accessibility good practice, security settings and adapting content for different social media platforms.

The Committee raised concerns regarding behaviour in the Council Chamber at Council meetings and welcomed the proposed ‘Chamber Skills and Etiquette’ training that would cover speaking and the types of behaviour expected of Members in the Chamber.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

- 1) Notes the work undertaken by the Local Government Association on their Debate Not Hate campaign.**
- 2) Notes the work that is being undertaken locally.**
- 3) Agrees that this item remains on the Work Programme of the Ethics Committee for continued review.**

37. **Committee on Standards in Public Life Update**

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer that provided a brief overview of the Committee on Standards in Public Life's (CSPL) report 'Leading in Practice' (the New Report) published in January 2023, which shared examples and case studies gathered from public and private sector organisations on maintaining ethical organisational practices.

The report also reported on an open letter (attached as an Appendix to the report) that Lord Evans, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, had written to public sector leaders to prompt reflection and discussion on the importance of ethical leadership in the UK.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (the CSPL) was set up in 1994 to monitor, report and make recommendation on all issues relating to standards in public life. This included the standards of conduct of holders of public office and all those involved in the delivery of public services. Its purpose was to help promote and maintain ethical standards in public life and thereby to protect the public interest through monitoring standards issues and risks across the United Kingdom (by invitation in the devolved areas); conducting inquiries and reviews and making practical and proportional recommendations that were generally implemented; and researching public perceptions on standards issues relating to specific areas of concern, and also over time. The views and recommendations of the Committee could be taken in account by local government and other organisations delivering public services when designing, implementing, and monitoring their own ethical standards regime.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

- 1) Notes the content of the report.**
- 2) Requests that the Chief Legal Officer continues to monitor the national picture regarding standards and reports back on any issue which may be of relevance to the Council on a local level.**

38. **Six Monthly Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality**

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer that reviewed declarations of gifts and hospitality made by Members, in line with the Committee's work programme to review declarations on a regular basis. The Committee last reviewed the gifts and hospitality register entries received from 1 January to 30 June 2022, at its meeting on 29 September 2022 (minute 19 referred). Appendices to the report detailed the most recent declarations for the period 1st July to 31st December 2022.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee notes the declarations of gifts and hospitality made by Members for the period 1st July to 31st December 2022.

39. **Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality**

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer that reviewed entries on the register of officers' gifts and hospitality, in line with the Committee's work programme to review entries every six months. An Appendix to the report detailed officers' declarations of gifts and hospitality for the period 1st July to 31st December 2022.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee notes officers' declarations of gifts and hospitality for the period 1st July to 31st December 2022.

40. **Code of Conduct Update**

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer that provided an update on national issues in relation to the ethical behaviour of Elected Members and the local position in Coventry regarding Code of Conduct issues.

The Committee had agreed that the Chief Legal Officer would provide a regular update on cases relating to the Members' Code of Conduct on a national basis. This was 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.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

- 1) **Notes the position regarding 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 Chief Legal Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.**

41. **Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2023/24**

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Legal Officer, appended to which was the Committee's proposed Work Programme for the Municipal year 2023/24.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

- 1) **Notes the Work Programme for 2023/24.**
- 2) **Agrees that following the 'Chamber Skills and Etiquette' training for Members being held in June 2023, a further item be added to the Committee's December 2023 meeting headed 'Chamber Skills and Etiquette – A Guide for Councillors'.**

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

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.00 am)