

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 11.00 am on Thursday, 14
December 2023

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)
 Councillor L Bigham
 Councillor P Hetherton
 Councillor E M Reeves
 Councillor D Welsh

Independent Persons: S Atkinson
 R Wills

Employees (by Service Area):

J Newman (Chief Legal Officer), O Aremu, S Bennett,
E Jones

Apologies: A Barton and P Wiseman

Public Business

18. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

19. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September, 2023 were agreed and signed as a true record, subject to a minor typographical error in Minute 13.

There were no matters arising.

20. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which set out the number, trends and outcomes of complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Report relating to Coventry City Council in 2022/23. It focused on upheld complaints, compliance with Ombudsman's recommendations, where the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the LGSCO, and how the Council compares to previous years and other local authorities.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) was the final stage for complaints about councils, all adult social care providers (including care homes and home care agencies) and some other organisations providing local public services. It was a free service that investigated complaints in a fair and independent way and provided a means of redress to individuals for injustice caused by unfair treatment or service failure.

Coventry City Council's complaints policy set out how individual members of the public can complain to the Council, as well as how the Council handle compliments, comments and complaints. The Council informs individuals of their rights to contact the LGSCO if they were not happy with the Council's decision after they have exhausted the Council's own complaints process.

Every year, the LGSCO issued an annual letter to the Leader and Chief Executive of every Council, summarising the number and trends of complaints dealt with in each Council that year. The latest letter, issued 19 July 2023, covered complaints to Coventry City Council between April 2022 and March 2023 (2022/23) (which was attached at Appendix 1 of the report).

The Committee asked questions and made comments on a number of issues including:-

- Patterns in relation to any complaints received regarding equality issues
- The Council's responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty
- The monitoring of complaints received with an element relating to the Duty
- Work being undertaken with services to ensure the Duty is considered and responded to and the provision of appropriate training for all staff in relation to this matter.

The Committee received assurances that work was being undertaken with the Council's Leadership Team and the Equality and Diversity Team in relation to ensuring that staff receive appropriate training in relation to the Public Sector Equality Duty and that services embed the Duty in all aspects of service delivery.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1) Notes the Council's performance in relation to complaints to the LGSCO complaints that were upheld.**
- 2) Notes the Council complaints process and guidance**
- 3) Notes that any cases where maladministration has been found will be reported to the Committee**
- 4) Requests that, in order to provide context, future reports provide data regarding the number of complaints received per 10,000 of the population.**
- 5) Requests that their comments in relation to the importance of ensuring that the Council complies with its Public Sector Equality Duty and that appropriate training is provided to all staff be fed back to the Council's Leadership Team.**

21. **Monitoring Officer/Code of Conduct/Members Complaints Update**

The Ethics Committee received 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.

In relation to one of the national issues reported regarding planning matters, the Committee discussed advice currently available to Members when acting as Ward Councillors and how they should approach Planning Officers who are dealing with planning applications under delegated powers and are therefore “decision takers”. It was noted that whilst there was clear advice for Planning Committee Members in relation to their role and issues relating to the pre-determination of applications, there was no specific advice for Councillors acting in their Ward capacity.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1. Notes the position with regard to matters concerning local authorities nationally.**
- 2. Notes the local position in relation 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.**
- 3. Requests officers to provide guidance for Councillors, who are not Members of Planning Committee, dealing with planning applications in their capacity as a Ward Councillor.**

22. Ethics Committee Work Programme 2023/24

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

Further to Minute 21 above the Committee noted that guidance for Councillors dealing with planning applications in their capacity as a Ward Councillor would be added to the Work Programme for the next meeting in March 2024.

23. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.40am)