

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 11.00 am on Thursday, 8
January 2026

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor E M Reeves

Independent Persons: S Atkinson
R Wills
P Wiseman

Employees (by Directorate):

Law and Governance J Newman (Director), S Bennett, S Manhertz, L Read

Planning and Performance A LeCras, C McGrandles

Public Business

17. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

18. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September, 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Further to Minute 9/25, the Committee were provided with an oral update on engagement undertaken with the Conservative Group by the Independent Persons, with a view to the Group being represented on the Committee, either in a formal capacity as a member of the Committee or informally, as an observer, by invitation.

The Committee noted with regret that, despite all the work undertaken by the Independent Persons to achieve this aim, it was unlikely that there would be any change in the position during the current Municipal Year. The Independent Persons were thanked for all the work undertaken in this regard.

19. **Prospective Councillor Information**

Further to Minute 15/25, Ethics Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance in response to the concerns highlighted by the Committee regarding the importance of ensuring that prospective new Councillors fully understand the responsibilities and expectations of the role before standing for election. This follows concerns arising from the elections held in 2025 where individuals were elected in other parts of the country without anticipating or understanding the demands of office.

The report indicated that work is currently being undertaken to ensure that newly elected Councillors in 2026 will be fully supported in their role. This includes reviewing the induction and training offer, particularly in the first few weeks following the election. A Booklet has also been produced entitled 'Becoming a Councillor' which is available to prospective candidates in the elections (A copy of the booklet was appended to the report). The approach taken has been to ensure that it remains politically neutral and focus' on what the role entails, what support is available and the election process. It is also proposed that this information will be made available on the Council's website.

Every year the Returning Officer holds Candidates and Agents briefings prior to the election which focus on the election timetable, completion of nominations, the count and campaigning. The Committee noted that in 2026 there will be an earlier briefing session for candidates which will focus more on the information contained in the Booklet and will provide the opportunity for candidates to ask questions around becoming a Councillor, expectations and duties of that role and the functions of local government.

The Committee welcomed the production of the Booklet and congratulated and commended the work undertaken by officers in this regard. A number of suggestions were provided in relation to the Booklet, including the following, and it was noted that, as the Booklet had already been printed, these would be included either on the Council's website or covered during the briefing sessions for candidates:-

- In the list of useful skills, reference to a drive for positive improvement.
- The provision of a glossary.
- More information and clarification in relation to the potential time commitment required to undertake the role of a Councillor.
- In relation to ward duties, clarification that these can be undertaken in a variety of ways.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1) Notes, welcomes and commends the content of the report and the "Becoming a Councillor Booklet"**
- 2) Formally record their thanks to officers for the work undertaken in this regard.**

- 3) Endorses the use of the Booklet as a way of providing prospective candidates with information in relation to the role of a Councillor.**

20. Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 2024/25

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which outlined how 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. The report indicated that 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 could complain to the Council, as well as how the Council would handle their compliments, comments and complaints. The Council also informed individuals of their rights to contact the LGSCO if they were not happy with the Council's decision once they have exhausted the Council's complaints process.

The LGSCO issues an annual letter to the Leader and Chief Executive of every Council, summarising the number and trends of complaints dealt with relating to that Council that year. The latest letter at the time, issued 21 July 2025, covered complaints to the LGSCO relating to Coventry City Council between April 2024 and March 2025 (2024/25).

The report set out the number, trends and outcomes of complaints to the LGSCO relating to Coventry City Council in 2024/25. It focused on upheld complaints, service areas with a high number of complaints, compliance with Ombudsman's recommendations, learning from complaints, comparisons with prior years, and how we compared to other local authorities.

The LGSCO had received 101 complaints and enquires in relation to Coventry in 2024/25, which was 21 more than the previous year. The category with the highest number of complaints and enquiries remained Children's and Education Services (31) while the service with the greatest percentage increase was Environmental Services (up from 5 to 16 in 2024/25). 17 of the 22 complaints investigated were upheld, which was the lowest upheld percentage across the West Midlands Combined Authority. Further details of the LGSCO investigated decisions were appended to the report.

The report had also been considered by the Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership and the Audit and Procurement Committee. The Committee noted that the report would also be considered by the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:

- 1. Notes the Council's performance in relation to complaints to the LGSCO that were upheld.**
- 2. Notes the Council's updated complaints process and guidance.**

21. **Code of Conduct Update**

The Ethics 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 regarding the Code of Conduct. The Committee also noted the position in relation to the local parish Councils and their Code of Conduct.

The report indicated that the Government had posted the outcome and its response to the consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England. The reforms which the Government seek to include:-

- Mandatory code of conduct -This will include a behavioural code and will be for all local authorities
- Formal Standards Committee - There will be a requirement for principal authorities to have a standards committee for complaints and to have oversight of Councillor conduct
- Individual support during investigations - Where there is an investigation, the principal authority must offer support to the complainant and the Councillor
- Appeal - This would be a legislative right of Councillors and complainants which entitles them to a 'right to review' in respect of a decision made by the Standards Committee
- Power of suspension - For serious breaches of the code of conduct Councillors face a suspension of up to 6 months. Within that allowances could be withheld in the most serious cases. In addition, Councillors could be banned from premises and facilities. For the most serious allegations whereby there is police involvement or where the Member is awaiting sentence they may be suspended on an interim basis of 3 months. In order for this to be extended this would need to be reviewed.
- Disqualification - Where Members have been suspended for the maximum period permitted more than once within 5 years, they could be disqualified.
- National appeals - Upon exercising their 'right to review' Councillors and complainants may lodge an appeal to the national appeals body

The Government has expressed its intention to "bring forward the necessary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows".

The Committee noted that the Local Government Association (LGA) was continuing to raise concerns and objections also raised by the Committee regarding continuing the current requirement to publish Councillor's home addresses.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1) Notes the position with regard to matters concerning local authorities nationally; and**
- 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 Director of Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.**

22. Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2025/26

The Committee noted a report of the Director of Law and Governance appended to which was the Committee's Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

RESOLVED that a review of the effectiveness of the work undertaken in relation to the Prospective Councillor Information (Minute 19 above) be included in the Ethics Committee Work Programme for 2026/27.

23. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.40am)