

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 2 July**  
**2015**

Present:

Members: Councillor J Clifford (Chair)  
Councillor L Bigham  
Councillor J McNicholas

Employees (by Directorate): H Lynch, Resources Directorate  
G Paddan, Resources Directorate

Apologies: Councillor A Andrews and D Gannon  
K Sloan – Independent Person

### **Public Business**

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2015 were noted. There were no matters arising.

3. **Code of Conduct Update**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Resources, which provided an update to Members 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. The report made reference to a number of national cases in the following areas; disrepute, bullying and disrespect.

Members were advised that the Monitoring Officer had received two new complaints, since the date of the last Committee meeting held in March 2015. All complaints had been handled in accordance with the agreed Complaints protocol and no findings had been made by the Local Government Ombudsman in relation to members of Coventry City Council. Also no complaints had been received by the Monitoring Officer in respect of Allesley or Keresley Parish Councils.

At the last Code of Conduct training session held on 16 June 2015; three newly elected members attended. It was noted that since 2012 the number of members having attended to date was 35. Consideration was given to the importance and requirement of attending the Code of Conduct training.

Members considered the report and raised the following points:

- The national cases reported at the Ethics Committee meeting to be made available for all members via the Members' Bulletin

- Holding regular training sessions at different times and officers to canvass best availability for training to improve attendance
- Code of Conduct being mandatory - every three years. Possibility of signing the Code of Conduct at 'Group' meetings
- Guidance to be provided on dealing with enquiries without correspondence address of the member of the public

**RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:**

- 1. Note the cases determined under the new regime nationally.**
- 2. All members to sign the new Code of Conduct following the Council's decision to include the confidentiality clause.**
- 3. National cases in relation to the ethical behaviour of elected members to be published in the Members' Bulletin.**
- 4. Guidance note to be provided to members on dealing with enquiries received from their electorate**

**4. Inspection into Rotherham Metropolitan District Council: Governance Issues**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Resources as requested on the outcome of two reports into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham and failings of Rotherham Metropolitan District Council, culminating in the decision of the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to intervene and appoint commissioners to run the authority.

The report gave a brief history of the background to the Casey report and the decision of the Secretary of State to intervene. It set out the main findings of failure in governance at Rotherham and asked the Committee to consider what action if any it required to take in the light of those findings.

Arising from the discussions, members agreed that the whistle blowing policy be added to the work plan to ensure a climate of greater forthrightness between employers and workers so that irregularities could be identified and addressed quickly and to strengthen employment rights by protecting responsible workers who blow the whistle.

**RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:**

- 1. Note the report on the inspection into Rotherham Metropolitan District Council.**
- 2. Review the Council's Whistle Blowing Policy and the findings to be reported back.**

**5. Review of the Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

The Committee received report of the Executive Director of Resources; setting out information about the Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) and updated the Committee on the recent Council-wide review of interests and uploading them on to Modern.gov, the Council's software system for democratic services. The Committee was asked to note the report and to give guidance on how it would like to be kept informed of this in the future. All members of a Council are required by law to complete a 'Register of Interests' form to provide details of

any interests that might give rise to a conflict of interest in their duties as a councillor.

Members discussed the progress made and viewed the City Council's online Register of Disclosable Pecuniary Interest; the functionality enabled members to update their interest; if required, with assistance from Members' Services. Any updates entered by a member are automatically forwarded to the following officers – Christine Forde, Helen Lynch and Adrian West.

**RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee note the report and a report to be brought to a future meeting providing the DPIs' online success and the frequency of usage of the 'Registers' webpage.**

**6. Appointment of Second Independent Person**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Resources, which advised that in 2015 the Government published a statutory instrument (SI), the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015, which required the Council to make changes to its Constitution. Those changes were approved by Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities on 18 June and Council on 23 June 2015. The changes required the appointment of a second Independent Person to be part of a Panel in the event of disciplinary action being taken against the Council's statutory Officers. The Council currently has only one Independent Person appointed.

In the event of disciplinary action being taken against any statutory officer, the Council would either need to appoint a second person or make arrangements with another local authority to use the services of one of their Independent Persons.

**RESOLVED that the advertisement and recruitment of a second Independent Person be delegated to the Assistant Director and Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.**

**7. Work Programme for the Ethics Committee**

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director of Resources, which suggested areas of work for Ethics Committee for the Municipal year 2015-16, which were agreed at the meeting of the Committee in March 2015. The Committee gave consideration to the work programme and requested that the review of DPIs be added to the work plan.

**RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee note the report and proposed changes to the work programme.**

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

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.20)

