

**Coventry City Council**  
**Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 10.00 am on Thursday, 23**  
**July 2020**

Present:

Members: Councillor S Walsh (Chair)

Councillor A Andrews  
Councillor P Hetherton  
Councillor J Mutton  
Councillor D Welsh

Other Members: Councillor M Mutton

Employees:- S Bennett, Law and Governance  
C Bradford, Law and Governance  
S Harriott, Law and Governance  
J Newman, Director of Law and Governance and  
Monitoring Officer  
C Sinclair, Law and Governance

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

### **Public Business**

1. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2019 were agreed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. **Outcome of Code of Conduct Investigation**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which detailed the outcome of a Code of Conduct Investigation in respect of allegations that Councillor G Williams breached the Code of Conduct for Elected Members.

The Ethics Committee's complaints protocol set out how a complaint that an Elected Councillor has failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct is dealt with. The protocol requires that, where an investigating officer concludes that there is no evidence of a failure to comply with the Code of Conduct and no further action is required, the outcome of such investigations will be reported to the next ordinary meeting of the Ethics Committee. The investigation report on this matter had been completed in March 2020 and was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

At a meeting of the City Council on 14 January, 2020, Councillor Williams made a statement that resulted in widespread criticism and resulted in six separate complaints alleging that Councillor Williams had breached the Code of Conduct for elected members.

The City Councillor's Monitoring Officer, supported by one of the Committee's Independent Persons, considered that the complaints merited a formal investigation and instructed Mr M Lewin as an appropriately experienced external investigator to undertake the investigation. Mr Lewin produced a draft report that he shared with the Complainants and Councillor Williams before forwarding his final report to the Council's Monitoring Officer.

Mr Lewin found that Councillor Williams' statement was ignorant, prejudiced and offensive, however he did not find that it amounted to a failure to show respect in breach of paragraph 3(j) of the Code. Mr Lewin considered that "There is a very high threshold to be crossed before political speech – even intolerant and offensive political speech – can be found to have breached the Code". In this case he did not find that that threshold was crossed.

Mr Lewin noted that Councillor Williams has been held accountable for his offensive statement in the public arena and had made a public apology.

Whilst recognising that, in light of the outcome of the investigation, there was no further action available to them, the Committee made a number of strong observations in relation to the comments made by Councillor Williams and recognised and welcomed the steps taken by other Councillors and the City Council to disassociate themselves from those comments.

**RESOLVED that the outcome of the investigation, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.**

**(Note:- Councillor J Mutton abstained from this decision)**

#### 4. **Work Programme**

The Committee considered the draft Work Programme for 2020/21. The Work Programme included a separate table showing progress on the actions to be taken in connection with the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Best Practice Recommendations for local authorities contained in its report of January 2019.

**RESOLVED that the Committee notes the Work Programme and progress on the best practise recommendations.**

5. **Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business**

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 10.25 am)