

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 11.00 am on Thursday, 21
March 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)
Councillor M Mutton (Substitute for Councillor Hetherton)
Councillor D Welsh

Independent Persons: S Atkinson
A Barton
R Wills
P Wiseman

Employees (by Service Area):

Law and Governance: J Newman (Director of Law and Governance), G Holmes, S
Manhertz (Trainee Solicitor), U Patel

Apologies: Councillors L Bigham and E M Reeves

Public Business

24. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interest.

25. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 December, 2023 were agreed and signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

26. Members Training and Development Update

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance that provided information about the Members Training and Development Programme for 2023-24. The Members Training and Development Strategy was agreed by Council on 22 March 2022.

This was the second year of the strategy's implementation which allowed for some comparison on the previous year. Overall, there was an increase in members training from an average of 5.7 training sessions attended during 2022-23 to 6.5 training sessions attended during 2023-24. The report attached at Appendix 1 covered the following:

- Core Training May 2023-February 2024
- Overall Training Attendance
- Training Delivery
- Training Information

- All-Members Seminars
- Members feedback
- Training 2023/24 – Training Matrix
- Action Plan 2024-25

The Committee received assurances that members appointed to Planning and Licensing Committee would have to undertake mandatory training prior to participating in a formal meeting. The Committee expressed concern at the low uptake of the Equality and Diversity and the Data Protection training as these were areas that could put the council into a difficult position. Currently these were offered online and it was acknowledged that this method of training was not the preferred option of choice for some members. It was reported that alternate in person training was being sourced and would be made available as an option.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Notes the attached report covering the Members Training and Development Programme for 2023-24, including plans for 2024-25.**
- 2. Considered ways in which to increase member's participation in training and development and to address barriers experienced in accessing the programme.**
- 3. Supports the continued delivery of the Members Training and Development Strategy, including actions for 2024-25.**

27. Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided information on the six-monthly review of officers' gifts and hospitality register.

Further to the high level of attendance at one particular event, a question was asked whether there should be a column to capture what benefits were gained by the council from the attendance.

RESOLVED that, the Committee considered and notes the entries of gifts and hospitality received by Officers from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023.

28. Six Monthly Review of Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided a six month review of the Members' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality Register.

Following consideration of the report, Members commented that it was difficult to quantify the benefits of attending events as not only were they representing the council, but they were showcasing the city and networking. Events were beneficial to everyone involved.

RESOLVED that, the Committee considered and notes the gifts and hospitality register entries from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023 and had no further recommendations to make.

29. **Code of Conduct Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided an update on any national issues in relation to the ethical behaviour of elected Members and the local position in Coventry with regard to Code of Conduct issues.

With regard to the complaints made that the Mayor of London had breached the Code of Conduct for elected members with comments he had made, the Director of Law and Governance drew the Committee's attention to the independent investigator's report which summarised the position in respect of Freedom of Speech. The summary was detailed in the report and provided a helpful explanation of a matter that was often difficult to explain and understand but occurred quite regularly.

RESOLVED that, the Committee:

- 1. Notes the position with regard to 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 Director of Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.**

30. **Ethics Committee Work Programme 2023/24**

The Committee considered and noted a report of the Director of Law and Governance which outlined areas of work for the Ethics Committee for the Municipal Year 2023/24. The work programme was attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

It was reported that with regard to the programme for 2024/25, most matters for consideration would be standard items, and currently there was nothing else in the pipeline that needed to be included in the programme.

31. **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 items of urgent public business.

32. **Ann Barton**

The Chair, Councillor S Nazir, indicated that Ann Barton was attending her last meeting as she has decided to step down as an Independent Member of the Committee at the end of this Municipal Year.

Anne has been a dedicated and valued Independent Member of the Committee since her appointment in 2017. On behalf of the Committee, and the Council, the Chair, placed on record her sincerest appreciation of all of the work undertaken by Ann over the last 7 years and thanked her for her contribution to the meetings and the work of the Committee. Everyone wished Ann all the very best for the future.

(Meeting closed at 11.25 am)