

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 11.00 am on Thursday, 27
June 2024

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)

Councillor L Bigham
Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor E M Reeves
Councillor D Welsh

Independent Persons: S Atkinson
P Wiseman

Employees (by Service Area):

Law and Governance: J Newman (Director of Law and Governance), S Bennett,
S Manhertz

Apologies: R Wills

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 March, 2024 were agreed and signed as a true record.

There were no matters arising.

3. Local Code of Corporate Governance 2024-25

The Ethics Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance, which had also been considered by the Audit and Procurement Committee (their Minute 4/24 refers), which detailed Local Code of Corporate Governance 2024/25.

The Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out the Council's arrangements for meeting the seven principles of good governance as defined in the CIPFA/Solace Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. The Framework recommended that Local Authorities developed and maintained a Local Code of governance as it provided a structure to help individual authorities with their approach to governance.

The Council adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance in 2017. The Code had recently been reviewed in the light of best practice and updated to reflect the current governance arrangements in place within the Council. An up to date and robust Local Code provided clarity over an authority's governance and supported the legal requirement to undertake an annual review of effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements and produce an Annual Governance Statement.

The CIPFA / Solace Framework defined governance as "the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders were defined and achieved." Coventry City Council had a range of measures in place to ensure that governance in the organisation was managed effectively and worked hard to ensure that those arrangements were robust and met best practice. This was achieved through a range of policies, plans, and procedures such as the Constitution (including codes of conduct for Members and employees), the One Coventry Plan, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and policies on whistle blowing, tackling fraud and corruption, and managing risk.

The Local Code of Corporate Governance, attached as an Appendix to the report, is a refresh of the previous Code with work undertaken with internal stakeholders to ensure it reflected the current position of the organisation and the Authority's One Coventry approach. The Local Code sets out the Council's specific arrangements for putting the principles of good governance into practice. It draws on examples provided in the Framework but also reflects systems and processes which are specific to the Council.

The Committee noted the legal requirement to undertake an annual review that the governance arrangements set out in the Local Code were effective and/or complied with and to produce an Annual Governance Statement, with any identified areas for improvement included in the Annual Governance Statement action plan.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee notes the Code of Corporate Governance 2024/25.

4. **Annual Report of Ethics Committee 2023-24**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which set out the work of the Committee over the last Municipal Year. In particular, the report detailed:-

- Update on the Online Safety Bill (now enacted Online Safety Act 2023)
- The Committee's review of the Local Code of Corporate Governance
- Civility in Public Life, Intimidation in Public and Digital Citizenship
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report

The report also detailed other regular work of the Committee over the last year including receiving regular reports on ethical standards cases across the country; maintaining a watching brief on work being undertaken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and locally on supporting Members in dealing with challenges associated with public service, particularly in relation to intimidation

and abuse. The Committee has also received an update on Members training during 2023/24 and supported the continuing delivery of the Members Training and Development Strategy, including actions for 2024/25.

Details of the Work Programme for 2024/25 were also highlighted in the report and included:-

- Consideration of the self-assessment Toolkit to aid Councillors in dealing with abuse, harassment and intimidation as part of the Debate not Hate: Ending Abuse in Public Life Campaign.
- Maintaining a watching brief on any legislative changes arising from the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report and recommendations of January 2019.

The Ethics Committee approved the Annual Report for 2023/24.

RESOLVED that the City Council be recommended to:

- 1. Note the Annual Report of the Ethics Committee for 2023/24**
- 2. Consider whether there is any work within the Committee's terms of reference that Council would wish the Committee to undertake**

5. Code of Conduct 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 cases and the disqualification of a newly elected Councillor as they were employed by the Council as a teacher, the Committee noted that advice and guidance was provided by the Elections Team to prospective candidates in relation to disqualification for standing for office prior to elections.

The Committee also noted the position in relation to the local Parish Councils and their Codes of Conduct.

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 Director of Law and Governance in consultation with the Chair of the Ethics Committee.**

3. **Requests that a copy of the report be forwarded to the local Parish Councils for their information.**

6. **Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2024/25**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance, appended to which was the Committee's Work Programme for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

In particular, the Committee welcomed the proposed consideration of a Self Assessment and Toolkit – Ending Abuse in Public Life and noted and supported the on-going work in relation to this area of work, including the provision of personal safety training for Councillors.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme for 2024/25 be received and noted.

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

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.30am)