

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 11.00 am on Thursday, 26
June 2025

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor M Mutton (Substitute for Councillor N Akhtar)
Councillor E M Reeves

Independent Members: S Atkinson
R Wills
P Wiseman

Employees (by Directorate):

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

Apologies: Councillor N Ahktar

Public Business

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March, 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record subject to the following amendment to the last sentence of Minute 28/24 which states "(Minute 27 below refers)", so it now reads (Minute 27 above refers)

Further to Minute 25/24, the Committee were informed that, as requested, the Chair of the Ethics Committee had written to appropriate Members outlining the Committee's view of the importance of Members undertaking appropriate training, especially in relation to safeguarding and Members' role as Corporate Parents. In addition two training sessions had been set up for Members on safeguarding and the Committee noted that there would be further sessions provided on this if required to ensure that all Members are able to attend. (Minute 4 below also refers).

3. **Annual Report of Ethics Committee 2024-25**

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:-

- The Local Code of Corporate Governance
- Code of Conduct Complaints
- Ending Abuse in Public Life - Council's Self Assessment and Toolkit
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman 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 had also received an update on Members training during 2024/25 and supported the continuing delivery of the Members Training and Development Strategy, including actions for 2025/26.

Details of the Work Programme for 2025/26 were also highlighted in the report and included:-

- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report
- 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, subject to the addition of the following information prior to its submission to Council:-

- The inclusion of the names of the Independent Persons on the Committee
- Information regarding the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints

RESOLVED that the City Council be recommended to:

1. **Note the Annual Report of the Ethics Committee for 2024/25**
2. **Consider whether there is any work within the Committee's terms of reference that Council would wish the Committee to undertake**

4. **Members Training and Development Annual Review 2024-25 - Full Year Update**

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided information about the Members Training and Development Programme for 2024-25.

The report indicated that the Council agreed the Elected Members Training and Development Strategy in March 2022. The Strategy provides a framework for Members to access a programme of training that meets their needs, as well as the needs of the organisation to deliver the ambition set out in the One Coventry Plan.

The Strategy helps to support the development of a training culture for Members. As part of this Strategy, it was agreed that there would be a core offer of training for all Members to complete during their term of office, as well as training specific to appointments to Planning and Licensing and Regulatory Committees.

The delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan is overseen by a cross-party Members Training and Development Strategy Cabinet Member Advisory Panel, which advises and makes recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Policing and Equalities, who has responsibility for Members training.

The report indicated that the Ethics Committee considered a progress report for the municipal year 2024 – 2025 at their meeting on 20 March 2025 (Minute 25/24 refers). At that meeting the Committee had requested that a letter be sent to appropriate Members outlining the Committee's view of the importance of Members undertaking appropriate training, especially in relation to safeguarding and Members' role as Corporate Parents. Dates for this training have now been set up and appropriate Members have been invited to attend.

An Appendix to the report provided more detail on delivery of the Strategy for 2025-26 as well as a full years' worth of training data from May 2024 – April 2025.

In response to questions raised at the meeting, the Committee noted that:-

- Training sessions are provided on a variety of dates and time slots to increase Members' participation in training and development and to address barriers experienced in accessing the programme.
- Work is being undertaken to provide a video for Members to make accessing the Members' website pages easier.
- Consideration will be given to the information and signposting provided by the Returning Officer to candidates for next year's election, particularly in relation to the Code of Conduct. It was noted that it would be useful to use the Members Training and Development Strategy Cabinet Member Advisory Panel for the consideration of this information and that any outcomes of that work would be reported to the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1) Notes and endorses the attached updated report covering the Members Training and Development Programme for 2024-25, including plans for 2025-26 (Appendix 1)**
- 2) Welcomes the work undertaken to increase Members' 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 2025-26**

5. 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.

In relation to national issues and a number of recent cases following this year's local elections, the Committee reiterated their comments in relation to the importance of work to be undertaken to review the information and signposting provided by the Returning Officer to candidates for next year's election (see Minute 4 above).

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

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1. Notes the position with regard to matter concerning local authorities nationally; and**
- 2. Notes the local position relating to the operation of the Council's Code of Conduct and to delegate any actions arising from these to the Director of Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair of Ethics Committee.**

6. Work Programme for the Ethics Committee 2025/26

The Committee considered their Work Programme for the Municipal year 2025/26.

RESOLVED that the following issues be included in the Work Programme for 2025/26:-

- 1) Local Government Association (LGA) Ending Abuse in Public Life – Council Self-Assessment Tool Kit – Progress – September, 2025**
- 2) Members Training and Development Review 2025-26 – Update – March, 2026**

7. Any Other Items of Public Business - Membership of the Committee

The Ethics Committee again raised their concerns regarding the decision of the Conservative Group not to appoint a representative to their seat on the Committee. The Committee discussed the importance of ensuring cross party representation on the Ethics Committee, which has a non-political duty to uphold the Nolan principles and the standards and ethics of the Council.

The Committee noted the historic reasons for the Conservative Group's decision and previous attempts by the Chair and Independent Persons on the Committee to encourage their participation. Notwithstanding this, the Committee felt that it was too important a matter not to once again engage with the Conservative Group on this issue. The Independent Persons on the Committee again offered their services to assist in this regard.

RESOLVED that, given the importance of the Committee's view that all political groups should be represented on the Ethics Committee, the Chair and Independent Persons be requested to again engage with the Conservative Group to achieve this aim.

NOTE: This item of business was taken as urgent public business as the Chair decided that the matter was sufficiently important so as to not wait until the next meeting on the Committee to be held on 25 September, 2025.

(Meeting closed at 11.35am)