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Ethics Committee

25 September 2025

**Name of Cabinet Member:**

N/A - Ethics Committee

**Director Approving Submission of the report:**

Director of Law and Governance

**Ward(s) affected:**

None

**Title:** Code of Conduct Update

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**Is this a key decision?**

No

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**Executive Summary**

The report updates the Ethics Committee 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.

**Recommendations:-**

The Ethics Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the position with regard to matter concerning local authorities nationally;  
and
2. Note 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.

**List of Appendices included**

None

**Other useful background papers**

None

**Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?**

No

**Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?**

No

**Will this report go to Council?**

No

## **Report title: Code of Conduct Update**

### **1. Context (or background)**

- 1.1 The Council's Ethics Committee has agreed that the Director of Law and Governance will provide a regular update on cases relating to the Members' Code of Conduct on a national basis. This is to facilitate the Ethics Committee's role in assisting the Council with its duties under Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 to promote and maintain high standards of Members' conduct.

### **1.2 The National Picture**

#### **1.2.1 Ethics and Integrity Commission**

The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) is set to be replaced by the Ethics and Integrity Commission in what has been described as the "strengthening and reforming" of the CSPL, with the view to increasing the ethical standards.

The Government made the announcement on 21 July 2025 following correspondence from the Minister for the Cabinet Office to the CSPL Chair which highlighted the Government's intentions for the Ethics and Integrity Commission (EIC) which includes existing duties such as promoting the Nolan Principles.

The Government in its press release confirmed that as part of the Committee's scope, it will be "convening and coordinating ethics bodies, formalising cooperation and the sharing of best practice".

One function of the EIC which is still in the development stages will be to engage with public sector bodies, ensuring they have appropriate codes of conduct in place.

The EIC will report to the Prime Minister annually and the Government has pledged to provide a response to any recommendations within a reasonable period.

While the formation of the new commission will lead to an increase in powers and responsibilities than that held by the CSPL, the EIC does not have the remit to undertake investigations into the individuals or impropriety, which was the case for the former. The new commission is set to come into force on 13 October 2025 with the current chair of the CSPL to be Chair of the EIC.

### **1.2.2 Councillor G; London Borough of Hounslow Council**

Councillor G, of London Borough of Hounslow Council, was allowed to vote as part of the Council's Licensing Panel despite not yet being appointed, causing the decisions made at the meeting to be invalid.

The mistake arose due to officers believing the Councillor had already been appointed therefore, when arranging the meeting the Councillor was included due to the mistaken belief that the Councillor was already a member of the panel.

The Director of Law Governance received complaints from the opposition and ultimately concluded that the meeting was not properly convened and as a result the decisions made in the meeting were "null and void". Councillor G has since been formally appointed as a Member of the Committee.

### **1.2.3 Ministerial Envoys Report at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets**

In their first report since being appointed in January 2025, the Ministerial Envoys at London Borough of Tower Hamlets have commended the Council for the improvements made whilst highlighting some areas of concern.

The implementation of Ministerial Envoys is a new method of statutory intervention being trialled. Rather than commissioners, this sees the appointment of envoys, who act as advisers and overseers of the process while the local authority retains its decision-making powers.

One aspect welcomed in the report is the creation of a Transformation and Assurance Board, consisting of independent members, set up to support the works being undertaken.

The report did highlight the need for the implementation of "wholesale political and staff buy-in and involvement in the improvement journey".

The report referred to political toxicity, with envoys having observed that "poor behaviour in the chamber sometimes goes beyond the usual political theatre, distracts the council from doing its business and limits scrutiny and debate." The envoys also emphasised the importance of there being an environment where there is an ability to challenge at all levels of the organisation.

In response to the report, the Local Government Minister in a written statement echoed the concerns raised in the report, reiterated his commitment to supporting the Council in achieving the Best Value Duty, whilst emphasising that escalation remains an option for the Tower Hamlets should it be required.

#### **1.2.4 Councillor B; Wolverhampton City Council**

Councillor B was found to have breached Wolverhampton City Council's code after the Ethics and Governance Sub-Committee concluded that the Councillor, in a speech had claimed they were a Royal Marine which was determined to be false. The Councillor's comments came during a speech while the Councillor was Mayor. In that speech Councillor B said they had "served as a Royal Marine" at an event in 2021. The Councillor was also accused of giving the impression that they had served as a Royal Marine while chairing an Armed Forces Covenant Board for the Council. These statements led to complaints of "stolen valour".

During the Sub-Committee Councillor B explained that they had undergone the training process for the Royal Marine for 30 weeks but due to personal circumstances was required to withdraw before completing the training. The Councillor told the Sub-Committee that the statements were true and apologised.

The Sub-Committee decided that because Councillor B had not completed the Royal Marine training process and had therefore not "passed out" they could not refer to themselves as a Royal Marine. Furthermore, having been a recruit only for Councillor B to refer themselves as a Royal Marine would be misleading.

It was determined by the Sub-Committee that Councillor B should make a public apology to the Armed Forces Community in addition to the Complainant and stipulated that they should make it clear that they were a Royal Marine recruit, not a Royal Marine in the future.

In light of the fact Wolverhampton City Council recognises "Armed Forces" as a protected characteristic, the Committee also recommended the removal of Councillor B from the City Council's Resources and Equality Scrutiny Panel.

#### **1.2.5 Councillor I; Enfield London Borough Council**

The former Mayor of Enfield Council has been found to be in breach of their code resulting in sanctions for the Councillor. A complaint suggested the Councillor "may have unintentionally brought his office into disrepute" in supporting the visa applications of family and friends by using the office of the Mayor for reasons unrelated to the Council, and against officers' advice.

The Committee also heard how Enfield Council had previously been contacted by the Home Office concerning the legitimacy of a letter received by the department in support of a visa application. The Committee determined that Councillor I should desist from wearing a badge which indicates that they used to be mayor, not use their position as a Councillor in support of visa applications and should make a written apology.

### **1.2.6 Councillor C; Bristol City Council**

Following an internal audit, it was determined that Bristol City Council had not complied with procurement rules when it contracted a company to deliver a diversity programme.

An external audit was previously conducted which revealed that the Council had contracted 3 companies and spent £637,596 but had failed to follow its own procurement rules in doing so in respect of a company. Further, the director of another of the companies was the then deputy mayor, Councillor C. The Councillor was first appointed in 2020 but did not declare their interest until 2021.

The deputy mayor had used one name as a Councillor and another as the company director which auditors recognised to not be uncommon but highlighted how this can impact public perception in respect of openness and transparency for a local authority.

The internal audit findings are said to be in keeping with the those of the external audit and led to some recommendations for the Council regarding monitoring officer referrals in respect of potential conflicts of interest, compliance with internal procurement rules, and formalising contract management arrangements.

The review found that no criminal activity had taken place.

### **1.2.7 Former Councillor G; Cornwall Council**

Cornwall Council has taken the decision to refer itself to the police following a Councillor's breach of their code of conduct. Former Councillor G was appointed the Head of Air and Space at Cornwall Airport but failed to properly register this disclosable pecuniary interest. The Councillor had also failed to declare non-registrable interests at an Economic Prosperity Board meeting, in which a project owned and run by Cornwall Airport was on the agenda. The Councillor is said to have accepted the role the day before the meeting in question was held in February 2025 but did not commence the employment until March 2025.

Councillor G, who a portfolio holder for the economy, did enquire to whom they should update however, the assurance officer was informed that since that initial enquiry Councillor G did not make further contact on updating their register.

In respect of their employment, Councillor G in their submissions said they decided not to declare the interest as they had not yet started their employment and had not received a contract.

Regarding the endorsement of the programme, the Councillor indicated that they believed they were endorsing a programme a Cornwall Council project as it was a longstanding programme.

Legal advice was not sought by the Councillor as they were wary due to wanting to honour an agreement made between themselves and their employer and due to not trusting their Councillors or officers "to not leak news of my employment to the media or elsewhere". The decision notice concluded that this response "gives the impression to the reader that he was dismissive of any professional advice and his fellow Cabinet members who he had worked with for the last few years."

The Local Authority's assurance officer determined that Councillor G was in breach of the code of conduct and that the Councillor had no "reasonable excuse for not registering [their] interests." Whilst there were other breaches found, it is the breach of this requirement to declare a disclosure pecuniary interest which Cornwall has referred to the police for them to consider whether an offence has arisen under the Localism Act s34.

The report highlighted that as Councillor G is no longer a Councillor, no further action would be taken in respect of this case, but censure would ordinarily be recommended for such a breach.

### **1.3 The Local Picture**

#### **Complaints under the Code of Conduct**

- 1.3.1 The Ethics Committee has requested that the Director of Law and Governance reports regularly on any complaints received relating to Members of Coventry City Council.
- 1.3.2 At the time this report was written, the Director of Law and Governance has received 1 complaint since those last reported. No further action was taken in respect of this complaint as it was determined that the Councillor was not acting in their capacity of a Councillor when the circumstances which gave rise to a complaint arose.
- 1.3.3 The Director of Law and Governance will update the Committee on any further complaints received before the meeting and progress on those already received.
- 1.3.4 All complaints are handled in accordance with the agreed Complaints Protocol. No findings have been made by the Local Government Ombudsman in relation to Members of Coventry City Council.

## **2. Options considered and recommended proposal**

The Ethics Committee are recommended to:

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

## **3. Results of consultation undertaken**

Not applicable

## **4. Timetable for implementing this decision**

Not applicable

## **5. Comments from Director of Finance and Resources and the Director of Law and Governance**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The issues referred to in this report will assist the Council in complying with its obligations under Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011.

## **6. Other implications**

None.

### **6.1 How will this contribute to the One Coventry Plan**

Not applicable.

### **6.2 How is risk being managed?**

There is no direct risk to the organisation as a result of the contents of this report.

### **6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?**

No direct impact at this stage.

**6.4 Equalities/ EIA**

There are no public sector equality duties which are of relevance at this stage.

**6.5 Implications for (or impact on) climate change and the environment**

None

**6.6 Implications for partner organisations?**

None at this stage.

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