

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Ethics Committee held at 11.00 am on Thursday, 25
September 2025

Present:

Members: Councillor S Nazir (Chair)

Councillor N Akhtar
Councillor L Bigham
Councillor J Gardiner
Councillor P Hetherton
Councillor E M Reeves

Independent Persons S Atkinson, R Wills, P Wiseman

Employees (by Directorate):

Law and Governance J Newman (Director), S Bennett, G Holmes, S Manhertz
A West

Public Business

8. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

9. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June, 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

Further to Minute 7/25 – “Membership of the Committee”, the Committee were provided with an update in relation to progress on engaging with the Conservative Group by the Independent Persons, with a view to the Group being represented on the Committee.

10. Local Code of Corporate Governance 2025-26

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 21/25 refers), which detailed Local Code of Corporate Governance 2025/26.

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.

The Committee sought assurances in relation to how comprehensive stakeholder engagement was monitored and checked and how public perception of transparency was measured. It was noted that further information on these issues would be provided to the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee notes the Code of Corporate Governance 2025/26.

11. Local Government Association (LGA) Ending Abuse in Public Life - Council Self-Assessment Tool Kit - Progress September 2025

Further to Minute 26/24, the Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided an update on progress on the Council's self-assessment and action plan based on a tool kit which was designed by the Local Government Association (LGA) as part of their “Debate Not Hate” campaign to aid local Councils in tackling and mitigating the impact and risks of abuse and intimidation that Councillors (Members) may encounter as part of their role. The action plan was appended to the report.

The report indicated that progress to date has included information provided on the Members intranet webpages in a section called “Well-being and Your Safety”, which sign-posts Members to where advice and support can be found. These webpages provide links to all of the LGA materials from the Debate Not Hate campaign, as well as support offered through the Council’s Occupational Health Service. The webpages also provide a link to the “Personal safety guidance for elected Members” document, as well as how to deal with online abuse and how to report harassment and intimidation.

Other actions already complete included linking with the police on Operation Ford to identify a single point of contact and a programme of personal safety workshops which have been delivered by the police for Members. Work is in progress to identify a baseline for Members risk-assessments when undertaking surgeries or home visits. In addition to this, a number of personal safety and awareness raising training sessions have been arranged for Members this municipal year, including one specifically on safety whilst election campaigning, and sessions delivered by the LGA on online abuse and harassment. Thirty-one Members have accessed these safety training sessions.

To further progress this work, it was proposed that the next step should be to provide a Member-led approach to delivering the actions and outcomes identified in the self-assessment. To achieve this was proposed to establish a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group and the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) have agreed in principle to establish the Task and Finish Group.

RESOLVED that the Ethics Committee:-

- 1) Notes the work undertaken by the Local Government Association (LGA) on their Debate Not Hate campaign, including the self-assessment tool.**
- 2) Notes the progress on the Action Plan at Appendix 1.**
- 3) Supports the Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) in establishing a Task and Finish Group to provide a Member-led approach to developing the Council’s approach to dealing with abuse and intimidation experienced by Elected Members.**
- 4) Supports the continued work to improve the support offered to Members to mitigate the impact and risk of abuse and intimidation.**

12. Six Monthly Review of Members' 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 for the period 1 January to 30 June, 2025.

It was noted that it was intended to undertake a reminder of the processes and procedures for Gifts and Hospitalities for both Members and Officers (Minute 13 below also refers)

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the Members' Gifts and Hospitality Register entries from 1 January to 30 June, 2025.

13. Six Monthly Review of Officers' Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance which provided a six-month review of Officers' Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality Register for the period 1 January to 30 June, 2025.

It was noted that it was intended to undertake a reminder of the processes and procedures for Gifts and Hospitalities for both Members and Officers (Minute 12 above also refers).

RESOLVED:-

- 1) That the Committee notes the entries of gifts and hospitality received by Officers from 1 January to 30 June 2025.**
- 2) That the Officers' Register be updated to provide more information on the outcomes and any benefits to the Council.**

14. 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.

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 matters concerning local authorities nationally; and**
- 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.**

15. Ethics Committee Work Programme 2025-2026

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Law and Governance appended to which was the Committee's Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

In response to questions at the meeting, the Committee were provided with an oral update on preparations taking place to provide information for potential candidates standing in the local elections May 2026.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme for 2025/26 be noted and that a report on preparations for candidates standing in the local elections in May 2026 be added to the Work Programme for the meeting of the Committee in January, 2026.

16. Any Other Items of Urgent Public Business

There were no other items of urgent public business.

(Meeting closed at 11.45am)