
Ethics Committee

8 January 2026

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

Is this a key decision?

No

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 Consultation results and Government response Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England

On 11 November 2025 the Government posted the outcome and its response to the consultation on Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England. The consultation sought to obtain views on the introduction of a mandatory minimum code of conduct for Councils and enhanced measures on the standards and conduct regime, with the view to creating consistency across local authorities in England when investigating serious code of conduct breaches. The consultation received 2092 responses.

The reforms which the Government seek to implement include:

- Mandatory code of conduct
This will include a behavioural code and will be for all local authorities
- Formal standards committee
There will be a requirement for principal authorities to have a standards committee for complaints and to have oversight of Councillor conduct
- Individual support during investigations
Where there is an investigation, the principal authority must offer support to the complainant and the Councillor
- Appeal
This would be a legislative right of Councillors and complainants which entitles them to a 'right to review' in respect of a decision made by the standards committee
- Power of suspension
For serious breaches of the code of conduct Councillors face a suspension of up to 6 months. Within that allowance could be withheld in the most serious cases. In addition, Councillors could be banned from premises and facilities
For the most serious allegations whereby there is police involvement or where the Member is awaiting sentence they may be suspended on an interim basis of 3 months. In order for this to be extended this would need to be reviewed.

- Disqualification
Where Members have been suspended for the maximum period permitted more than once within 5 years, they could be disqualified.
- National appeals
Upon exercising their 'right to review' Councillors and complainants may lodge an appeal to the national appeals body

The Government expressed its intention to "bring forward the necessary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows".

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has urged the Government to act quickly on the reform.

The Local Government Association (LGA) in its response acknowledged that majority of Councillors "uphold high standards," but it identified that the system in its current state is not sufficient for modern local government.

1.2.2 Audit Wales follow-up review on Wrexham Council

Wrexham Council has been informed by Audit Wales that the progress it has made on governance issues is not sufficient, with the Council having failed to fully address the recommendations identified in an earlier report

The previous report on the Planning Service, drafted in 2024 revealed "fractured" relationships between Councillors and officers. The follow-up review carried out in 2025 looked at the previously recommended values and behaviours not just in the Planning Service but across the wider Council. Within the report those concerns remained and it was highlighted that when it comes to roles and expectations the Council lacks awareness.

Despite the warning from Audit Wales, the review did recognise that there had been an improvement in relationships in the Planning Committee however, it also noted that there was a lack of trust expressed by Councillors in some officers and their advice.

The Council has a 'Self-Regulatory Protocol' (in addition to the Code of Conduct) under which "Members are to avoid personal confrontation in any public forum", which includes through the media. However, the Auditor for Wales found that this had not been adhered to "with multiple press statements highlighting ongoing tensions, leading to what was described as "unhelpful blame culture".

The watchdog as part of its conclusions stated that without "constructive values and behaviours, the Council can't be assured that it has secured value for money."

Other findings in report were, the limited Member engagement in respect of training and the scope for key materials such as the Member Code of Conduct Handbook and Planning Protocols to be updated.

As part of its follow-up review Audit Wales made three further recommendations concerning the improvement of “relations between Members and officers”, “Member knowledge, awareness and skills” and “strengthening governance arrangements”.

In a statement on the matter Wrexham’s interim Chief Executive :_

“As a Council we’re committed to improving the way Councillors and officers work together. We’re also committed to enhancing Councillor support, skills and knowledge and to ensuring good governance.

“We feel we’ve made some good progress in these areas in recent times, and we’ll continue to work hard in these areas and make sure we take on board the comments and recommendations from Audit Wales.”

1.2.3 Councillor B; Leicestershire County Council

A Leicestershire County Council Councillor was reported to the police after it was alleged that on polling day in May 2025 the Councillor parked an ice-cream van in the street a Leicestershire town with a sign which read “free 4 real Brits”.

Leicestershire Police investigated whether the Councillor’s conduct constituted “treating under electoral malpractice.”

The Leader of the Opposition called for the Leader of the Council to suspend Councillor B, due to the serious allegations which they claimed brought the Council into “serious disrepute”.

Leicestershire Police investigated the matter and decided to take no further action over the allegation having not identified any criminal offences to have taken place.

Following the police’s decision, Councillor B as part of his video response online said, “It was a sham from the get-go”.

1.2.4 Councillor B; Cheshire West and Chester Council

On 19 August 2025, Councillor B was found to have breached Cheshire West and Chester Council’s Code of Conduct due to his behaviour. Following an interaction with a taxi driver in which he alleged the driver refused to take him based on a protected characteristic, the Councillor made a social media post whereby he explained that the driver “refused to give him a lift” and stated that he is a member of the Licensing

Committee and has “attended hearings about their behaviour”. This led to 2 complaints being made in February 2024 by fellow Councillors.

A further incident is said to have arisen between the Councillor and taxi driver, after which, Councillor B attended the taxi office to complain about it. This conduct formed the basis of a further complaint made against the Councillor in August 2024. The complaint stated that the Councillor said that he would get the driver’s badge, and went on to allege that the Councillor made several phone calls to the driver’s employer making harassing comments.

The complaint alleged that Councillor B made further contact with the driver’s employer by phone to state that he wished to make a complaint, referred to the driver as “obnoxious” and highlighted that he is part of the Licensing Committee which “regulates taxis and private hire provision.”

Councillor B who did not attend the hearing, when responding to the draft report, stated that he felt the investigation was “vexatious”. The Councillor went on to say that in making his complaint to the taxi company which employed the driver in question he “acted in good faith as a private citizen with no influence over any Cheshire West and Chester Council committees.”

The law firm investigating on behalf of the Council described there to be a “history of animosity” and concluded that the Councillor did not treat the driver with respect by misusing his position in a social media post and also breached the Code by “failing to cooperate with the investigation”.

The report did go on to state that Councillor B neither brought his role nor the Council into disrepute.

The Council’s Standards Complaints Panel agreed with a number of the Investigating Officer’s findings but disagreed with the finding that Councillor B had not brought his role into disrepute, with the Decision Notice citing that the Panel were concerned that by referring to his position in the Licensing Committee and stating “I’m not here, to get anyone’s job or to close any business down” implied that as a Councillor he had the power to do so.

The Panel recommended that Councillor B apologise to the driver. Further, West Cheshire and Chester Council’s Monitoring Officer has been instructed to provide training for Councillor B on “the Council’s Acceptable Use Policy”.

The Panel noted that Councillor B is no longer a member of the Licensing Committee but that they would have recommended his removal had he still been a member.

1.2.5 Councillor M; Staffordshire County Council

Councillor M has apologised for comments he made on the social media site X, which have been labelled as “disgusting”.

The Councillor for Staffordshire County Council made posts about the police and a statue of a black woman.

In a post dating back to April 2024, the Councillor referred to the police as “politically indoctrinated British hating scum” the post went on to make derogatory remarks towards various groups.

The comments which date back to 2023 and 2024 came to light in recent months however Staffordshire County Council said that action could not be taken as the comments were made before the Councillor commenced his role, with the Code of Conduct applicable to the actions of Councillors.

In light of the comments surfacing the Councillor faced calls to resign.

Councillor M denied being racist or homophobic. The comments posted pre-date Councillor M’s term, and in a statement issued the Councillor said the posts were made “during a difficult time personally” citing both grief and redundancy, and that he does “regret and apologise” for his choice of words.

As a result of this, Horninglow and Eton Parish Council passed a motion that Councillor M is not welcome to attend the Parish Council’s meetings.

1.2.6 Councillor C; Staffordshire County Council

In allegations made by the group Hope Not Hate, Councillor C of Staffordshire County Council was accused of making racists posts on X.

The Councillor is accused of posting that “no foreign national or first generation migrant should be allowed to sit in Parliament” said to be in relation to the current Justice Secretary.

Councillor C allegedly described the Mayor of London as “narcissistic” coupled with reference to his ethnic background and allegedly used expletives to tell a black British lawyer to go back to Nigeria.

Another post which the Councillor is alleged to have made appears to make a claim about a demographic within the global majority being “intent on colonising the UK, destroying all that has gone before”.

The Councillor, who had been selected as the Leader of Staffordshire County Council in May 2025 was also accused by a different group of being a ‘top fan’ of a Facebook page which promotes white supremacist views. The term ‘top fan’ on Facebook means to have high levels of engagement with a page on the social media platform.

Following an internal investigation into Councillor C's "non-disclosure of social media accounts" the Councillor's party membership was revoked. At the time of writing, he remains Leader of the Local Authority.

A new interim Party Leader has also been appointed in the meantime, and a new Leader will be appointed following agreement at the next full Council meeting for Staffordshire.

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.

At the time that this report was written, the Director of Law and Governance has received 3 complaints since those last reported; of the 3 complaints none of them were Member on Member.

Two of these are currently at Stage 2 and the other has been escalated to Stage 1.

1.3.2 The Director of Law and Governance will update the Committee on any further complaints received before the meeting and progress on those already received.

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.

Report author(s):

Name and job title: Shanita Manhertz, Trainee Solicitor

Directorate: Law and Governance

Contact details: 024 7697 2350; Shanita.Manhertz@coventry.gov.uk

Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

Contributor/approver name	Title	Service Area	Date document sent out	Date response received or approved
Contributors:				
Suzanne Bennett	Governance Services Officer	Law and Governance	08/12/2025	08/12/2025
Names of approvers for submission: (officers and members)				
Finance: Richard Shirley	Lead Accountant	Finance	08/12/2025	08/12/2025
Legal: Julie Newman	Director of Law and Governance	Law and Governance	08/12/2025	17/12/2025
Councillor S Nazir	Chair of Ethics Committee		12/12/2025	12/12/2025

This report is published on the council's website:

www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings