
Ethics Committee

19 March 2026

Name of Cabinet Member:

N/A - Ethics Committee

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities

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, Governance and Safer Communities, 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, Governance and Safer Communities 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

A number of Councils are reporting an increase in the number of Code of Conduct complaints. Some examples of these can be found below:-

1.2.1 Middlesbrough Council finds increase in number of Councillor-on-Councillor complaints

Middlesborough Standards Committee have heard that the number of complaints received by the Local Authority from Councillors about Councillors has more than double since the year before. The total received in 2025 was 16, up from 7 in 2024 and the highest since 2021 which was 13.

1.2.2 Brighton and Hove City Council Review of Member Complaints

As part of its report Standards Update and Annual Review of Member Complaints report, Brighton and Hove City Council's Audit, Standards & General Purposes Committee heard that the number of complaints against Councillors was 42.

This is an increase from the 32 received in 2024 and the highest since 2021 which was 36. Of the 42 complaints received 6 of these were Member-on-Member complaints.

Previous work carried out by the Local Authority identified that they receive a higher number of complaints to comparable Authorities and the report noted that this may partially be due to the City's high level of democratic engagement.

1.2.3 Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council & Milton Keynes City Council

The Chair of the Standards Committee for Milton Keynes City Council wrote to the Chair of Kents Hill and Monkston Parish Council about the number of Councillor complaints received.

Kents Hill and Monkston was said to be responsible for 64% of all parish Council complaints received the financial year for Milton Keynes despite “the number of electors registered in the parish comprises less than 3% of those in the local authority area”.

The letter also referred to the costs incurred by Milton Keynes investigating matters and consulting Independent Persons and highlighted that the City Council had previously asked the Parish Council to consider contributing towards these costs.

The City Council emphasised that it remains committed to assisting the Parish Council and has encouraged it to take “preventative and holistic measures”.

1.2.4 Councillor M; Wokingham Borough Council

A Councillor has been deemed to have breached Wokingham Borough Council’s Code of Conduct by the Local Authority’s Standards Committee Hearing Panel for failing to declare an interest in an item listed on the agenda.

It was said that as part of a consultation response Councillor M expressed his objections to a planning application. He subsequently voted against application.

A complaint was raised against the Councillor claiming that ahead of the planning committee hearing he had decided in advance to oppose the application.

The Panel determined that Councillor M should have declared an interest in respect of the application and subsequently not participated in discussion or vote concerning it. In failing to do so, it was a breach of the code.

The Panel requested training on declarations of interest be arranged and noted the investigating officer’s conclusion regarding the complexities surrounding predetermination.

1.2.5 Councillor W; Liverpool City Council

Councillor W was accused of anonymously sending up to 100 “poison pen” cards and letters said to contain “foul language” and “abuse” between 2023 and 2025 to another Councillor after a falling out between the two.

The Councillor was able to be linked to the letters through forensic evidence and was subsequently charged with harassment without violence.

The Court heard that the defendant was suffering from mental health problems during the time in which the offences were committed.

The Councillor entered a guilty plea and was sentenced at Liverpool Magistrates' Court to an 18-month community order with 30 Rehabilitation Activity Requirement days, a fine and victim surcharge. In addition, he was ordered to pay prosecution costs, and a Restraining Order was also granted.

1.2.6 **Multiple Councillors; Tameside Council**

A number of Councillors have been found to have breached Tameside Council's Code of Conduct for Members owing to messages contained within a WhatsApp group.

The conversations within the WhatsApp group, named 'Trigger Me Timbers', contained "racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, hate speech and even threats of violence towards constituents including death."

Councillor W was found by the Panel to have committed 3 breaches of the Code of Conduct. Councillor W who was present at the hearing apologised for the upset caused by the WhatsApp Group.

It was recommended that Councillor W be censured and removed from the Standards Committee and 2 panels for which she holds membership. The Panel also requested that training be arranged on the "Code of Conduct and Nolan Principles, equalities and diversity, and safeguarding".

Councillor G was found to have committed 3 breaches. She apologised for the upset caused. Censure, removal from 3 panels and training were recommended by the Panel.

Councillor Ne committed 3 breaches. His apology was welcomed by the Panel. He was recommended for censure, removal from a working group and for training.

Former Councillor R is no longer in office, but the Panel made findings on the allegations against her. The Panel determined that she had committed 2 breaches and they set out the sanctions they would have made had she remained in office. These included censure, removal from any committee or outside body which is relevant and a requirement to undergo training.

Councillor Na committed 2 breaches and apologised in his statement provided for the Hearing. Sanctions recommended were censure, removal from 2 panels and that training be provided.

Councillor J was found to have committed 1 breach of the Code. The Panel accepted that the Councillor was genuinely sorry and that his age and experience played a significant role. It was recommended that he be censured.

The Panel also recommended that the decision notice for the Councillors was made public as part of their sanctions. The Chair stated that they would have considered suspending the Councillors had that been a power available to them.

1.3 The Local Picture

Complaints under the Code of Conduct

- 1.3.1 The Ethics Committee has requested that the Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities reports regularly on any complaints received relating to Members of Coventry City Council.

One of the complaints previously reported to Committee on 8 January 2026 concerning 2 Councillors was investigated by an Independent Person at the request of the Monitoring Officer. Following the investigation, the recommendation was that the Monitoring Officer take no further action. The Monitoring Officer accepted the finding that there was no breach of the Code.

At the time that this report was written, the Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities has received 0 complaints since those reported at the last meeting.

- 1.3.2 The Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities 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, Governance and Safer Communities, 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, Governance and Safer Communities

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, Governance and Safer Communities

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, Governance and Safer Communities	23/02/2026	25/02/2026
Names of approvers for submission: (Officers and Members)				
Finance: Richard Shirley	Lead Accountant	Finance	23/02/2026	27/02/2026
Legal: Julie Newman	Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities	Law, Governance and Safer Communities	23/02/2026	27/02/2026
Councillor S Nazir	Chair of Ethics Committee		02/03/2026	09/03/26

This report is published on the Council's website:

www.coventry.gov.uk/councilmeetings