
Ethics Committee

25 June 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

1.2.1 Councillor Y; West Northamptonshire Council

West Northamptonshire Council have concluded that one of their Councillor's is "likely to have" breached the local authority Members Code of Conduct. Whilst attending an International Women's Day event, Councillor Y is alleged to have said "some women should have never left the kitchen", after which a formal complaint was made.

Shortly after the Councillor issued an apology, which was taken into account by West Northamptonshire Council. The Council conducted an initial assessment and concluded that remedial action would be adequate to deal with the matter, with training on civility and respect to be arranged for the Councillor.

1.2.2 Judicial Review against local authority allowed for Claimant who was prevented from asking a question at Full Council meeting

A claimant seeking to challenge a decision made by The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead by way of Judicial Review has been granted permission to do so.

The Claimant was subjected to sexual abuse during their time in a children's home belonging to the Berkshire County Council, (the governing local authority at the time). A settlement agreement was signed between the Council and its former employee which contains a confidentiality clause as to the terms of the said agreement. The Claimant in their application asserts that the agreement inhibited prosecution witnesses during criminal proceedings involving the former employee.

The application follows a decision made by the Council in July 2023 whereby the Claimant was denied the right to ask a supplementary question at a Full Council meeting on the basis that the local authority owes a duty of care to staff to protect them from harm stating that the Claimant may try to intimidate or harm staff. In the Council's defence to the claim they cited examples of the Claimant's conduct including where

they considered the Claimant to have become agitated and aggressive on previous occasions, including upon being afforded an opportunity to view the settlement agreement.

The Judge determined that the Claimant's conduct, including "corresponding in extensive, pejorative and potentially defamatory terms with elected representatives and officials and of making serious allegations of misconduct against members of the council" did not equate to sufficient reason to block the Claimant from asking the question in person or remotely.

The Judge exercised their discretion to extend the time limit for judicial review due to the issue concerning freedom of political speech and giving rise to issues of public interest.

When deciding the case, the Judge determined it to be "arguable with a realistic prospect of success that the Defendant's refusal to allow the Claimant his supplementary oral question, in person or via a remote video link, constituted a disproportionate interference in the Claimant's right to freedom of expression under Art 10" and granted permission for Judicial Review.

1.2.3 Two Councillors forced to resign due breaching election rules Councillors

Having been newly elected in the 7 May 2026 elections Mr T and Mr N were subsequently forced to step down upon it being discovered that both Councillors were employed by their respective local authorities, which is a breach of the election rules.

Hackney London Borough Council employs Mr T as a teacher. As a result of the vacant seat, a by-election will be called.

Mr N is also a teacher employed by the Camden London Borough Council. He confirmed that he would resign. A by-election is anticipated to be held in July.

Under s80(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1972, a person is disqualified from being elected or a candidate at Councillor elections to a particular local authority, if they hold paid office or employment of that local authority.

1.2.4 Councillor K; Leicester City Council

In what was described as "disrespectful and designed to humiliate", Councillor K of Leicester City Council has been found to have breached the Code of Conduct in respect of a comment made towards another Councillor. During a Full Council meeting the Councillor is said to have "attacked the person not the issue by an irrelevant and unwarranted reference to his taking of Councillor's allowances"

The Standards Committee for the City Council recommended a written apology, that the findings be released through a press release and that training on the Code of Conduct is arranged for Councillor K.

1.2.5 Former Councillor O; Cambridgeshire County Council

Ahead of elections held in Cambridgeshire last year, Councillor O alleged in a social post that Councillor H, of Fenland District Council had “worked in the care industry but allegedly was sacked for fraud”. The post also implied that this was the reason an area in question was “in such a state” and said that the party that they represented would “fix it”. It transpired that whilst Councillor H does work in the care industry, the assertions were untrue.

It is reported that Councillor O claimed to have had his account hacked which was dismissed by the Judge. The Councillor was convicted of an offence under the Representation of the People Act 1983 for making or publishing a false statement. Under s106 of the Act, where a person makes or publishes a statement before or during an election, for the purpose of affecting the return of any candidate at the election, in relation to a candidate’s personal character or conduct, shall be guilty of illegal practice unless they are able to show they had reasonable grounds for believing, and did believe the statement to be true.

The Councillor was sentenced the following year in April 2026 to a fine by the Courts and ordered to pay costs. In absence of an appeal lodged within the time limit, the County Council has since confirmed that Councillor O is no longer a Councillor. A by-election will follow.

1.2.6 Decision to grant planning permission quashed by High Court; North Devon District Council

A High Court has ruled that a Councillor’s involvement in a planning decision made by North Devon District Council contributed to it being “tainted by apparent bias”.

A planning application was made to the Local Authority which had received several objections. It was called in for determination by Councillor P and subsequently granted.

Councillor P stated that prior to the application, he gave one of the applicants, procedural advice only via a telephone call when asked, which is in accordance with the Planning Code of Conduct.

One of the applicants is a former employee of the District Council, a fact known to Councillor P and his fellow Councillor and sibling, Councillor S. A witness claimed to have seen this applicant having a “long and amicable conversation” with a Committee Member thought to be Councillor S. The

other applicant and their family are known by Councillor P through mutual friends, though he does not consider the applicant to be a friend.

Upon the grant of the application, a resident who objected made a Judicial Review application. The application was heard in the High Court where the Judge presiding over the hearing stated that the “fair-minded observer, informed of the following matters, would conclude that there was a real possibility that the Decision was tainted by apparent bias.”

During the meeting Councillor P spoke well of one of the applicant’s family and stated that the Council should support local families and the Judge accepted that his views would likely “carry some weight among other members of the Planning Committee given his seniority as a Councillor”. He concluded that the decision was unlawful and ordered for it to be quashed on the grounds of inadequate reasons, irrationality and irrelevant considerations.

1.2.7 Councillor G; Hatfield Town Council

Following a disciplinary hearing conducted by the City of Doncaster Council, a Member of Hatfield Town Council has been sanctioned for breaches of the Councillor’s Code of Conduct.

The Council considered complaints about Councillor G, concerning 3 provisions within the Code. One concerned a Facebook post whilst in the other it was alleged that Councillor G threatened to hit another Councillor with a gavel and also referenced “knocking some sense” into her.

The complaints were upheld and 7 sanctions were recommended including censure, to apologise in writing and undergo training.

1.2.8 Tendring District Council on Town and Parish Councils Members social media use

Following a report considered by Tendring District Council’s Standards Committee, the Council has urged Town and Parish Councils to ensure Councillors are using social media responsibly and in accordance with guidance set out.

The District Council’s Monitoring Officer received a complaint regarding the alleged conduct of a Member in relation social media posts. The Monitoring Officer deemed the complaint to warrant investigation. After the investigator’s report but prior to the Sub-Committee hearing, the Councillor resigned.

Although unable to determine whether there had been a breach in that particular case, as a result of the issues pertaining social media use came to light.

The advice for Town and Parish Councils included becoming acquainted with social media guidance, for example that provided by the Local Government Association (LGA), ensuring policies and procedures are up to date and to deliver training.

The District Council also intends to assist by advising the Town and Parish Councils of the variety of tools they have available to support.

1.2.9 Councillor W; Leicestershire County Council

A Councillor has been found to have committed breaches of Leicestershire County Council's Code of Conduct due to his responses to residents who emailed about the hanging of St George's flags on lampposts.

The County Council considered 4 complaints and determined that for 3 of them, he had "used his official platform to shame and belittle members of the public for expressing concerns that he did not share." For the remaining complaint his first response was deemed "dismissive, personally insulting, and contributed to an environment that [the Complaint] reasonably perceived as intimidating. Upon becoming aware of the complaint, the Councillor contacted the Complainant, to inform them that they were one "causing division", that others shared his view and had asked for the Complainant's details to "make it clear how they feel" and implied he may feel the need to provide the details. The Panel considered this behaviour constituted "bullying".

For this conduct Councillor W was found to have breached 4 paragraphs of the Code. The Member Conduct Panel imposed sanctions including censure and a public apology to be read out at a Full Council meeting.

Councillor W was also found to have breached the Code in failing to register an interest, but no further action was taken in relation to this technical 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, Governance and Safer Communities reports regularly on any complaints received relating to Members of Coventry City Council.

Since the last Committee meeting held in March 2026, the Director of Law, Governance and Safer Communities has received 6 complaints regarding 9 Councillors at the time of writing this report. There is 1 Parish Council complaint which relates to 2 Councillors with the others about Members of the City Council.

The Parish Council complaint was dealt with at Stage 1 with no further action recommended. Of the City Council complaints, 1 was concluded by way of no further action, the others remain at Stage 1.

None of these complaints were Member on Member.

- 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. 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.

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