

<u>Promoting Compliance With the Code of Conduct</u>			
Report by:	Cllr Amanda Williams		
Political Group:	Bridgend County Independents		
No. of members:	13	No. trained on Code:	13 (100%)
For the period:	7 th May 2022 to 14 th June 2023		
<u>Number, Source and Level of Complaints</u>			
	Informal	Local Resolution	PSOW
Public		1 (not upheld)	2 (not investigated)
Officers			
Councillors			
<u>Steps taken to Promote Compliance (To Be Completed by Group Leader)</u>			
Include matters such as:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demonstrating personal commitment to and attending relevant development or training around equalities and standards; - encouraging group members to attend relevant development or training around equalities and standards; - ensuring nominees to a Committee have received the recommended training for that Committee; 			
<p>It has been a difficult first year for some members of my group in that they have been targeted via online trolling, sharing of fake news, vexatious complaints and I have been provided with evidence that some of my group should be pursued until they are tipped over the edge by members and supporters of a political party. It has been extremely distressing and has impacted greatly on the mental health of some of my group members. Fortunately, none of the complaints in their capacity as BCBC councillors have been taken forward with the Public Services Ombudsman or monitoring officer. Unfortunately, there have been more complaints in their capacity as a Town/Community Councillor, and whilst is not relevant for the purpose of</p>			

this report, I do feel it impacts on their BCBC role and could affect the reputation of BCBC given that the public don't always differentiate between the two. Unfortunately, these individuals who continue to troll are fired up by an inherent dislike of the Bridgend County Independents group and so I do not feel that this will change. I simply continue to remind my group not to engage. Politics has changed over the years with social media making it easier to attack others from behind a screen and so all BCBC members need to work together to protect ourselves and I have asked the leader and chief executive to meet with South Wales Police to look at ways of ensuring all councillors feel safe and supported.

As the majority of my group are new members they have attended as much training as possible in order to gain better understanding. They have also all agreed to complete a PDR to consider other areas of learning that may be beneficial. These have commenced. Although I am a returning member, I have attended many of these training sessions to refresh my memory and to also provide support to my group. I regularly encourage all my group to attend training and if any member cannot, due to other commitments, then they will often watch the recording. In addition, I have put forward some areas of training that my group members have suggested would be beneficial to them.

- promoting civility and respect within group communications and meetings and in formal Council meetings;
- promoting informal resolution procedures in the Council, and working with the Standards Committee and monitoring officers to achieve local resolution;
- promoting a culture within the group which supports high standards of conduct and integrity;
- attend a meeting of the Council's Standards Committee if requested to discuss Code of Conduct issues;

We have a monthly group meeting where we have an open and honest discussion as a group, however, I have an open-door policy where any member can contact me for advice or to discuss issues as needed.

Civility and respect are core and I strongly believe that this has improved greatly over the past 12 months. Sometimes eagerness for an issue to be resolved has seen individuals sending passionate emails and many chasers, however, if I feel that the email is too pointed then I will discuss it with the group member.

I also continuously remind my group about what they say and share on social media and if I see a group post that I am not 100% content with then I will make sure it is removed. I believe that there have been vast improvements in the tone of social media posts. If the monitoring officer also raises a concern with me then I discuss it further with the individual in order for them to understand how some messages can be perceived.

I also attend a monthly group leaders meeting and a monthly meeting with the Chief Executive where we can discuss openly and frankly any concerns about behaviour and comments made and also work on building relationships. I have also had several meetings with Cllr Huw David regarding relationships between our two groups and we have both always agreed to resolve issues directly, reminding our groups of this rather than submitting ombudsman complaints. Whilst I am only responsible as a group leader for the 13 BCBC members in my group, I do also relay this to the wider group of independent town and community councillors and provide them with support also as outlined above, their actions also can affect the reputation of BCBC.

- work to implement any recommendations from the Standards Committee about improving standards;
- work together with other group leaders, within reason, to collectively support high standards of conduct within the Council.

I am more than happy to implement any recommendations put forward to me.

I am also grateful to both of the other group leaders Cllr Ross Thomas and Cllr Huw David for their openness with me and I genuinely believe that we have a good relationship and are all committed to working together to promote the values set out above and ensure that there is a high standard of conduct.