

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**NOTICE OF DETERMINATION OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Member	Former Councillor Angela Morelli
Relevant Authority	Bridgend County Borough Council
Date and Location of Hearing	7 May 2024
Complainant	Councillor Ian Williams
Public Services Ombudsman Reference No:	202203440

**Background**

- 1 On 7 May 2024, the Council’s Standards Committee considered a report from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (“the Ombudsman”) into a complaint from Cllr Ian Williams (the Complainant) of Bridgend County Borough Council (“the Council”) and Bridgend Town Council (“the Town Council”), that Former Councillor Angela Morelli (“the Member”) had failed to observe the Council’s Code of Conduct for Members.
- 2 It was alleged that the Member whilst campaigning for the 2022 elections, had in a discussion with a member of the public referred to the Complainant as a “wife beater”.
- 3 The Ombudsman determined that the Member may have breached the Council’s Code of Conduct, in particular, the following paragraphs which provide:
  - **4(b) Members must show respect and consideration for others**
  - **6(1)(a) – Members must not conduct themselves in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or authority into disrepute.**
4. During the Ombudsman investigation, copies of relevant documents were obtained from the Council, witness accounts were obtained, and an account was provided by the Member.
- 5 The Ombudsman referred her investigation report to the Monitoring Officer of Bridgend County Borough Council for consideration by its Standards Committee.
- 6 The Standards Committee initially considered the report of the Ombudsman and determined that the former Member should be given the opportunity to make

representations either orally or in written. The Member advised that she did not want to attend the hearing.

### **The Hearing**

The Committee considered whether they would hear the matter in public or in private. They considered submissions from PSOW officers and considered the impact on the Complainant. The Committee resolved to hear the matter in closed session. The Committee considered the Ombudsman's written report and oral submissions, together with the written representations submitted by the Member in accordance with the Committee's pre-hearing procedure.

The Committee, in accordance with their adopted procedure dealt with the case in three stages. Their decision in relation to each stage is detailed below.

### **Findings of Fact**

The Committee first considered the disputed facts and found on the balance of probabilities that:

- An argument did ensue between the Member and the witness
- The Member did refer to the Complainant as a "wife beater"
- Facebook activity by the Complainant did not contribute to her referring to him as a "wife beater"
- The witnesses behaviour towards the Member did not contribute to the Member arguing with him and referring to the Complainant as a "wife beater".

### **Breach of Code of Conduct**

Following the findings of fact the Committee proceeded to hear representations from the PSOW as to whether the facts amounted to a breach of the code of conduct. The Committee were satisfied that the Code of Conduct applied at the time of the incident as the Member was engaged in political activity. After careful consideration of all the evidence presented, the Committee determined that the Member had failed to comply with the following paragraphs of the Code of Conduct:

4(b) –Members must show respect and consideration for others.

The Committee considered that the comment made went beyond political comment and had the potential to cause serious reputational damage, The Committee considered Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights and determined that due to the nature of the comment it did not attract enhanced protection under Article 10 and an interference with Article 10 rights was justified.

6 (1) (a) – The Member must not conduct themselves in a manner which could reasonably be regarded as bringing their office or authority into disrepute.

Looking at the conduct of the Member, the Committee considered that it was sufficiently serious in nature to bring the Council and her office as a member into disrepute. The comment was an unsubstantiated personal attack made to a member of the public while engaged in political activity. This had the potential of adding credence to rumours. Such

comments would not be expected from an elected member. The Committee determined that in these circumstances the public's trust and confidence in the authority and office of Member would be damaged and therefore brought into disrepute.

### **Sanction**

In considering what sanction was appropriate, the Committee listened to representations from the PSOW. They had regards to the Sanctions Guidance issued by the Adjudication Panel for Wales, and considered mitigating and aggravating factors.

With regard to mitigating factors, the Committee acknowledged that the Member had cooperated in the investigation process and had a previous good record.

Turning to the consideration of aggravating factors, the Committee found that the Member had used her position for potential political gain; had failed to acknowledge the recklessness of her comment and the impact on the Complainant; had failed to show any remorse.

The Committee resolved that the former Member should be censured in relation to the above breaches of the Code of Conduct which as the maximum sanction available to the Committee, as the Member was no longer an elected Member. This is in accordance with their powers under s 9(1)(c) of the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2001

The Committee put on record that if the former Member was still an elected Member, they would have imposed a suspension of 4 months.

The Member, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the Monitoring Officer for Bridgend County Borough Council are notified of the Committee's decision by this Notice of Determination.

### **Appeal**

The former Member may seek permission to appeal against the Committee's determination to an appeals tribunal drawn from the Adjudication Panel for Wales by giving notice in writing within 21 days of receiving this notification of determination to the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales. Further details can be found on the Adjudication Panel's website [www.adjudicationpanel.gov.wales](http://www.adjudicationpanel.gov.wales).

Bridgend County Borough Council Standards Committee

Dated: 09 May 2024