

Meeting of:	STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	6 FEBRUARY 2025
Report Title:	NOTICE OF DECISION OF THE ADJUDICATION PANEL FOR WALES IN RELATION TO COUNCILLOR STEVEN BLETSOE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	MONITORING OFFICER
Responsible Officer:	LAURA GRIFFITHS GROUP MANAGER LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.
Executive Summary:	To present to the Committee a recent decision of the Adjudication Panel for Wales in relation to Councillor (Cllr) Steven Bletsoe and determine the duration of suspension.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to the Committee the recent decision of the Adjudication Panel for Wales (APW) in relation to a complaint against Cllr Steven Bletsoe of Bridgend Town Council, and to consider the recommendation by the APW, which has been referred back to the Standards Committee for consideration. The Standards Committee is to determine the duration of suspension.

2. Background

- 2.1 This matter relates to a complaint made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) alleging that Cllr Steven Bletsoe, a member of Bridgend Town Council, had failed to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct, in particular, the following paragraphs of the Code:

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

(7a) – Members must not in their official capacity or otherwise, use or attempt to use their position improperly to confer on or secure for themselves, or any other person, an advantage or create or avoid for themselves, or any other person, a disadvantage;

10(2)(c)(i) – Members must regard themselves as having a personal interest in any business of their authority if a decision upon it might reasonably be regarded as affecting their wellbeing or financial position, or that of a person with whom they live, or any person with whom they have a close personal association;

11(1) - Where Members have a personal interest in any business of their authority and they attend a meeting at which that business is considered, they must disclose orally to that meeting the existence and nature of that interest before or at the commencement of that consideration, or when the interest becomes apparent;

14(1)(a) - Where Members have a prejudicial interest in any business of their authority they must, unless they have obtained a dispensation from their authority's standards committee withdraw from the room, chamber or place where a meeting considering the business is being held;

14(1)(c) - Where Members have a prejudicial interest in any business of their authority they must, unless they have obtained a dispensation from their authority's standards committee not seek to influence a decision about that business;

14(1)(e) - Where Members have a prejudicial interest in any business of their authority they must, unless they have obtained a dispensation from their authority's standards committee not make any oral representations (whether in person or some form of electronic communication) in respect of that business or immediately cease to make such oral representations when the prejudicial interest becomes apparent.

2.2 The PSOW issued a report under section 69 of the Local Government Act 2000 and referred the matter to the Monitoring Officer of Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) for consideration by the Council's Standards Committee. On 9 May 2024 the Committee considered the PSOW report and found that Cllr Bletsoe had breached the Code of Conduct. At that meeting the Committee found that he had breached paragraphs 6(1)(a), 7(a), 11(1), 14(1)(a), 14(1)(c) and 14(1)(e) of the Code of Conduct ('the Code'). It also found that, in the light of certain aggravating factors, Cllr Bletsoe should receive a sanction of six months' suspension in accordance with its powers under the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2001 (as amended).

2.3 The decision to suspend was not implemented as Cllr Bletsoe subsequently appealed to the APW. On 5 June 2024, the President of the APW issued a decision which allowed the appeal to proceed on a limited ground of appeal in relation to sanction only. The President decided that the appeal in relation to the breaches of the Code had no reasonable prospect of success. The APW, to adjudicate upon the appeal, met on 5 December 2024. Cllr Bletsoe represented himself, with the support of Cllr Martin Williams. The Decision Report of the APW dated 3 January 2025 attached as **Appendix 1** sets out the reason for the decision and has been uploaded to the APW website. The APW referred the matter back to the BCBC Standards Committee with a recommendation that the Appellant should be suspended for 10 weeks pursuant to the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2001.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 The Committee has limited options available and must only consider the issue of sanction. Regulation 9(2) of the Local Government Investigations (Functions of Monitoring Officers and Standards Committees) (Wales) Regulations 2001 provides that where a Tribunal refers a matter back to a Standards Committee with a recommendation that a different penalty be imposed, the Standards Committee may impose the new penalty but must also decide whether or not it should instead uphold its original decision on sanction. This is the final part of the process and deals only with the level of sanction which should be imposed, taking into account the findings reached by the APW.

3.2 The decision for the Standards Committee is therefore whether to follow the recommendation of the APW and suspend Cllr Bletsoe for a period of 10 weeks, or to uphold its original decision of a 6 month suspension. Whichever period of suspension the Committee decides, it will take effect on the day after the Committee

has reached its decision. There is no further right of appeal except by way of Judicial Review to the High Court. An application for permission to bring a Judicial Review will not terminate the implementation of the suspension in the way that the Notice of Appeal to the APW did.

- 3.3 After the Committee makes its determination, the decision and reasons for the decision will be confirmed in writing to Cllr Bletsoe, the Complainant, PSOW and the APW as soon as reasonably practicable.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report. This report also assists in the achievement of the following well-being objective under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:-

A county borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community.

- 5.2 Standards are an implicit requirement in the successful implementation of the corporate well-being objectives.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no climate change implications.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 There are no safeguarding and corporate parent implications.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Standards Committee determine the level of suspension to be imposed on Cllr Bletsoe as a result of the breaches of the Bridgend Town Council's Code of Conduct.

Background documents:

None