

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 30 MAY 2025

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON FRIDAY, 30 MAY 2025 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor S Maughan – Chairperson

G Thomas

R Lynch

Apologies for Absence

None.

Officers:

Philip Morris
Riah Skillin
Llinos Lake
Kelly Watson
Mark Galvin
Oscar Roberts

Counsel Representing the Ombudsman
Code of Conduct Case Handling Assistant · Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
Representative from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
Chief Officer - Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees
Business Administrative Apprentice – Democratic Services

Declarations of Interest

None.

179. Urgent Items

Decision Made	None.
Date Decision Made	30 May 2025

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg

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180. Exclusion of the Public

Decision Made	The Committee considered whether to hold the meeting in closed session, considering recommendations from the Ombudsman that it should remain in open session as there was nothing within the Ombudsman's documentation that was not suitable to enter the public domain. Cllr Jones also expressed a desire for the meeting to be held publicly. <u>RESOLVED:</u> Following consideration of the above, the Committee ruled to have the meeting held in open session noting that members of the Committee should not seek to unduly make meetings confidential when not required.
Date Decision Made	30 May 2025

181. Ombudsman Investigation Under S69 of the Local Government Act 2000

Decision Made	The Committee convened to determine on a complaint of an alleged breach of the Member Code Of Conduct against Cllr Lisa Lewis of Brackla Community Council. In specific the Cllr was alleged to have breached paragraphs 4(b) and 6(1)(a) of the Code of Conduct, which comprise: 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. The Committee heard representations from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales and Cllr Lisa Lewis, while Cllr S Bletsoe of Bridgend County Borough Council and Bridgend Town Council provided a character reference for Cllr Lewis. During this process, the Committee retired several times to consider aspects of the hearing. <u>RESOLVED:</u> <u>Background</u> 1 On 30 May 2025 the Council's Standards Committee considered a report from the Public Services
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	Ombudsman for Wales (“the Ombudsman”) into a complaint from Cllr John Spanswick (“the Complainant”) of Bridgend County Borough Council (“the Council”) and Brackla Community Council (“the Town Council”), that Councillor Lisa Lewis (“the Member”) had failed to observe the Council’s Code of Conduct for Members. 2 It was alleged that the Member had maliciously and deliberately tried to discredit the Complainant during a Community Council meeting that was attended by other Councillors and members of the public, and that during a Whats App chat the Member had used accusatory language against the Complainant. 3 The Ombudsman determined that the Member’s behaviour was suggestive of breach of 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 statements were taken from the Complainant and the Member. 5 The Ombudsman referred her investigation report to the Monitoring Officer of Bridgend County Borough Council for consideration by the 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 wished to attend the hearing. <u>The Hearing</u> The Committee considered whether they would hear the matter in public or in private. Both the Member and the Ombudsman made submissions that the hearing should be held in public. The Committee considered the Ombudsman’s written report and oral submissions, together with the representations submitted by the Member in accordance with the Committee’s pre-hearing procedure. The
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Member made a request to call Cllr Steven Bletsoe as a witness. No witness evidence had been produced prior to the hearing. The Member also requested that the Committee listened to two recordings which she suggested were relevant to the proceedings. The Ombudsman objected to the calling of Cllr Bletsoe but did not object to the submission of the recording provided they had the opportunity to listen to the relevant extract.

The Committee determined that they would not allow the Member to call Cllr Bletsoe as a witness. No witness statement had been produced. The Member had been given a number of earlier opportunities to confirm her witnesses and had failed to do so and therefore the Ombudsman hadn't had the opportunity to consider the evidence.

The Committee were prepared to listen to the recording, however the Member chose not to share it. It was therefore not part of the evidence considered by the Committee.

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:

- Cllr Lewis did inappropriately challenge Cllr Spanswick during the Council meeting on 23 March 2023
- Cllr Lewis was acting in her official capacity when she commented on the Whats App group chat
- Cllr Lewis inappropriately challenged Cllr Spanswick during the Whats App group chat on 24 March 2023

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. After careful consideration of all the evidence presented, the Committee determined that the Member had failed to comply with the following paragraph of the Code of Conduct:

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

	The comment was made in a public meeting without any supporting evidence and was therefore inappropriate. The Committee didn't consider the comment to be highly offensive or outrageous however they did find that the comment was inappropriate in nature and could discredit the Complainant in the eyes of the public. The comment made on the Whats App group was inappropriate in nature. It referenced the Complainant by name and contained unsubstantiated allegations implying that the Complainant was aware the funding hadn't been used as expected. The Committee considered that the comments made went beyond political comment and had the potential to cause 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. The Committee did not find that the Member had failed to comply with the following paragraph of the Code of Conduct: 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 didn't consider that it was sufficiently serious in nature to bring the Council into disrepute. The comment was directed at a specific member and not at the wider Council. Whilst the initial comments were in a public forum they were limited in nature and the Member was muted quickly. The additional comments were made in a closed Whats App group that didn't have any public members and therefore couldn't cause wider disrepute. <u>Sanction</u> 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 <u>mitigating</u> factors, the Committee acknowledged that there had been no previous breaches. They heard character evidence from Cllr Steven Bletsoe and accepted that the Member was passionate about her role and at the time was an inexperienced Councillor. The Committee felt that the Member struggled to articulate herself well and did become frustrated when trying to put her point across.
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	Turning to the consideration of <u>aggravating factors</u>, the Committee found that the Member had failed to acknowledge any wrongdoing and didn't show any remorse. They felt she could have tried to raise and resolve the issues in a different way. The Committee acknowledged that there was some confusion as to whether the Member had undertaken code of conduct training. However, the Committee noted the Member had signed her declaration of interest and the onus was on the Member to ensure she understand the Code and undertook any relevant training. The Committee resolved that the Member should be censured in relation to the above breaches of the Code of Conduct 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 made recommendations that discussions take place around training opportunities for the Member to add real value to the contribution she can make to Brackla Community Council and to ensure she has the relevant skills in a challenging environment. The Committee also recommended that there needs to be a revisit around Code of Conduct training. The Monitoring Officer will also offer her support to other Members of Brackla Community Council. 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. <u>Appeal</u> The 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. Bridgend County Borough Council Standards Committee Dated: 6 June 2025
Date Decision Made	30 May 2025

STANDARDS COMMITTEE - FRIDAY, 30 MAY 2025

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click this [link](#)

The meeting closed at 14:32.