

## Standards Committee Annual Report – 2025/26

### Membership

The Standards Committee is made up of Independent Members, one Town and Community Council representative and two County Borough Councillors. These are:

#### **Independent Members:**

Sue Maughan (Chair)

Peter Baker

Roy Lynch

Martyn Daley

Janet Evans

#### **Borough Councillors:**

Cllr Martin Williams

Cllr Graham Walter

#### **Town and Community Council representative:**

Cllr Gavin Thomas

### Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC)

This is the Annual Report of the Standards Committee for the period 1<sup>st</sup> March 2025 to 31 March 2026. The Committee seeks to promote and maintain high standards of conduct across the Council. Under Section 63 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 the Committee must make an annual report to the Authority describing how the Committee's functions have been discharged during the financial year.

### The Roles of the Standards Committee

The role and functions of the Committee are set out within Section 8 of the Council's Constitution. This covers such matters as:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors and Co-opted Members
- Monitoring the Council's Whistleblowing Policy
- Considering reports submitted by the Monitoring Officer and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
- Monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct
- Granting dispensations in accordance with the Regulations
- Monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups on the Council with their duties to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by the members of the group.

The Standards Committee generally meets quarterly throughout the year.

### Recruitment

On 20 July 2022, Council approved that the membership of the Committee be increased to eight Members and an additional Independent Member (co-opted) be appointed to the Committee. The previous two vacancies on the Committee following the resignation of Mr Shawn Cullen, Independent Member and the term of office ceasing for Mr Phillip Clarke,

Independent Member have now been filled with Mr Martyn Daley and Mrs Janet Evans being appointed to the Standards Committee in July 2025 as Independent Members.

### Work of the Committee

The work of the Committee during 2025/6 has continued to centre on the following main areas:

#### **Maintaining high standards**

The Council has ensured that Members have been trained to understand:

- Members' Code of Conduct
- Importance of the Register of Member Interests. The declaration of interest forms are published on the Council's website
- The Investigation of Complaints and a local hearing procedure

#### **Monitoring compliance by leaders of political groups**

The provisions in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 build on this by supporting a culture where members have a responsibility to act in a manner which respects and values all people. A duty under the Act is placed on the leaders of political groups to take steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of their members. Under the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 a political group is constituted where the Proper Officer is notified of two or more members who wish to be treated as a political group, the name of the group and the name of the one member of the group who is to act as its leader. At the Annual Meeting in May 2025, the Proper Officer was informed in writing of the following political groups and leaders:

- Labour – Group Leader: Cllr John Spanswick, Leader of the Council
- Bridgend County Independents – Leader of Largest Opposition Group: Cllr Amanda Williams
- Democratic Alliance Group – Group Leader: Cllr Ross Penhale-Thomas

The three group leaders were invited to the meeting of the Committee on 22 July 2025 to present reports outlining their compliance and support with the new duties including details of attendance at mandatory training sessions, complaints and relevant information.

Looking ahead, a report will be prepared and submitted to the Committee annually from each individual Group including details of attendance at mandatory training sessions, complaints and other relevant information. The reports will be shared with the Monitoring Officer prior to being submitted to the Committee and individual Group Leaders will be invited to attend the Committee when their reports are being considered.

### Code of Conduct Complaints

On 30 May 2025 the Committee convened to determine a complaint of an alleged breach of the Member Code Of Conduct against Cllr Lisa Lewis of Brackla Community Council. The Member 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 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 their support to other Members of Brackla Community Council.

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) received the following Town and Community Council Code of Conduct Complaints for 2025/26. At the time of this report, a breakdown of those complaints is not available but will be published as part of the PSOW Annual Letter in September 2026.

	Received	Closed	Closed at Investigation
Accountability and Openness	2	1	-
Disclosure and registration of interest	10	10	-
Integrity	2	2	-
Promotion of equality and respect	2	4	1
Selflessness and stewardship	2	2	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>

#### Local Resolution Protocol (LRP) Process

In 2025, the PSOW carried out a review of the LRPs of each of the principal local authorities in Wales. The review identified a varied approach to local resolution in terms of:

- the type of complaints which were deemed to be 'low level'
- the role of the Standards Committee or members of it
- the inclusion of an agreement not to refer a matter to PSOW whilst the protocol is in operation
- reference to the statutory duties on Group Leaders in managing standards of conduct and
- the outcomes available when the protocols are used.

As part of its review, the PSOW sought Counsel's opinion which was shared with Monitoring Officers for consideration. A Working Group of Monitoring Officers was established to review the advice note and the Group subsequently recommended that each local authority should review its LRP to reflect Counsel's advice.

At its meeting on 12 February 2026, the Standards Committee approved revisions to the Local Resolution Protocol adopted by the Council and noted that it continues to provide a helpful process for resolving relatively 'low-level' behavioural complaints made by County Borough Members about other Members, in a timely and proportionate way.

## Dispensations

The Standards Committee has statutory power to grant dispensations to Members with a personal and prejudicial interest in a matter, to allow them to participate in a decision regarding that matter, in appropriate circumstances, which are set out in statutory regulations.

A dispensation was granted to a Member of Council on 14 July 2025 to enable him to speak at a Community Council meeting as a matter of clarification in relation to minutes of a previous meeting held on 19 June 2025 whereby the Member declared a prejudicial interest in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

## Other Activities

In addition to the above activities the Standards Committee also:

- Received and noted the Public Services Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2024-25;
- Received and approved the Council's revised Local Resolution Protocol;
- Noted update reports following observations of Town and Community Council meetings;
- Received reports from the Group Leaders outlining their compliance and support with their new duties including details of attendance at mandatory training sessions, complaints and relevant information.

## Looking ahead

Looking ahead, much of the work of the Committee is demand led.

- The Committee will identify and support the provision of regular training and refresher events for Elected Members of the Council. This will be particularly relevant in the lead up to and following the local elections scheduled for May 2027;
- Observation of Council and Committee Meetings – the Standards Committee will continue to observe proceedings at Town and Community Council, Council and Committee meetings to give feedback on observations and inform its work priorities;
- Meetings with Group Leaders - to facilitate ongoing engagement with representatives from all political groups and to identify how the approach code of conduct matters in their political group;
- Code of Conduct, Member Training and Development – the Standards Committee will consider the need for any further training on the Members' Code of Conduct focussing on Town and Community Councils;
- To review the Council's Whistleblowing Policy to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

The Agenda and Minutes of the Standards Committee, together with all Reports considered at meetings are published online.