

Dorset Council – Complaint No. COM00008308

Investigation in respect of an alleged breach of the Dorset Council Code of Conduct

Investigation undertaken by Mary Dolley Legal Services Dorset Council

Background

Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by members of the authority and, under section 28, to have mechanisms in place to investigate allegations that a member has not complied with the Code of Conduct.

Following an initial review by the Complaints Team and having been reviewed by the Monitoring Officer and Dorset Council's Independent Person complaint number COM00008308 was referred for investigation on 8 January 2025.

Introduction

In order to be able to carry out a thorough investigation of the complaint raised I viewed the following:

- The Councillor Code of Conduct (the Code) referred to in the Constitution of Dorset Council (Appendix B)
- Dorset Council's policy (applicable to members and officers) relating to the use of social media (Appendix C)
- The materials comprising various screenshots that accompanied the complaint (Appendix D), comprising the post made by Councillor Somper on her Facebook page on 7 December 2024 (Appendix D.1) and the comments applied to that post by her, Councillor Beddow and Councillor Fuhrmann (Appendix D.2) and the 'conversation' between Councillor Beddow and Councillor Fuhrmann that took place by means of an exchange of private messages on Councillor Fuhrmann's Instagram account on 7 December 2024 (Appendix D.3) and the story shared by Councillor Fuhrmann on his Instagram account on 18 December 2024.
- Material provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) about the use of social media found here [Social media guidance for councillors | Local Government Association](#) including this guidance [An introduction to social media for councillors | Local Government Association](#) and [Guide to the role of councillors on social media | Local Government Association](#)

To supplement the information provided to me, I also met with the following people in order to seek their comments on a number of issues:

- Councillor Louie O'Leary – virtual meeting (Teams) 6 February 2025
- Councillor Jane Somper – face-to-face meeting on 13 February 2025
- Councillor Laura Beddow – face-to-face meeting on 13 February 2025

- Councillor Andrew Parry – virtual meeting (Teams) 20 February 2025
- Councillor Alex Fuhrmann – virtual meeting (Teams) 27 February 2025

A record of our discussions is attached at Appendices E to I. All interviewees have agreed the text of such records.

It is not my intention to set out everything said in the interviews, a record of which can be found in the appendices, but I refer to any issues within the main body of the report that I believe are pertinent to this investigation.

Complaint No. COM00008308

A complaint was received from Councillors Jane Somper, Laura Beddow and Andrew Parry alleging that

- Comments made by Councillor Fuhrmann on a post made by Councillor Somper on her Facebook page were ageist and sexist and thus in breach of the Code.
- The conduct of Councillor Fuhrmann towards Councillor Beddow by accusing her of stalking and bullying him in response to her attempt to challenge what she perceived as his rudeness to one of her colleagues and his use of a swear word, was aggressive and unacceptable.
- The conduct of Councillor Fuhrmann towards Councillors Somper and Beddow displayed sexism, age discrimination, prejudice, aggression and controlling behaviour.

The complaint was supported by Councillors Jill Haynes, Sherry Jespersen, Cathy Lugg, Emma Parker, Carole Jones and Val Potheary. Following consultation with the Monitoring Officer I concluded that it was not necessary to interview any of the six additional complainants.

The complaint is set out verbatim at Appendix A

Undisputed facts

The undisputed facts relating to the complaint are:

- Councillor Fuhrmann created the image reposted by Councillor Somper and identified in Appendix D as D.1 and shared it as a story on his Instagram account on or about 5 December 2024.
- The image came to the attention of Councillor Somper who reposted it on her Facebook page on 7 December 2024. That repost is identified in Appendix D as D.1.
- Comments were applied to Councillor Somper's post by Councillors Fuhrmann and Beddow and others (members of the public). The comments applied by Councillors Fuhrmann, Beddow and Somper were posted on 18 December 2024 and are identified in Appendix D as D.2.
- Councillor Fuhrmann created the image identified in Appendix D as D.4 and shared it as a story on his Instagram account on or about 18 December 2024.

- During the exchange of comments on 18 December 2024 referred to above Councillor Beddow exchanged messages with Councillor Fuhrmann using the private messaging facility available on Instagram and the exchange of messages is identified in Appendix D as D.3.

Facts/statements not agreed

Councillor Fuhrmann denies all the allegations made about his conduct and denies that he has acted in breach of the Code.

Findings

1. The Code was adopted on 3 December 2020. The paragraphs that are relevant to this complaint are:
 - General Principles of Councillor Conduct
 - to uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan principles);
 - to treat all persons fairly and with respect; and
 - to lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of Councillor.
 - General Conduct: 1.1 (Respect) - as a Councillor to treat other Councillors and members of the public with respect.
 - General Conduct: 2 (Bullying, harassment and discrimination) - as a Councillor not to bully or harass any person and to promote equalities and not to discriminate unlawfully against any person.
 - General Conduct: 8 (Complying with the Code of Conduct) – as a Councillor to undertake Code of Conduct training provided by my local authority.
2. The Code states that it applies to councillors when they are acting in their capacity as a councillor which may include when their actions would give the impression to a reasonable member of the public with knowledge of all the facts, that a councillor is acting as such. Councillor Fuhrmann's Facebook and Instagram accounts refer to him as a councillor and I find that the Code therefore applies to the complaint.
3. The Code states that it applies to all forms of communication and interaction including electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments. I find that the Code therefore applies to the material about which the complaint has been made.
4. The Code also states that councillors are expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor. Appendix A in the Code states that the principle of leadership includes being willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.
5. Paragraph 8.1 of the section of the Code headed 'General Conduct' requires councillors to undertake Code of Conduct training provided by the Council. The

existence of the Code and the requirement to undertake training about it, and the Council's policy relating to the use of social media are drawn to the attention of councillors immediately after their election to Dorset Council, as part of the councillor induction process. The process included a training session that took place on 9 May 2024, which I have been told was not attended by Councillor Fuhrmann. The training session incorporated a presentation by the Service Manager for Democratic and Electoral Services about the Code, and attendees were asked to take some time to read the Code. Materials available on the Council's Democratic Services website including information and guidance published by the Local Government Association about the use of social media, were also drawn to Councillors' attention as part of the induction/training process.

6. The complaint relates to: -

- material posted (shared as a story) by Councillor Fuhrmann on his Instagram account on or about 5 December 2024 ('the 5 December post') and on or about 18 December 2024 ('the 18 December post').
 - comments applied by Cllr Fuhrmann on 18 December 2024 to material incorporating an image of the 5 December post, posted by Councillor Somper on her Facebook account on 7 December 2024 ('the 7 December post').
 - a private exchange of messages on Instagram on 18 December 2024, between Councillor Fuhrmann and Councillor Beddow.
7. The 5 December and 18 December posts and the comments applied by him to the 7 December post are communications to which the Code applies, and I find that when generating and publishing them Councillor Fuhrmann was thus subject to the duties imposed by the Code, to treat all persons with respect and to lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.
8. I find that the exchange of messages on Instagram between Councillor Fuhrmann and Councillor Beddow was likewise written communication to which the Code applies, including the duty to treat other councillors with respect and to lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.
9. As regards the 5 December post (which can be seen as part of image D.1 in Appendix D), Councillor Fuhrmann confirmed that he added the words 'I continue to find a better uses of my time at Dorset Full Council meetings, while the party politics seems the chief purpose' to an image (photograph) of himself sitting in the Council chamber at County Hall and shared it on social media in such a way that it was visible to members of the public at large. He cannot recall whether he posted it to his Facebook account as well as sharing it as a story on his Instagram account. By sharing material as a story on Instagram (and in contrast to material put on Instagram as a post), the 'story' is automatically deleted after 24 hours and is then no longer visible to people who look at the Instagram account. Councillor Fuhrmann confirmed that he does not know, and there is no way of ascertaining, how many people looked at the story during the 24-hour period for which it was visible.
10. The 5 December post having been brought to the attention of Councillor Somper, she reposted it to her Facebook page on 7 December 2024 (the 7 December post) having added text stating 'Meet Cllr Fuhrmann, a new Liberal Democrat councillor

who posted this from Full Council during important debate on the real priorities ...' The 7 December post is image D.1 in Appendix D. I find that Councillor Somper's motive for posting the 7 December post was to challenge what she believed to be Councillor Fuhrmann's poor behaviour (his making the 5 December post), in accordance with the Nolan principle of Leadership as described in Appendix A of the Code.

11. The events that gave rise to the complaint occurred on 18 December 2024 some ten days after the 7 December post. They took place within a short space of time and a chronology of them is as follows:

- 15.49 – Councillor Fuhrmann applied a comment to the 7 December post. An image of the comment is one of those at Appendix D.2.1 and starts with the words 'Meet Cllr Somper, an old tory councillor'
- 16.13 – Councillor Somper applied a comment responding to Councillor Fuhrmann's 15.49 comment. An image of the comment is likewise found at Appendix D.2.1 and states 'less of the old 'babe'.'
- 16.19 – Councillor Beddow applied a comment responding to Councillor Fuhrmann's 15.49 comment. An image of the comment is likewise found at Appendix D.2.1 and starts with the words 'Jane loves people having their own opinion. She's not old and even if she was'
- 17.46 – Councillor Fuhrmann applied a further comment in response to Councillor Beddow's 16.19 comment. An image of the comment is found at Appendix D.2.2 and starts with the words '...get back on the bin lorry Beddow ... see Jane's response above, she gets that it's a bit of banter....'
- 17.48 – Councillor Beddow responded to Councillor Fuhrmann's 17.46 comment. An image of the comment is likewise found at Appendix D.2.2 and states 'wow'.

Simultaneously with the posting of these comments, the exchange of messages referred to in paragraph 6 above took place privately between Councillor Beddow and Councillor Fuhrmann using the messaging facility on Councillor Fuhrmann's Instagram account. The exchange is contained in three screenshots that are shown in Appendix D.3. I find that Councillor Beddow's motive in contacting Councillor Fuhrmann by this means was to challenge what she believed was his poor behaviour, and to do so privately rather than by means of comments available for members of the public at large to see. The exchange was initiated by Councillor Beddow and began with her message sent at 16.50, which started with the words 'Alex seriously – why? If you hate' and finished at approximately 18.06 with Councillor Beddow's message which began with the words 'I'm not a bully Alex. We've never spoken'.

12. When I viewed Councillor Somper's Facebook page it showed that 26 comments, including those referred to in paragraph 6 above, had been applied to the 7 December post. The part of the post showing the comments has subsequently been removed. At the date of this report Councillor Somper has 214 followers on Facebook. It is not known how many of her followers and how many other people viewed the 7 December post and the comments applied to it.

13. The screenshot shown at Appendix D.4 is of the 18 December post. The image (photograph) of him was the same as the one that formed the basis for the 5

December post, but as well as the words added then and by Councillor Somper when she reposted it (the 7 December post), Councillor Fuhrmann added the words 'Proud cllr moment – managed to catch a jolly, jumped up north dorset tory cllr with my post' together with images (someone fishing and a cartoon character of a grinning child) that suggested that he felt that the incident was a matter of fun. Councillor Fuhrmann confirmed that the post was shared as a story on his Instagram account and thus was automatically removed 24 hours after he created (shared) it. He cannot recall whether he also posted it on his Facebook account. He confirmed also that he does not know, and there is no way of ascertaining, how many people looked at the story during the 24-hour period for which it was visible.

14. Councillor Fuhrmann advised me that he has approximately 1180 followers on Instagram and 2100 followers on Facebook. He does not know and has no way of ascertaining how many of his followers and how many others (members of the public) view images he posts on Facebook and posts or shares as a story on Instagram.

Conclusion

On concluding my investigation, I am of the view that Councillor Fuhrmann is in breach of the Code as follows:

1. As regards the General Principles of Councillor Conduct (to act lawfully, to treat all persons fairly and with respect and to lead by example and act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of Councillor) and paragraph 1.1 of the section of the Code headed 'General Conduct' that requires councillors to treat other councillors with respect:

Conclusion: In my opinion Councillor Fuhrmann is in breach of these provisions of the Code.

The preamble to the General Principles states that everyone in public office should uphold the Nolan Principles and sets out how councillors should act on all occasions. The text that accompanies paragraph 1.1 states that respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour and speech, and that rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors. The section of the Code headed 'Application of the Code of Conduct' states that it applies to all forms of communication and interaction including written and non-verbal communication and to electronic and social media communication, posts, statements and comments. This section of the Code also states that councillors are expected to uphold high standards of conduct and show leadership at all times when acting as a councillor. The principle of leadership is referred to in Appendix A of the Code which states that holders of public office should exhibit the Nolan principles in their own behaviour and should actively promote and robustly support them.

As regards the 5 December post I conclude that by adding the words 'I continue to find a better uses of my time at Dorset Full Council meetings, while the party politics seems the chief purpose' accompanied by an emoji showing a face with rolling eyes (the conventional meaning of which is to indicate sarcasm, frustration or boredom) to an image of himself sitting in the Council chamber at County Hall and

sharing it on social media, Councillor Fuhrmann could reasonably be taken to be suggesting that some at any rate of the time he spends at Full Council meetings of Dorset Council is time wasted. In my view he thereby showed a lack of respect for all his fellow Councillors including the complainants and for the officers (local authority employees) who were present at the meeting, and a lack of leadership. I further conclude that making such an image available for public view is an action that is inconsistent with the requirement of the Code that councillors should act in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor.

As regards the two comments applied by Councillor Fuhrmann to Councillor Somper's 7 December post referred to in paragraph 11 of the section headed 'Findings' above, I accept Councillor Fuhrmann's explanation that he did not use the word 'old' as a reference to Councillor Somper's age but rather by way of parody to highlight her membership of the pre-May 2024 administration. I also accept Councillor Fuhrmann's explanation that he uses the word 'babe' as an informal means of address to a wide range of people, old and young, male and female alike and as such his use of it is not sexist. However I conclude that in the context of communication made in the public domain the words were ill-chosen and that the use in the first comment of the colloquial expression 'laters babel' with two emojis the conventional meaning of which is to indicate someone rolling on the floor laughing, showed a lack of respect, and that the tone of the second comment ('get back on the bin lorry'), again incorporating the use of the same emojis, was impolite and discourteous and suggested a lack of respect for the service provided by the Council's waste operatives and Councillor Beddow's championing of it. For the reasons given in paragraph 2 below I do not consider that the exchange of comments can be dismissed as 'a bit of banter' and that although not an attack, the second comment was phrased in such a way as to appear aggressive and to be inappropriately personal. Furthermore, it seems to me that by applying comments such as these in circumstances where he knew that they could be read by members of the public Councillor Fuhrmann showed disregard for the Code's stated fundamental aim of creating and maintaining public confidence in the role of councillor and local government.

As regards the 18 December post, while I am willing to accept that Councillor Fuhrmann intended it to be light-hearted, I conclude that viewed objectively it was rude and offensive, it displayed a lack of respect and showed disregard for the need to uphold high standards of conduct and to show leadership. The use of the word 'proud' to describe his feeling about his action in further sharing the original post having added another comment and more emojis, and his use of the words 'jolly' and 'jumped-up' to describe Councillor Somper, gave the post (story) the dimension of a personal attack. It is not known how many people viewed the 18 December post during the 24 hours in which it was available to be seen, but I conclude that it is possible that many of those who did might well have had their expectations and confidence in councillors, lowered.

As regards the exchange of messages between himself and Councillor Beddow I conclude that the tone and language used by Councillor Fuhrmann was rude, disrespectful, confrontational and aggressive. The use of the word 'shit' was in my opinion regrettable, but I am conscious that whilst regarded by many people as crude, particularly when used outside an immediate circle of people to whom such language is known to be acceptable, this word is now widely in use as a mild

expletive and as a colloquial alternative to more traditional words that might have been used in this context such as ‘... giving me a hard time because you don’t agree...’, and may not therefore be regarded by much of the population at large as seriously offensive. I am mindful that the exchange was initiated by Councillor Beddow as a private one (she did not feel it appropriate to challenge Councillor Fuhrmann’s conduct in a public space) and I have been told by both Councillors that they have not shared it with third parties other than in the context of the complaint I have investigated; had the exchange taken place in a publicly accessible space my view of Councillor Fuhrmann’s tone and choice of language would have been that it rendered the matter a more serious breach. I have also noted that although the tone of Councillor Fuhrmann’s private exchange with Councillor Beddow was on his part unpleasantly aggressive and belligerent, the exchange began and ended within the space of little more than an hour.

2. As regards paragraphs 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the section of the Code headed ‘General Conduct’ that requires a Councillor not to bully or harass any person, to promote equalities and not discriminate unlawfully against any person:

Conclusion: In my opinion Councillor Fuhrmann is not in breach of this provision of the Code.

The Code refers to the meaning attributed by ACAS to bullying as ‘offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour ...’ and states that it might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident ([What bullying is - Bullying at work - Acas](#)). The Code refers to the definition of harassment contained in the Protection of Harassment Act 1997 as being conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. The Code states that unlawful discrimination occurs where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic, such characteristics being defined as specific aspects of a person’s identity defined by the Equality Act 2010 namely age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The comments made by Councillor Fuhrmann in his two responses to Councillor Somper’s 7 December post were in my view offensive and insulting but I have concluded that they could not be said to amount to bullying, harassment or similar behaviour of a controlling nature.

As regards Councillor Fuhrmann’s comment stating that Councillor Somper ‘gets that it’s a bit of banter’, a dictionary definition of ‘banter’ is ‘the playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks’. The website of the Anti-bullying Alliance explains that banter is a playful and positive reciprocal interaction that typically occurs between friends, involving a ‘verbal ping-pong’ of comments meant to be light-hearted and humorous, and that if the person on the receiving end of it is hurt it is no longer banter - [Understanding Banter](#). The website also explains that whilst amongst friends banter is understood as fun, to outsiders it can appear aggressive, and that it is important to recognise the difference between playful teasing that has gone too far, and intentional harm, and to distinguish between innocent mistakes and behaviours intended to harm, which can escalate into bullying. The relationship between Councillors Fuhrmann and Somper is that of professional

colleagues which exists by reason of their being elected Members of Dorset Council rather than friends, and exchanges between them cannot therefore be characterised as banter. I conclude also that it is unlikely that any exchanges made in public rather than amongst friends can be regarded as banter. The Anti-bullying Alliance website explains also that all offensive language and behaviour is always unacceptable, and that language and behaviour can have different meanings in different contexts; exchanges that might initially be characterised as banter can turn into bullying. The website refers to the four widely accepted elements of bullying, namely that it is intentional, hurtful, repetitive and involves a power imbalance, and Councillor Fuhrmann's conduct cannot therefore in my view be said to have crossed the line into bullying or harassment. Ill-judged as Councillor Fuhrmann's comments were, the exchange on Councillor Somper's Facebook page took place and was finished within the space of two hours.

As regards the promotion of equalities and the duty not to discriminate, I have concluded that whilst Councillor Fuhrmann's use of the words 'old' and 'babe' was disrespectful and rude, I do not consider that it could be said that he has treated Councillor Somper unfairly because of a protected characteristic, nor that it is evidence that he would not if by reason of his work as a councillor he was required to do so, play his role in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the Council's performance and strategic aims in accordance with the expectations of the Code. As indicated above I have accepted Councillor Fuhrmann's explanation that he did not use the word 'old' as a reference to Councillor Somper's age and that he uses the word 'babe' as an informal means of address to a wide range of people and his use of it is not sexist. However, it is a source of some concern to me that the second sentence of the comment made by Councillor Fuhrmann to Councillor Beddow at 17.46 on 18 December in the thread attached to the 7 December post, suggests that he did not take seriously the possibility that had been raised by Councillor Beddow, that the use of the word 'old' by him might be taken as age-discriminatory.

3. Although not part of the complaint, during the course of my investigation I checked the training record maintained by the Council in respect of all Members of the Council and which is publicly available on the Council's website. The training record relating to Cllr Fuhrmann indicates that he did not attend the councillor induction day (getting started session) on 9 May 2024 at which (amongst other things) Code training was provided (see paragraph 5 in the section headed 'Findings' above). I have been advised by the Member Development & Support Officer that to the best of her knowledge Cllr Fuhrmann has not at the date of this report requested sight of the training materials relating to the Code training. In the absence of any evidence that Cllr Fuhrmann has undertaken Code training I conclude that it is likely that he has not and that he is thus in breach of paragraph 8.1 of the Code.

Further conclusions

As is apparent from paragraph 11 of the section of this report headed 'Findings', the exchanges between Councillor Fuhrmann and Councillors Somper and Beddow on Councillor Somper's Facebook page that are the subject of the complaints, all occurred within a space of approximately two hours on one day. Although the two images created by Councillor Fuhrmann and shared as a story

by him on Instagram (the 5 December post and the 18 December post), were available to be seen for just 24 hours, during that time it was possible for anyone who viewed them to take a photograph or screenshot of them for future reference, as indeed happened. The reputational risk not only to individual councillors but also to the Council itself through the ill-advised and injudicious use of social media, is not inconsiderable and should not be underestimated.

In the context of the comments about banter, I have referred above to the possibility that comments made on social media can be misconstrued by those who read them, whether such comments are made to a specific recipient or to a wider audience. Attempts at light-hearted humour are not always taken as such by the recipients and others who happen to read them. Moreover, there is no certainty that something that is put in writing, even where the author believes they are 'saying' it in a closed group such as a private Facebook or Instagram page or messaging facility, or a chat group such as WhatsApp, will remain private. Regular reports appear in the press of instances where people, in some cases politicians, have found that something they have 'said' in what they believed was a private space has come into the public domain, resulting in some instances in catastrophic loss of reputation and even careers.

As stated in paragraph 5 of the section of this report headed 'Findings', all councillors have access to the Council's Councillor Services page on Sharepoint on which the Council's policy and guidance relating to the use of social media can be found [Social media - policy and guidance](#) and councillors are directed to it when they are elected, as part of the induction process. The Councillor Services page also advises councillors that social media is a great way of reaching a large number of people and that the Council's Communications Team will be pleased to offer guidance about its use. It also refers councillors to the advice given by the LGA mentioned in the section of this report headed 'Introduction'. Amongst other things the advice includes a reminder that social media works in the public domain and that once something is published it is 'out there' for everyone to see, and describes the risks that can thereby arise, including that it can be taken out of context. The LGA Guide to the role of councillors on social media offers another piece of useful advice when posting on social media 'Follow the golden rule – do as you would be done by. It is never pleasant to be on the receiving end of negative posts or abusive comments' and speaks to the need for responses on social media to be measured. LGA guidance also advises that using social media as an elected member of a council is very different from using it as someone who isn't, and that councillors have additional responsibilities because of their position.

The issues raised by the complaint I have investigated, and which is the subject of this report, might therefore usefully form the basis for some careful reflection about the use and misuse of social media.

Mary Dolley
Legal Services
Dorset Council
15 July 2025

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Appendix A

COMPLAINT No. COM00008308

From Councillor Parry:

'It is clear, Councillor Fuhrmann's default position when he has been called out for poor behaviour in his social media posts, is to retort with an overtly aggressive tone, sexist or discriminatory language and personally derogatory remarks. All of these behaviours would be in breach of the Code.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour:

Sexism: Addressing Councillor Somper as "Babe".

Discrimination: Age reference to Councillor Somper.

Prejudice: "Get Back on the Bin Lorry". Whilst Councillor Beddow does not work in the waste and recycle sector, her husband does, something which she has spoken about with pride in public before. To suggest the work of those in this sector is in some way inferior is contemptable. Also, as a previous Cabinet Member for this service, Councillor Beddow championed officers & crews that work in this important sector of Dorset Council's responsibilities. To belittle the service in this way, Councillor Fuhrmann has been deeply disrespectful to a much wider audience.

Aggression: Use of swear word in message to Councillor Beddow. Also, there is a consistent personally aggressive tone running through the messages from Councillor Fuhrmann.

Controlling Behaviour: Rather than acknowledging he has overstepped the mark and apologise at the first opportunity, Councillor Fuhrmann dismissed the matter as "a bit of banter", when it clearly is not. He then dares Councillor Beddow to take him through the complaints process, giving an air of arrogance that he is untouchable from any consequences.'

From Councillor Somper

'We are writing to make a formal complaint under the council's Code about comments made by Councillor Fuhrmann towards Councillor Jane Somper on her Facebook page.

Councillor Fuhrman comments are both sexist and ageist, and such conduct should not be tolerated.

Under the Nolan Principles of Public Life, this behaviour constitutes a clear breach. Specifically, the principle of Leadership states:

"Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs."

His actions have undeniably brought disrepute upon himself and his group, diminishing the standards we believe the group would wish to uphold.'

From Councillor Beddow

Councillor Beddow's complaint is the same as Councillor Somper's, with the addition of the following – 'There are two screenshots attached of his and my comments on

Jane's facebook post, and three screenshots of the ensuing private message between Councillor Fuhrmann and myself where he accused me of stalking and bullying, of 'giving him shit' and of being 'creepy'.

For clarity - this brief exchange (which you will note is polite on my part, and was only intended to call him out for rudeness to my colleague) is the only exchange I've ever had with him.

That being the case, I was horrified to be accused of those things. I would never behave like that towards anyone but regardless, this brief exchange is hardly evidence of 'stalking and bullying'.

I would like an apology from Councillor Fuhrmann, and I feel he would also benefit from some EDI training.'

Appendix B

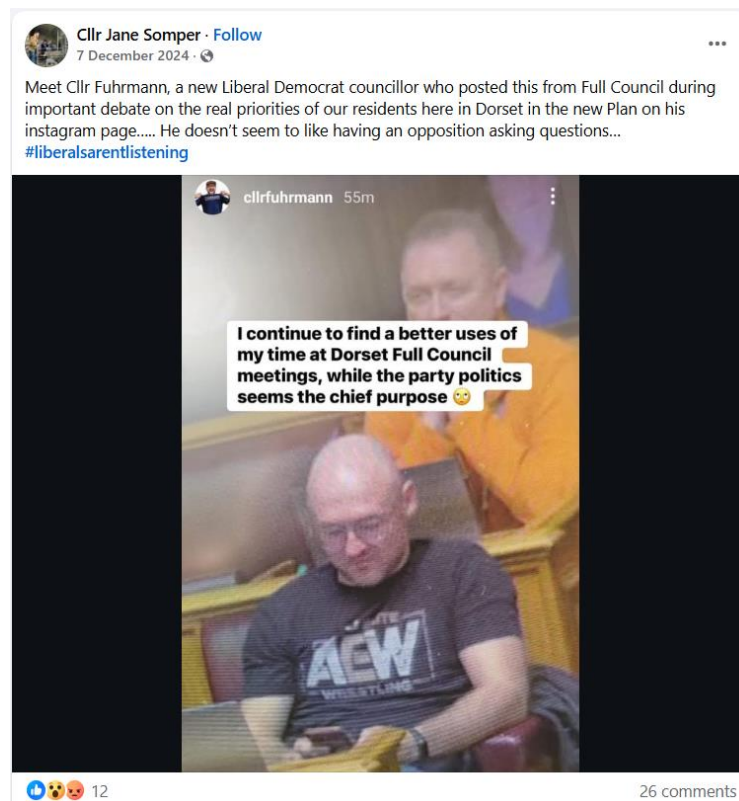
Dorset Council Councillor Code of Conduct - [Local Government Association Model Councillor Code 2020](#)

Appendix C

Dorset Council social media policy - [Social media policy for Councillors](#)

Appendix D

D.1 – Councillor Fuhrmann's 5 December 2024 post to Instagram as reposted by Councillor Somper to her Facebook page on 7 December 2024



D.2 – comments applied to Councillor Somper's repost of Councillor Fuhrmann's first Instagram post

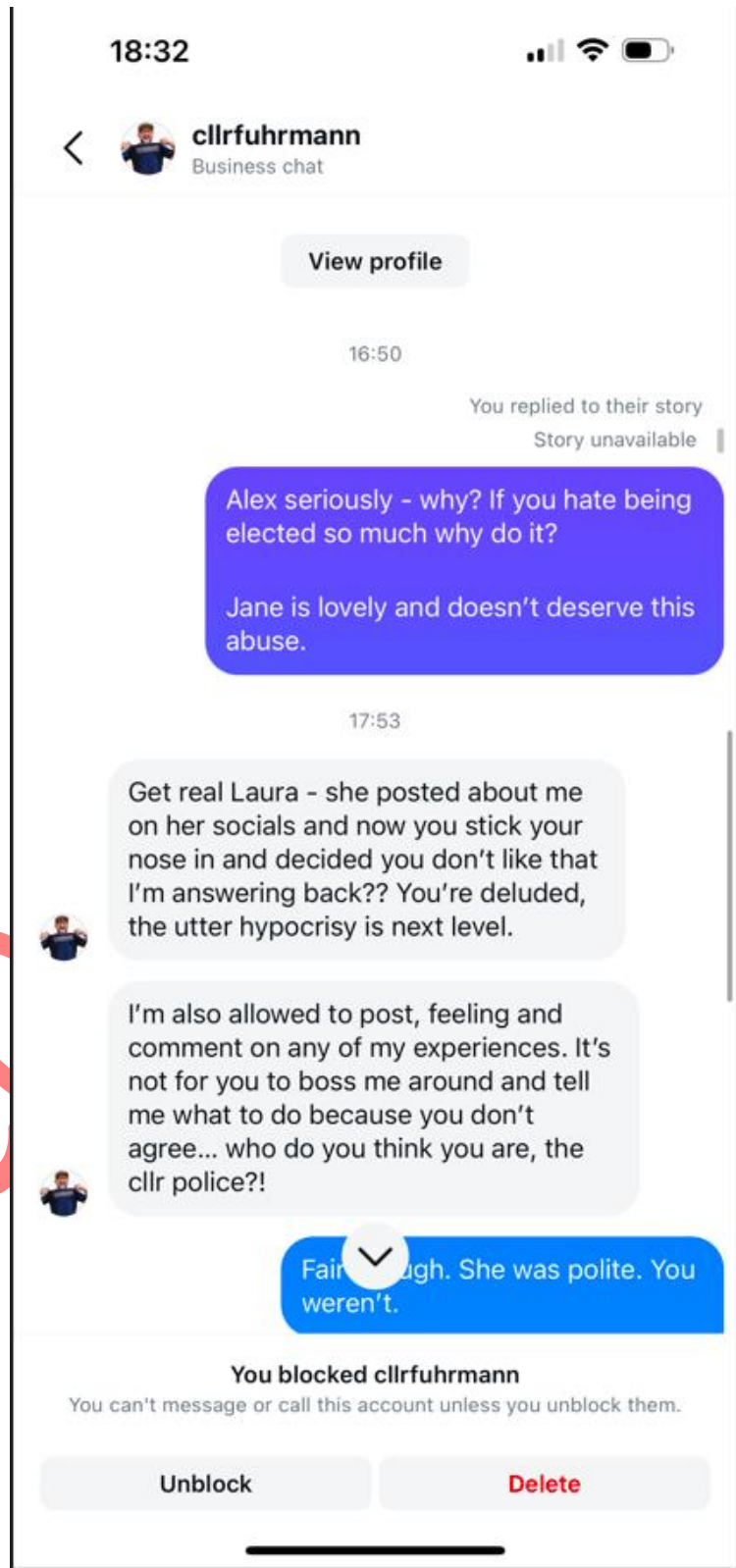
D.2.1



D.2.2



D.3 – three screens detailing the private Instagram message conversation between Councillor Fuhrmann and Councillor Beddow



18:32



cllrfuhrmann

Business chat

I'm also allowed to post, feeling and comment on any of my experiences. It's not for you to boss me around and tell me what to do because you don't agree... who do you think you are, the cllr police?!



Fair enough. She was polite. You weren't.

True. That's the job of the code of conduct that we all signed up to.

Then make a complaint about me if you don't like it. You've got more front than Blackpool, giving me shit because you don't agree. You don't have to stalk me, just unfollow me. This is surreal.



And by your own logic - you posted your feelings, she posted hers. I jumped in because you were rude. Not sure how this is stalking, we all follow each other at DC, what an incredibly odd comment. It just feels to loads of us that you seem to think council is a joke, and we take it seriously.



Okay, let's do this ✓

You blocked cllrfuhrmann

You can't message or call this account unless you unblock them.

Unblock

Delete



D.4 – Councillor Fuhrmann’s second Instagram post (the 18 December post)



Appendix E

Interview with Councillor Louie O'Leary

1. I explained to Councillor O'Leary that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information to enable me to understand aspects of the Code of Conduct complaint I was investigating to assist me in formulating my report and its conclusions for reference to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary to the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee, in accordance with Dorset Council's arrangements for dealing with Code complaints. The complaint related to breaches of the Code that have been alleged by Councillors Somper, Beddow and Parry in relation to the behaviour of Councillor Alex Fuhrmann.

2. I explained that I had approached him because I had seen his name on an image sent to me in the context of my investigation and I needed to understand his involvement in the matter. The image indicated to me that it had been sent by him to others from his smartphone, at 16.42 on 18 December 2024.
3. Councillor O'Leary confirmed that the image was a screenshot taken by him on 18 December 2024 using his mobile phone, of a story that Councillor Fuhrmann had shared on his public Instagram account. Councillor O'Leary's understanding of Instagram is that items that are shared as stories by the account owner in this manner, disappear automatically from the account after 24 hours.
4. Councillor O'Leary confirmed that he forwarded the screenshot to a WhatsApp group of which he believes Councillors Somper, Beddow and Parry are members.
5. Councillor O'Leary also asked me to note that he had not forwarded the screenshot to the WhatsApp group in order to initiate or support the complaint I am investigating.

Appendix F

Interview with Councillor Jane Somper

1. I explained to Councillor Somper that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information to enable me to understand aspects of the Code of Conduct complaint I was investigating to assist me in formulating my report and its conclusions for reference to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary to the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee, in accordance with Dorset Council's arrangements for dealing with Code complaints. The complaint related to breaches of the Code that have been alleged by herself and Councillors Beddow and Parry, supported by six other Councillors in relation to the behaviour of Councillor Alex Fuhrmann. I advised Councillor Somper that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. Councillor Somper believes that the original post made by Councillor Fuhrmann, which she reposted to her Facebook account on 7 December 2024, was made by him during or soon after the Full Council meeting on 5 December 2024 to his Instagram account and/or his Facebook page, but she cannot recall specifically which. The post was drawn to her attention by a third party.
3. Councillor Somper's attention was also drawn to the second post made by Councillor Fuhrmann to his Instagram account; it was forwarded to her on 18 December 2024 by Councillor Louie O'Leary.
4. Councillor Somper feels that as well as displaying sexism and ageism, Councillor Fuhrmann's conduct is indicative of a lack of regard for the Nolan Principles which (among other things) require councillors to treat all persons with respect and to lead by example. Councillor Somper believes that by making available to be viewed by the public, material such as the image posted by him during or shortly after the Full Council meeting on 5 December 2024 and the further amended image posted on 18 December 2024, Councillor Fuhrmann was displaying a lack of leadership – the material suggested that the work of Dorset Council and the role of councillor were not matters to be taken seriously. The comment she made in response to Councillor Fuhrmann's comment on her post ('less of the old 'babe')

was an attempt on her part to defuse the situation as it seemed to her that Cllr Fuhrmann's comment was seeking to escalate a potentially unsatisfactory exchange of comments that was taking place in public view.

5. Councillor Somper has been a member of Dorset Council since its formation in 2019 and had been a member of North Dorset District Council one of its predecessor councils since 2011. This is the first time she has felt it necessary to make a Code of Conduct complaint about a fellow councillor's conduct. Councillor Somper is mindful that the Nolan Principle of Public Life that speaks to leadership requires holders of public office not only to exhibit the principles in their own behaviour but also to be willing to challenge poor behaviour whenever it occurs, and she feels that on this occasion Councillor Fuhrmann's conduct ought to be challenged.

Appendix G

Interview with Councillor Laura Beddow

1. I explained to Councillor Beddow that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information to enable me to understand aspects of the Code of Conduct complaint I was investigating to assist me in formulating my report and its conclusions for reference to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary to the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee, in accordance with Dorset Council's arrangements for dealing with Code complaints. The complaint related to breaches of the Code that have been alleged by herself and Councillors Somper and Parry, supported by six other Councillors in relation to the behaviour of Councillor Alex Fuhrmann. I advised Councillor Beddow that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. Councillor Beddow believes that the original post was made by Councillor Fuhrmann to his Instagram account during or shortly after the Full Council meeting on 5 December 2024; it had been drawn to her attention by a third party.
3. Councillor Beddow feels that Councillor Fuhrmann's comments about Councillor Somper were both rude and unjustified, and that they were ageist and sexist.
4. In the context of the comment applied by Councillor Fuhrmann to Councillor Somper's Facebook post (Get back on the bin lorry Beddow ...) on 18 December 2024 Councillor Beddow explained that she had previously held the brief for the Council's Waste Services when she was Cabinet Member for Culture and Communities and in that capacity had trained as a waste operative and went out with the then Corporate Director and others on a waste vehicle on International Women's Day as part of an initiative to demonstrate the ability of women to perform non-traditional roles, and this had been publicised by the Council. Councillor Beddow believes that Councillor Fuhrmann's comment suggested that the work of waste operatives was less valuable than that of elected members of the Council and was disrespectful.
5. Councillor Beddow initiated the private 'conversation' on the Instagram messaging facility with Councillor Fuhrmann in the context of the comments applied by Councillors Fuhrmann and Somper to Councillor Somper's 7 December 2024 post (re-post) of the 5 December Instagram story. Councillor Beddow wanted to let Councillor Fuhrmann know the extent of her disquiet about the nature and tone of

his comments privately rather than by continuing to add comments to Councillor Somper's Facebook post, such comments being available to be seen by members of the public. The 'conversation' was not protracted – it started at 16.50 pm, went backwards and forwards and finished at 18.06 pm. The swear word that Councillor Beddow complained of, used by Councillor Fuhrmann in the exchange, was 'shit'. Councillor Beddow does not believe that her exchange of messages with Councillor Fuhrmann could reasonably said to have amounted to stalking and bullying as alleged by him. Councillor Beddow has not shared the contents of the 'conversation' with any third party.

6. Councillor Beddow has been a Member of Dorset Council and one of its predecessor councils (Purbeck District Council) since 2015. She has never previously felt it necessary to make a complaint about the conduct of a fellow councillor and was somewhat reluctant to make the current complaint. She feels however that Councillor Fuhrmann's conduct has on this occasion crossed a line and has breached the standards required by the Code of Conduct, and that the Nolan Principle of Leadership described in the Code of Conduct justifies her in challenging what she believes was his lack of leadership.

Appendix H

Interview with Councillor Andrew Parry

1. I explained to Councillor Parry that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information to enable me to understand aspects of the Code of Conduct complaint I was investigating to assist me in formulating my report and its conclusions for reference to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary to the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee, in accordance with Dorset Council's arrangements for dealing with Code complaints. The complaint related to breaches of the Code that have been alleged by himself and Councillors Somper and Beddow, supported by six other Councillors in relation to the behaviour of Councillor Alex Fuhrmann. I advised Councillor Parry that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. Councillor Parry does not know which social media platform (Facebook and/or Instagram) Councillor Fuhrmann had posted the original image on, but believes that in light of the caption that he had applied to it ('I continue to find better uses of my time ...') Councillor Fuhrmann's comment may have been made about questions that were being asked at the Full Council meeting on 5 December 2024. Councillor Parry felt that by suggesting that aspects of the meeting were a waste of time, Councillor Fuhrmann was not leading by example and acting in a way that secures public confidence in the role of councillor. Councillor Parry believes that the principle of leadership as explained in Appendix A of the Council's Code of Conduct encourages councillors to challenge poor behaviour on the part of other councillors, in the interest of holding councillors to account if it is perceived that they are not displaying leadership in accordance with the Nolan Principles.
3. Councillor Parry is also concerned by what he considers are the ageism and sexism inherent in Councillor Fuhrmann's comments, and by the element of prejudice he believes comes across in the comment about Councillor Beddow and the bin lorry, which he considers suggests that the work of the Council's waste

collection service is in some way inferior. He is concerned too that the tone of Councillor Fuhrmann's comments is aggressive and personal.

4. Although the complaint has been made principally by himself, Councillor Somper and Councillor Beddow, Councillor Parry has received similar expressions of dissatisfaction about Councillor Fuhrmann's conduct from six other councillors.

Appendix I

Interview with Councillor Alex Fuhrmann

1. I explained to Councillor Fuhrmann that that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information to enable me to understand aspects of the Code of Conduct complaint I was investigating to assist me in formulating my report and its conclusions for reference to the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person and if necessary to the Audit and Governance (Hearing) Sub-Committee, in accordance with Dorset Council's arrangements for dealing with Code complaints. The complaint related to breaches of the Code that have been alleged by Councillors Somper, Beddow and Parry, supported by six other Councillors in relation to his behaviour. I advised Councillor Fuhrmann that our interview was to remain confidential.
2. I asked Councillor Fuhrmann about the image of him to which text had been added and which had been reposted by Councillor Somper to her Facebook page on 7 December 2024. He confirmed that the image was a photograph taken by a colleague at the Full Council meeting on 5 December 2024 and sent to him.
3. Councillor Fuhrmann confirmed that having added the words 'I continue to find a better uses of my timeetc.' he put the image on his Instagram page using the 'share as a story' facility, the effect of which is that it is visible to persons viewing the page for 24 hours, after which it is automatically removed and is then no longer available to be seen. Councillor Fuhrmann cannot recall whether he also posted the image to his Facebook account.
4. Councillor Fuhrmann has approximately 1,180 followers on Instagram and approximately 2,100 followers on Facebook. Both accounts are public and thus available to be viewed by members of the public at large. He does not know how many people actually viewed the image during the period of time it was available to be seen on Instagram.
5. As regards Councillor Somper's post (repost of the image) on her Facebook account on 7 December 2024, Councillor Fuhrmann noted that she identified him by name and identified the political party to which he is affiliated.
6. As regards the comment Councillor Fuhrmann applied to Councillor Somper's post at 15.49 on 18 December, he used the word 'old' by way of parody to make the point that Councillor Somper was part of the pre-May 2024 administration, and in contrast to the use by her of the word 'new' in the text she applied when re-posting the image to her Facebook page. He did not use the word 'old' to refer to Councillor Somper's age. The sentence structure used by him in the comment was also parody in that it was similar to that used by Councillor Somper, for instance "She doesn't seem to like' in response to Councillor Somper's 'He doesn't seem to like', and his reference to Councillor Somper's political party allegiance was made in response to her having identified the political party he is affiliated to. Nor did he use the word 'babe' to refer to Councillor Somper's sex; it is a term (mannerism)

he uses informally when talking to both men and women, adults and children alike: the expression 'laters babe' has no particular meaning and is merely informally conversational. Councillor Fuhrmann pointed out that Councillor Beddow had used the word 'dude' in one of the comments she had applied to Councillor Somper's Facebook post, which he understood to be similarly informal.

7. As regards the comment about getting back on a bin lorry that he applied to Councillor Somper's post at 17.46 on 18 December, Councillor Fuhrmann did not intend it to be derogatory; he was merely referring to a social media post he had seen some months previously about Councillor Beddow's involvement with the Council's waste collection service.
8. As regards the image created after Councillor Beddow had reposted the original one, Councillor Fuhrmann confirmed that he had added the 'Proud Councillor moment – managed to catch' and a couple of emojis and shared it as a story on his Instagram account on 18 December 2024. By adding the emojis he intended to indicate what he regarded as the facetiousness of the situation and by sharing it as a story on Instagram so that it would be removed after 24 hours and have no permanence, he intended to indicate that the episode was a matter of fun. He does not know how many people viewed the story during the 24-hour period it was available on his Instagram account.
9. As regards the exchange of messages with Councillor Beddow, the 'conversation' was over within the space of little more than an hour and Councillor Fuhrmann does not know why she chose to initiate private contact with him. As far as he is aware the exchange has remained private; he has not shared it with anyone.
10. Councillor Fuhrmann felt that Councillor Beddow instigated conflict when she suggested to him in her comment on Councillor Somper's Facebook post that he should stand down, and that by replying in the way he did he was only responding to her aggression. He believes that as an experienced councillor, Councillor Beddow is using the complaints process against him for purely political ends.
11. Councillor Fuhrmann finished the interview by stating that he believes all the allegations against him are unfounded. He is a schoolteacher living in a largely female household [REDACTED] and he therefore found the complaint of sexism particularly ridiculous. His style when using social media reflects his half-full approach to life and his work as a councillor, and he feels that he does not deserve to be the victim of a political witch-hunt.