

Meeting of:	<b>Resources Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Wednesday, 25 March 2026</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Task and Finish Review on Countering Misinformation
Purpose of Report:	To present the findings and subsequent recommendations compiled by the Resources Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Review Group; to seek the Resources Committee's approval for referral of the report to Cabinet.
Report Owner:	Resources Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Review Group
Responsible Officer:	Liz Whitaker, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	<p>Elected Members of the Task and Finish Review Group:</p> <p>Councillor B. Loveluck-Edwards (Chair)</p> <p>Councillor E. Goodjohn (Vice-Chair)</p> <p>Councillor J. Norman</p> <p>Councillor S. Campbell</p> <p>Councillor R. Fisher</p> <p>Councillor J. Protheroe</p> <p>Councillor Dr. I. Johnson</p> <p>Tom Bowring - Director of Corporate Resources</p> <p>Rob Jones - Operational Manager – Corporate Communications</p>
Policy Framework:	This report is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.

**Executive Summary:**

**The Resources Scrutiny Committee’s Task and Finish Review on Countering Misinformation examines how the Vale of Glamorgan Council can better understand, prevent and respond to false or misleading narratives that affect residents, services and democratic processes. Drawing on member experience, expert evidence and training sessions, the review concludes that misinformation presents real risks to community cohesion, public trust and the safety of both residents, staff and Elected Members.**

**The report highlights the need to strengthen Members’ confidence, improve dialogue with Officers, provide clear factual resources, develop tailored training, and explore community-based approaches such as media-literacy initiatives and credible-messenger networks. It also identifies opportunities for proactive communication, collaborative working with partners, and long-term improvements such as fact-checking protocols and updates to the Members’ Code of Conduct, with a recommendation for progress to be reviewed in 12 months’ time.**

**The recommendations for Cabinet, contained in the report, are as follows:**

<b>Build Internal Capacity and Resilience:</b>
<b>1. Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.</b>
<b>2. Create a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation.</b>
<b>3. Strengthen and promote opportunities for improved dialogue between Elected Members and Officers for the sharing of related information and advice.</b>
<b>4. Establish internal support systems for officials targeted by mis/disinformation.</b>
<b>Engage the Community:</b>
<b>5. Explore offering media literacy workshops for residents to help them to identify false information and information threats and harms.</b>
<b>6. Consider developing Information Community Champion advocates.</b>
<b>Taking the conversation offline:</b>
<b>7. Explore the potential and possibilities for holding in-person events involving Officers, Elected Members, partner organisations, community leaders and the public, to promote social cohesion and understanding among a variety of groups of residents.</b>

**Collaborate and Share:**

- 8. Partner with like-minded organisations, for example Welsh Government, schools, public and third sector organisations, and local media to counter information threats.**
- 9. Join relevant networks for examples of good practice and resources.**
- 10. Explore adopting shared monitoring tools with partners, to enhance awareness and understanding of pervasive and emerging media narratives.**
- 11. Consider partnering with independent local media and influential community leaders through joint-working opportunities.**

**Advocate for Support:**

- 12. Explore the possibilities for a variety of funding opportunities to support both resilience-building internally, and public-facing projects to counter misinformation.**
- 13. Seek legal clarity on Local Authorities' role in combating intentional disinformation.**

**Review Progress and Build on Results:**

- 14. That the Resources Scrutiny Committee receives an update presentation or report on any recommendations accepted and actioned, and any related work undertaken, in 12 months' time.**

## **Recommendation**

1. T H A T the report and recommendations contained therein be referred to Cabinet for consideration, and that a formal response be requested including agreed next steps.

## **Reason for Recommendation**

1. To present the findings and subsequent recommendations compiled by the Resources Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Review Group, and subsequently agreed by the Resources Scrutiny Committee, for approval.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Resources Scrutiny Committee selected the Council's communications as the focus of its first Task and Finish Review, narrowing this to Countering Misinformation, due to time constraints and the growing impact of false narratives on residents and the Council's reputation.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1 Members were increasingly concerned by misinformation circulating about Council projects, which often overshadowed positive work, fuelled division, and in some cases posed risks to the wellbeing and safety of both residents and Councillors.
- 2.2 They also recognised that misinformation had personally affected some Members, reinforcing the need for improved ways of responding. Given recent community tensions linked to projects such as Heol Croeso and the Afghan Resettlement Programme, the group felt it was timely to explore how the Council could support more factual, transparent conversations with residents.
- 2.3 Although the topic is complex and influenced by external factors, Members emphasised the importance of ensuring the public receives accurate information and of strengthening the Council's own communication practices in order to reduce the spread and impact of misinformation.

## **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1 The Task and Finish Working Group activities form a key part of the Resources Scrutiny Committee meeting its terms of reference and remit, which are aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan – Vale 2030, which in turn, is aligned to the Wellbeing Goals for Wales.

- 3.2 The efforts of the Task and Finish Working Group contribute towards achieving the following Council Wellbeing Objectives and Commitments:

**WBO 5: Being the best Council we can be**

**In particular, the aim to improve how we work by finding new ways to do things, engaging more with our residents and working with our partners.**

## 4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1 None as a direct result of this report.

## 5. Resources and Legal Considerations

### Financial

- 5.1 None as a direct result of this report. It is expected that any agreed actions would be achieved through existing team budgets.

### Employment

- 5.2 None as a direct result of this report. It is expected that any agreed actions would be achieved through existing staff resources.

### Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3 None as a direct result of this report.

## 6. Background Papers

- [https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/ Committee%20Reports/Scrutiny-New-2025/Scrutiny-Resources/2025/25-07-09/Task-and-Finish-Review-Topics-Resources.pdf](https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/Documents/Committee%20Reports/Scrutiny-New-2025/Scrutiny-Resources/2025/25-07-09/Task-and-Finish-Review-Topics-Resources.pdf)
- [RESIST Counter-disinformation Toolkit](#)
- [RESIST 2 Counter-disinformation toolkit](#)
- [A guide to disinformation affecting local authorities and their communities | Local Government Association](#)
- [Challenging misinformation through a Community Champions Network of trusted local voices – Staffordshire County Council | Local Government Association](#)
- [What we learned at Cardiff Conversations: Navigating Disinformation with Babita Sharma - News - Cardiff University](#)
- [Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf](#)
- [CitizensUK OrganisingTogetherAcrossDifference digital.pdf](#)

## Countering Misinformation

### **Executive Summary**

This Task and Finish Review was commissioned by the Resources Scrutiny Committee to explore how the Vale of Glamorgan Council can better understand, prevent, and respond to misinformation affecting its residents, services and democratic processes. Members selected this topic following increasing concern about the spread of false or misleading narratives within the community. These narratives have at times distracted attention away from the significant positive work being undertaken by the Council and have contributed to reduced public confidence, increased division, and—on occasion—direct harm to community cohesion and to the wellbeing of the Council’s people.

The Group recognised that Councillors, as trusted community representatives, are often at the frontline of responding to misinformation. Members reported experiencing growing levels of misinformed challenges, both offline and on social media, which could escalate into confrontational or abusive discussions. The Review therefore focussed on strengthening Members’ confidence, skills and access to factual information, to support constructive engagement with residents and with the aim of reducing the likelihood of harmful misinformation taking root.

Through training, expert witness sessions and discussions with Council Officers, Members identified that misinformation is a complex and evolving issue, influenced by wider social, psychological and economic factors. The Review’s research explored practical approaches to ‘prebunking’ and ‘debunking’, promoting factual dialogue, strengthening Council processes, and developing community-based approaches to building resilience.

The Group found that effective responses require a combination of internal capacity building and outward facing community engagement. This includes equipping Elected Members with tailored training, guidance and tools; enhancing collaboration between Members and Officers; supporting individuals who may be targeted by misinformation; and exploring opportunities for media literacy initiatives and community champion networks.

The Review concludes with a comprehensive set of recommendations that focus on supporting Members, strengthening community resilience, improving communication processes, and developing partnerships with trusted organisations. Recognising that misinformation will continue to evolve, the Group also recommends that progress

against these actions be reviewed in 12 months' time, alongside consideration of longer-term developments such as factchecking protocols, potential updates to the Members' Code of Conduct, and greater use of responsible technology.

## **1. Background & Rationale**

- 1.1** At their meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2025, Members of the Resources Scrutiny Committee chose the area of Communications and the Council's Communications Strategy as the overarching topic that they would like to take a deeper dive look into, and investigate through a Scrutiny Task and Finish Review exercise. This would be the first of a series of regular Task and Finish Review projects under the new revised scrutiny arrangements. Once the group had been formed and meetings had commenced, it was decided that a narrower focus was required, within the area of the Communications Strategy, given the timescales and practicalities involved.
- 1.2 Members of the group were concerned about several incidents of misinformation and false information being circulated and widespread among residents in relation to particular areas of the Council's work, and were concerned as to how this impacted upon vulnerable residents, as well as on the reputation of the Council and its Elected Membership. Members found that much of the positive work the Authority was carrying out, was being overshadowed by more negative and divisive narratives, particularly online. Increasingly this placed the Council in a more reactive role, where a more proactive approach to informing residents may be more productive. Members wanted to encourage transparency and openness, and found it was crucial that facts formed the basis of each discussion that could be had with residents.
- 1.3 Group Members felt that it was important for Vale of Glamorgan Councillors to feel able to, not only promote the positive projects and services being delivered by the Council on behalf of residents, but also to feel more confident in how they can counter the negative, misinformed viewpoints that they encounter in their role, with factual information. Members found that they were being challenged by misinformed views, statements and opinions regularly, both online and offline. Online and in-person examples of this brought with them a variety of problems, including the complexity of what drives misinformed narratives on social media, and the potential for in-person encounters to escalate into unpleasant or even abusive incidents, risking the safety and wellbeing of the Council's staff and Members, in more extreme cases.

- 1.4 Members of the group also identified examples of when they themselves had been the subject of online and offline misinformation, relating to their roles as Councillors. Some of these experiences have been captured in Appendix 1a. And 1b. Although the primary aim of this project has been to assist our most vulnerable residents against the harms that misinformation can cause, the group felt it was also important to acknowledge the impact on both Elected Members and Officers/Staff Members who had been the subject of incorrect information. Members found that it was particularly important to find effective actions that could be taken to counter misinformation, because false claims, when left to get out of control can quickly escalate into, and go hand-in-hand with incidents of hate and personal attacks, be it confined to the online space, or even the potential for in-person risks to individuals' safety.
- 1.5 It was subsequently decided by the group that it was fitting and timely to investigate ways in which the Council could contribute to a more factual, and less rumour-driven discussion with residents about its work. The topic resonated with Group Members, especially given their experience of how public sentiment around recent Council projects such as Heol Croeso in Llantwit Major and the use of the Holiday Inn in Rhoose as part of the Afghan Resettlement Programme had suggested a threat to social cohesion among our communities.
- 1.6 It was acknowledged that countering misinformation would be a challenging topic to undertake, given the scope and the variety of external factors influencing the situation. However, Group Members felt that it was important to feel able to contribute positively in this space. Members were also mindful of their responsibility to ensure that the people they represented were given access to accurate, relevant and transparent information on the work carried out on their behalf. Additionally, Members wanted to ensure that the Council's own communication tools did not fall foul of the risks around misinformation.

## **2. Aims**

- 2.1 In undertaking this project, Members of the Task and Finish Group hoped that it would help to reassure residents that the work of the Council is monitored and scrutinised by those elected to represent our communities, and who are working within them. Members have aimed to identify achievable actions that the Council can take, that will help to foster a factual, inclusive and constructive dialogue between Elected Members, officers and residents around the work that the Council is carrying out. These are set out in a series of recommendations as outlined in full in section 8 of this report.

### **3. Terminology**

3.1 Through the group's research, the following definitions have been established and used:

- **Misinformation**

Misinformation is false or misleading information shared without the intent to cause harm. (WLGA Training Session, January 2026).

- **Disinformation**

Disinformation is false information that is created, shared or amplified deliberately to deceive or cause harm. (WLGA Training Session, January 2026).

- **Malinformation**

Malinformation is genuine information that is used out of context, manipulated, or shared in a way intended to cause harm. (WLGA Training Session, January 2026).

- **Bad Faith Actors**

Individuals or groups that share false information intentionally.

- **Information Harms**

The negative impact and harm that is caused by the sharing and spread of false information.

- **Information Threats**

The threat of harm to people or organisations due to the potential for the prevalence of false information.

For ease of reading, this report will occasionally use the term 'misinformation' as a catch-all term, where the intention behind the information referred to is uncertain or mixed.

### **4. Current Communications Work related to Countering Misinformation**

4.1 Officers advised the group on the work being currently undertaken by the Communications team as a whole, and around misinformation more specifically. This included:

- **Weekly reviews of communications performance across a range of digital and non-digital media, with regular updates to SLT.**

This part of the editorial process is carried out in conjunction with Senior Leadership, and includes analysis of the public sentiment across each communications piece published.

- **Regular communications updates to Cabinet.**

Including updates to business cabinet meetings and communications performance updates.

- **Specific communications strategies actioned for more sensitive news items**

This includes making proactive and bespoke communications plans for potential future issues, to ensure a plan is in place and actionable, should a potential issue arise.

- **Publishing factual information separately to incidents of false information**

Officers advised that it is accepted that responding to false information and claims about its work that are misinformed, within the same online conversation as the false claim itself, runs the risk of both lending credibility to and amplifying false information, and that this is counter-productive to encouraging factual debate. Therefore, the approach taken has been to, where appropriate, publish a fact-based response independently. An example can be found on the Council's website, in a Frequently Asked Questions piece regarding the Afghan Settlement Programme, which has recently been prominently placed on the Council's website.

4.2 While group members understood the approach currently being taken, they found there may be more that Councillors could contribute to in terms of wanting to protect vulnerable residents from information harms. Members found that there was sometimes a lack of confidence, particularly among Members outside of the Cabinet, in knowing the most appropriate ways to respond to misinformation. Members also wanted to explore the possibilities around developing new ways to promote factual debate and conversations with our residents and others. This would support areas that Officers were already working towards with Vale 2030 and a new Communications Strategy for the Council, particularly around supporting vulnerable citizens.

## **5. Research methods**

- 5.1 A key challenge for this project was achieving meaningful research and recommendations within the timescales available. The group identified several avenues that may be pursued, if further time or revisiting of the topic were possible. The group were also able to undertake the following training sessions in order to enhance their understanding of the topic. In addition to the training sessions, the below expert witnesses were willing and available to support the group's work.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1 Training Session 1. - Welsh Local Government Association & Northern Irish Local Government Association - Managing Misinformation for Councillors – 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2025.**

This session focussed on how to respond if your organisation unintentionally publishes false information. There were, however, also elements around countering misinformation that originates externally. Members found that largely the training focussed on what Officers rather than Councillors could achieve, however there were points which arose from the training, that Members found particularly resonant:

- 'Pre-bunk versus debunk' – Could the Council have information readily available, particularly to Elected Members, on topics which it knows it will be challenged on?
- What are some of the legitimate public objections and how can these be misinterpreted? Could the Council use this information to pre-empt information threats and harms?
- How can the Council 'get in early' with issues that they know will be controversial? It can often be best to speak first on an issue and shape the debate. However, this approach risks setting off the 'rumour mill'.
- Should there be a code of conduct regarding Elected Members' social media and online content that reminds Councillors and the public how they can engage, and what kind of comments will be acceptable there?
- Are there practical steps or actions the Council can take for habitual abusers of its social media platforms. We remind residents of the zero-tolerance stance when phoning or meeting with Council Staff and Members, but this is not as robust online.

### **6.2 Key findings:**

Following this session and subsequent discussions, the group decided to focus on the role of Elected Members in countering misinformation. Officers were keen to support Members to do so, with advice, confidence-building and the necessary tools.

### **6.3 Subsequent recommendation(s) related to this training session:**

- **Strengthen and promote opportunities for improved dialogue between Elected Members and Officers**
- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Council staff and Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.**
- **Create/Develop a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation.**

### **6.4 Training Session 2. - Local Government Association - Mis/disinformation Training Workshop for Elected Members – 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2025.**

This training session focussed on the role of Elected Members in countering misinformation. While agreeing that debating and disagreeing with one another is a healthy part of democracy, it was acknowledged that misinformation can lead to abuse and intimidation, which crosses the lines of inclusive society and civility in public life.

This session also covered the psychology behind why misinformation is so pervasive, including the following key points:

- Simple online narratives and information target natural brain responses, for instance, the stress and dopamine responses.
- Misinformation plays into ‘groupthink’, prioritising group consensus over critical thinking.
- The difficulties in challenging viewpoints that are related to people’s identities – people will often feel that they are being attacked.
- Social media platforms are designed to be psychologically addictive, and this can be weaponised by ‘bad faith actors’.

The harms caused by mis/disinformation were also discussed, including:

- **Major risks to community cohesion**
- **A rise in hate incidents and polarisation**
- **Erosion of institutional trust**

Techniques for keeping debate on a constructive level were explored, such as de-escalating emotion, and opportunities for taking conversations away from the online space, to enhance person-to-person connections, and the quality of communication.

#### **6.5 Key findings:**

Members found that the right type of engagement matters in these circumstances, and that there will be instances of misinformation where it will help to engage, and others where attempting to correct the 'bad information' may never be constructive, due largely to the external forces involved. Guidance for Councillors on when to respond or engage, and when to focus efforts in another area would be useful. There are models around this already available and in use, which could be adopted, or adapted for local use.

#### **6.6 Recommendation(s) related to this training session:**

- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Council staff and Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.**
- **Create/Develop a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation.**

#### **6.7 Training Session 3. - Welsh Local Government Association - Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses Learning Session (Officers and staff) - 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026.**

This session aimed to equip attendees with knowledge of what information-based online harms are, how they function, the impact on communities, and what tools and techniques are available to mitigate disinformation threats that may be encountered.

#### **6.8 Key Findings:**

Members found this session, along with the previous two sessions very useful in understanding the drivers and mechanics behind mis/disinformation, and found that all Elected Members would benefit from accessing the learning provided through each session. It was decided that this may be most effective if coupled with a Vale of Glamorgan-specific perspective, whereby Members could consider the local circumstances alongside the more general advice around strategies for countering false information.

It was also acknowledged that, due to the complexity of the topic, a written guide for Elected Members on the key messages from these types of training sessions, would be helpful, especially for those Members who felt less confident in tackling the subject and the related issues.

## **6.9 Recommendation(s) Related to this Training Session:**

- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Council staff and Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.**
- **Create/Develop a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation.**

## **7. Guest Speakers / Expert Witnesses**

### **7.1 Guest Speaker / Expert Witness 1. – Steffan Rollnick (Strategic Communications, Welsh Government).**

**The group identified Steffan Rollnick of Welsh Government as a key expert witness on the topic of Misinformation generally, and one who could offer both a UK and a Welsh perspective on the matter. Steffan provided the group with several important points of consideration, including the following:**

- Misinformation is not an easy issue to get to grips with in a clear way. There are many forces at play, many of which are outside of the control of a Local Authority. Councils should focus on the ‘levers’ that they *can* pull, and where they *can* have influence.
- Information threats and harms are terms now often used by UK Government when talking about mis/disinformation. This draws our attention to the real-world harms that can be caused.
- Peoples’ levels of vulnerability to misinformation is linked to the degree to which they have experienced economic decline. It is also linked to a public feeling of a lack of control over their lives, and of disconnection from others. In addition to this, an overload of information also creates a need for simplified stories.
- Teaching young people to think for themselves critically is an important way of challenging misinformation.
- The Wall of Beliefs Framework – This model can help organisations to decide whether and how to respond to different instances of misinformation.
- How we have conversations with people who may be misinformed is important – respecting their autonomy can be more successful than trying to push them in your direction.
- Partnerships with others to spread your message can be key, particularly when your ‘brand’ is less trusted.
- Identifying ‘credible messengers’ who can assist with communicating the factual message may be a way to work with others to promote factual debate.

## **7.2 Key Findings:**

Following Steffan's presentation to the group, and the subsequent discussions, Members found that understanding the factors driving misinformation, such as poverty, and a feeling of disconnection and powerlessness over our lives was crucial in countering misinformation productively. Also important was the tone of voice employed when speaking to people who may be misinformed, which is key to fostering healthy debate.

## **7.3 Related Recommendation(s):**

- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Council staff and Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.**
- **Create/Develop a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation**
- **Explore offering media literacy workshops for residents to help them to identify false information and information threats / harms.**
- **Develop Community Champion advocates.**

## **7.4 Guest Speaker / Expert Witness 2. – Jonathan Cox (Citizens Cymru, Real Living Wage Campaign)**

The Group identified Jonathan Cox as an expert witness who had worked on several national projects that were relevant to the group's areas of interest around misinformation. This session explored the drivers behind and challenges around misinformation, as well as examining some examples of interesting and successful practice in countering false narratives.

## **7.5 Key Findings**

The group found that debate and discussion around controversial issues is often best tackled away from the environment of Social Media Platforms. When conversations are taken off-line, common ground is often easier to find around opposing views, rapport can be built and belief and trust in the facts of the matter can be more mutually accepted. There is an opportunity to have open discussion on divisive matters either in-person or using digital/hybrid means, outside of the less productive and more fear-driven, emotional environments that Social Media encourages. As long as the safety of all involved could be managed and ensured, in-person events could offer residents and Members/Officers the opportunity to discuss potentially divisive topics within a 'safe-space'. A key challenge around this was identified as being the means by which people outside of the existing traditional networks and established ways of engaging communities offline could also be encouraged to take part in such initiatives.

## **7.6 Related Recommendation(s):**

- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Council staff and Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.**
- **Create/Develop a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation**
- **Explore offering media literacy workshops for residents to help them to identify false information and information threats / harms.**
- **Explore the potential and possibilities for holding in-person events to engage the community.**
- **Advocate for support amongst the community, engage Community Champions to share factual messaging both online and offline.**

### **7.7 Guest Speaker / Expert Witness 3. – Welsh Refugee Council**

The group identified the Welsh Refugee Council as being a crucial source of information for the project, representing the experience of refugees in Wales, these being one of the most often targeted groups regarding mis/disinformation incidences, and also because as an organisation the Welsh Refugee Council have also been the target of a mis/disinformation attack themselves. Two key members of their team gave an impactful presentation to the group, shared helpful resources for combatting false viewpoints, and helped Members to shape the recommendations in this report, from the perspective of the victims of information harms.

The Welsh Refugee Council demonstrated to the group how real-world harm is being caused by false information shared and spread, largely online. As topics such as immigration and housing are some of those which attract a large amount of controversy and online attention, they also attract a large proportion of misinformed opinions. The negative impact that this is having on some of the most vulnerable members of our communities was evidenced by the experience of the Welsh Refugee Council's staff members and service users being threatened and verbally abused by those who had been outraged, based on false information caused by the mis/disinformation attack that the organisation experienced.

### **7.8 Key Findings:**

Members want to help to protect vulnerable residents, as well as colleagues within the Council from the harms that can be caused by 'bad information', whether that be intentional information attacks, or the unintentional spread of incorrect views and opinions. Members found that further support could be offered to Councillors when they themselves are the subject of misinformation incidences. Members also want to explore ways that healthy debate can be encouraged, in a way that protects our most vulnerable residents, whose voices can be harder to hear. In order to encourage factual and inclusive debate, Members of the group found that access to clear facts around the

most polarising and controversial areas of the Council's work was important. Also important would be empowering Members to have the confidence to engage in challenging debates in a way that would be helpful and productive.

**Involving partners** – Members found that while the task of countering misinformation can at times seem so challenging as to be insurmountable, particularly when working with a small team and limited resources, working collaboratively with the aim of preventing, or at least mitigating information harms to our residents and internal colleagues helps to promote what is achievable when working together. Members found that this, combined with other strategies, will produce the best possible outcomes and results.

#### **7.9 Related Recommendation(s):**

- **Establish/Develop internal support systems for officials targeted by mis/disinformation.**
- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Council staff and Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.**
- **Create a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation**
- **Partner with like-minded organisations.**
- **Join relevant networks for examples of good practice and resources.**
- **Explore adopting shared monitoring tools with partners, to enhance awareness and understanding of pervasive and emerging media narratives.**
- **Consider partnering with independent local media and influential community leaders through joint-working opportunities.**

### **8. Recommendations in Full**

#### **8.1 Build Internal Capacity**

- **Schedule bespoke, Vale-specific training sessions for Elected Members around identifying and responding to misinformation.** This would allow Councillors to combine knowledge of the strategies that can be adopted, with the local picture in the Vale of Glamorgan. Within these sessions, the avoidance of misinformation that occurs from within the council should also be covered, as well as how instances of mis/disinformation originating from Elected Members would relate to the Members' Code of Conduct. Training on misinformation could be linked to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training, where themes overlap. Training should be refreshed regularly and be included in the Elected Member Induction and Development Programmes.

- **Create a toolkit for Elected Members on the topic of countering misinformation.** This should include advice and guidance such as - When to engage; How to engage; Useful Facts on Controversial topics; FAQs; De-escalation techniques; Social Media guidance, List of useful Council Contacts, e.g. Within The Communications Team, and wider regarding specific topics; helpful resources and links. This may begin as a simple guidance document and evolve over time to include more tools, advice and guidance as internal experience in dealing with information threats grows.
- **Strengthen and promote opportunities for improved dialogue between Elected Members and Officers** to assist Service Areas in using local information gathered by those ‘on the ground’ within our communities, and to enable Elected Members to be supported by Officers to counter false narratives with factual information, where appropriate. With regards to in-person communication opportunities, Elected Members could be invited to attend the Communications Team’s ‘surgeries’ to talk about issues in their communities. Media monitoring information and subsequent communications campaigns could involve Elected Members more, to ensure effective, consistent messaging.
- **Establish internal support systems for officials targeted by mis/disinformation.** Identify ways in which the Council can protect its officials from targeted mis/disinformation, including gendered and other hate attacks, through, for example, both legal and psychological support, where appropriate.

## 8.2 Engage the Community

- **Explore offering media literacy workshops for residents to help them to identify false information and information threats and harms.** Education has a key role to play in equipping people with the skills to navigate the information landscape. Group members would like to see the Council exploring ways to contribute to a community that has the access to means of learning how to engage with modern information types, given the pitfalls and challenges around truth and fact that are currently pervasive in the media. There may be opportunities to involve schools in partnerships, to ensure that media literacy messaging can be consistent, both to adults, and to children and young people in The Vale of Glamorgan.

- **Consider developing Community Champion advocates** to act as credible messengers to promote factual, inclusive and positive messaging about the work of the Council, both online and offline.

### 8.3 Taking the conversation offline

- **Explore the potential and possibilities for holding in-person events** involving Officers, Elected Members, partner organisations, community leaders and the public, to promote social cohesion and understanding among a variety of groups of residents.

### 8.4 Collaborate and Share

- **Partner with like-minded organisations**, for example Welsh Government, schools, public and third sector organisations, and local media to counter information threats, and develop ways of working collaboratively to combat misinformation.
- **Join relevant networks** for examples of good practice and resources.
- **Explore adopting shared monitoring tools with partners**, to enhance awareness and understanding of pervasive and emerging media narratives.
- **Consider partnering with independent local media and influential community leaders** through joint-working opportunities.

### 8.5 Advocate for Support

- **Explore the possibilities for a variety of funding opportunities** to support both resilience-building internally, and public-facing projects to counter misinformation.
- **Seek legal clarity on Local Authorities' role** in combating intentional disinformation.

### 8.6 Review Progress and Build on Results

This is a topic that will evolve and will need to be revisited over time. As a starting point, members of the group would like to have an update on the recommendations it has made through this project, once any work around its recommendations has been actioned or plans have been put in place.

- **That the Resources Scrutiny Committee receives an update presentation or report on any recommendations accepted and actioned, and any related work undertaken, in 12 months' time,** in conjunction with revisiting the suggestions for future consideration included below.

### **Suggestions for Further and Future Consideration**

As tackling misinformation will be an ongoing concern for the Council, Group Members identified the following areas where shorter-term action may be difficult, but a longer-term focus could have a lasting positive impact:

- **Consider whether the consequences of mis/disinformation incidences should be explicitly reflected in guidance such as the Members Code of Conduct.**
- **Develop internal protocols for fact-checking and crisis communication with the role of Elected Members in mind.**
- **Develop citizen panels around communications issues, to strengthen trust and transparency.**
- **Consider investing in political / social media monitoring tools for early detection of information threats.**
- **Explore AI-based fact-checking and horizon-scanning tools, ensuring their ethical use.**

## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1. Vale of Glamorgan - Specific Case Studies from the experience of Group Members**

#### **Appendix 1a. Heol Croeso, Llantwit Major.**

*We, as Llantwit Major Vale Councillors, were informed that the Vale Council had been requested by the Welsh Government to use available, suitable space for temporary accommodation, primarily for Ukrainian refugees, and homeless families in the Vale. When the Eagleswell site was selected, there were huge reactions from neighbouring properties, who had enjoyed several years of open space behind their properties since the demolition of the junior school which had been re-located.*

*The rumours were rife. According to the local scaremongering, the future occupants of these properties were, among other things, going to be 'illegal immigrant Syrian men' who were going to 'murder us all in our beds', and other young single men who would 'rob us all blind'. All of these claims were ridiculous, and a perfect example of disinformation.*

*Later, when the Town Council met, we were confronted by a large number of residents who were shouting and yelling abuse, saying that us Vale Councillors had betrayed them, and we were in receipt of financial inducements to let this development go ahead. One woman waved her finger in my face and shouted, 'She's one of them!!', which was very intimidating.*

*We fortunately had a strong police presence there to stop it from escalating. A few weeks later we were invaded by a 'Far-right rent-a-mob'. As they got off the train they were met with a 'Welsh Cake Revolution', where some of the local people, led by the vicar, handed out Welsh cakes and spoke kind words to everyone. Fighting negativity with positivity. This action actually made the Welsh news. This whole thing came out of deliberate disinformation, spread by selfish individuals who thought they had the right to have their own way at all costs.*

*After speaking to the representatives from the Welsh Refugee Council I have, on several occasions, been able to correct misinformation regarding refugees to our country. It was very satisfying to have the correct information to hand. Thank-you for organising the meeting with them. The poster that the Welsh Refugee Council sent through to me I gave to the vicar, who photocopied it and handed it out to people who attended a recent hustings event.*

## **Appendix 1b. Afghan Resettlement Programme, Rhoose.**

*Unfortunately, the situation in Rhoose was a mixture of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, which created a perfect storm of community upheaval and distrust, leading to protests and a lot of negativity online, and locally.*

*Back in mid 2025, a post was shared on a local Facebook group stating that Afghan Asylum Seekers/Refugees would be using the Holiday Inn in Rhoose for residency. At the time I did not know that these claims had not been substantiated by a formal source, so I clarified to my community that our new residents would in fact be part of the Afghan Resettlement Programme, as well as adding further context to the post in what I believed to be clarifying the misinformation shared. However, this quickly became malinformation in the hands of bad faith actors, many of which were not Rhoose or even Vale residents.*

*Although the original post was deleted, my comment was screenshotted and shared multiple times over multiple different social media outlets, leading to a lot of hate towards me, accusations about my intentions and knowledge of this scheme, as well as the validity of the information I had shared. The community had a lot of questions which I could not answer. I attempted to share the information I had, but the information was being overridden tenfold by disinformation due to scale of the interest in this topic.*

*Unfortunately, once formal communication was released, the damage was already done and Rhoose was dealing with protests on a weekly basis. The Rhoose community banded together to make our residents welcome, creating welcome baskets for children, running events, making families feel welcome, but the undertone of resentment due to misinformation and lack of information was still there.*

## Appendix 2. – IRE Framework

Tier	When to use	Action
Ignore	Fringe content, low visibility	Monitor silently without drawing attention to claims
Inform	Misunderstanding, growing engagement	Proactively put out correct information without amplifying falsehood directly
Refute	Clearly false and harmful claims	Publicly correct claim using evidence and clarity
Escalate	Coordinated or malicious campaigns	Involve platform T&S, fact-checkers, legal/policy if necessary

**This table has been reproduced with the permission of its owners, who presented it during Training Session 3. - Welsh Local Government Association - Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses Learning Session (Officers and staff) - 6<sup>th</sup> January 2026, as an approach to countering misinformation incidents in a proportionate manner.**

### Appendix 3. - Background Information and Related Links

- [RESIST Counter-disinformation Toolkit](#)
- [RESIST 2 Counter-disinformation toolkit](#)
  
- [A guide to disinformation affecting local authorities and their communities | Local Government Association](#)
- [Challenging misinformation through a Community Champions Network of trusted local voices – Staffordshire County Council | Local Government Association](#)
  
- [What we learned at Cardiff Conversations: Navigating Disinformation with Babita Sharma - News - Cardiff University](#)
- [Local-truth-shared-trust-EN.pdf](#)

#### Weaving Trust Example:

- [CitizensUK\\_OrganisingTogetherAcrossDifference\\_digital.pdf](#)

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