



## Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses Learning Session – January - April 2026

### Frequently Asked Questions

Alongside the information handout provided by the presenters, a number of questions asked across both phases of the delivered sessions have been collated. Where questions were repeated or of particular use, they have been captured below.

### Can we use the information in the handout and FAQ?

Yes, the presenters welcomed the use of the information contained in the documents if it will be helpful. If you are using information from the presenter handout or the IRE table/Discourse triangle, please credit Dr Joe Ondrak and Jen Talbot, Peryton Intelligence. Where possible please note the information stemmed from your attendance at a Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses Learning Session, funded by WLGA and Welsh Government and supported by the Wales Safer Communities Network.

### We often hear about misinformation and disinformation. What is malinformation, and how does it differ?

Misinformation is false or misleading information shared without the intent to cause harm.

Disinformation is false information that is created, shared or amplified deliberately to deceive or cause harm.

Malinformation is genuine information that is used out of context, manipulated, or shared in a way intended to cause harm. For example, sharing private information, cropping an image to change its meaning, or placing information in a different context to alter how it is understood.

### What systems or escalation routes should be in place to ensure staff know how to respond if they identify potentially harmful misinformation?

Preventative action is often far more effective than responses to potentially harmful information. The Local Government Association and Belong have [published some key practical lessons](#) they recommend Councils apply:

- **speed and timeliness:** Rapid, visible response prevents misinformation from gaining momentum and curbs its spread.
- **clarity and simplicity:** Formats like “*Claim vs Fact*” cut through noise and make truth accessible.
- **values and unity:** Grounding messages in civic pride and shared values resonates deeply with communities.



- **leadership presence:** Direct communication and on-site visibility from trusted figures reinforce credibility and confidence.
- **transparency and naming:** Clearly identifying facts and naming the true source (e.g., the actual group involved) demystifies rumours and dispels fear.
- **proactive rhythm:** Regular factual updates position councils as reliable sources of truth.
- **preparedness:** Establishing rapid-response protocols ensures institutions are ready for mis/dis/malinformation incidents.

Putting in place effective frameworks, available to all staff, can help with identification of whether content is a media campaign, a community member who is misinformed, or intentional disinformation. Once identified, the issue can be broken down using techniques discussed in the session, including the I.R.E approach.

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

The I.R.E framework provides a proportionate response model.

Practitioners should be aware that multiple responses may be appropriate. Knowing what referral options exist, and using dual reporting where necessary, helps avoid delays and ensures appropriate support.

The UK Government Communications Service has developed the [RESIST toolkit](#) to support organisations to build resilience to information threats.

**If colleagues need to deal with disinformation, how can we best support them, when/if they are negatively targeted?**

Offer consistent support to those affected. Being targeted by a disinformation campaign can be overwhelming, so providing a listening ear and demonstrating empathy is beneficial. When issuing communications or responding, ensure that they



feel supported and are not isolated. It is also important to recognise that you are not responsible for orchestrating a counter-campaign.

### **What is an effective professional approach to challenging far-right beliefs when the individual strongly resists being described that way?**

Calling out labels directly is often counter-productive, especially when someone feels the term doesn't reflect how they see themselves. A more effective approach is to focus on the specific behaviours, narratives or harms rather than the label, and to frame the conversation around shared values, concerns or community impact. Using curiosity, asking open questions, and keeping the tone non-judgemental helps reduce defensiveness. Trusted messengers, relationship-building, and grounding the discussion in real-world consequences rather than identity can create more space for reflection without escalating division.

### **How is information about disinformation shared with staff and officers?**

Information, guidance, and training are shared through several coordinated channels. Updates, toolkits, research, and practical resources are shared through regional and national forums, including the Wales Community Safety Officers Group (WaCSO), Equality Officers Member Network, Community Safety Partnerships and other relevant multi-agency groups.

Welsh Government-funded *Disinformation, Information Threats and Responses* learning sessions, supported by the Wales Safer Communities Network and the WLGA, have been delivered throughout January 2026. Additional sessions are scheduled for March. Participants are encouraged to complete the post-session evaluation to help shape future training ([evaluation survey/arolwg gwerthuso](#)).

Staff and elected members are also encouraged to sign up for the Wales Safer Communities Network's monthly BRIFF newsletter for updates.

To subscribe, please email: [saferrcommunities@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:saferrcommunities@wlga.gov.uk)

### **How can staff and elected members stay mindful of their online presence and avoid unintentionally engaging with social media pages that promote harmful or extremist content?**

Some online pages or groups may appear harmless at first, for example, nostalgia accounts or local interest forums, but may later share or amplify hateful, racist, or anti-immigrant narratives. It is important to be mindful that any public engagement you make online, including likes, follows, or comments, can form part of your digital footprint and may be connected back to you or your organisation.

Before engaging with a page, a level of curiosity and digital awareness is encouraged. Consider reviewing previous posts and comment threads, checking who runs the page, and looking for patterns in the content they share. This can help you



judge whether a page is credible or whether it may later shift into harmful or misleading narratives.

Being aware of your own data history, and how it may be perceived by the communities you work for, is an important part of maintaining personal and professional safety online. Taking a cautious approach helps protect both your reputation and the trust placed in you as a public-facing professional.

### **Is there a limit to what can be achieved online to counter hate and extremism?**

Online activity plays an important role in tackling hate and extremism, but it cannot address the issue alone. Digital interventions, such as content moderation, counter-narratives, reporting mechanisms, and the removal of harmful material, are essential tools but work best alongside offline measures.

As discussed in the sessions, hate and extremism often stem from broader social, economic, and community-based factors. Education, community engagement, early intervention, partnership working, and support services all play a critical role in addressing underlying drivers, supporting vulnerable individuals, and building long-term community resilience.

In Wales, online work should be understood as one element of a wider whole-system approach. Effective prevention relies on coordinated action across communities, public services, devolved and non-devolved partners, civil society, and law enforcement, supported by responsible practices from technology companies and online platforms. Individuals also play a role by engaging critically with information, reporting concerns, and promoting positive online behaviours. Tackling hate and extremism is most effective when online and offline efforts reinforce one another.

### **Misinformation can sometimes originate from individuals holding public office. What can be done about this?**

Most individuals that seek public office do so to support and improve their communities. Councillors have a legal duty to act ethically as outlined in the Local Government Act 2000. Also, the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) Order 2008 requires a mandatory Code of Conduct in each council, based on a national model. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales has detailed information and a model Code of Conduct which can be found here: [Information for councillors | Public Services Ombudsman Wales](#).

Elected members should understand the impact that mis/dis/mal-information can have on community cohesion, trust in public bodies, and democratic processes. All elected members and officers should uphold [the Seven Principles of Public Life](#) (the Nolan Principles).

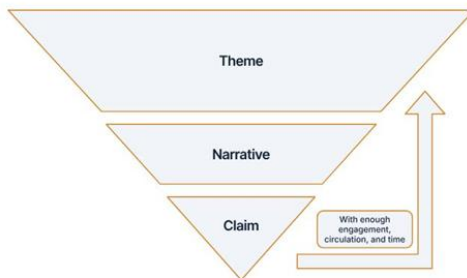


Disinformation sessions have been made available for elected members, officers and staff through January with further sessions planned for March.

Where an elected member is identified for sharing mis/disinformation, officers and staff are encouraged to contact them to explain the impact of the message to help prevent recurrence.

Officers should follow established governance procedures when concerns arise.

### What is the discourse triangle and how can it help you understand if decisive action is needed?



The discourse triangle explains how broad discussions narrow into specific statements. At the top are themes, wide topics where debate and legitimate concerns exist. These can develop into narratives in the middle, where particular stories or viewpoints shape how the issue is understood. At the narrow end are claims, specific statements or incidents that can be checked and shown to be true or false.

The model helps identify when decisive action is needed by encouraging you to focus on the claim.

While themes and narratives may require discussion or engagement, action is usually most appropriate when a clear, misleading, or harmful claim emerges that can be verified and addressed directly. This helps avoid over-reacting to broad debate, while responding proportionately when facts are being distorted or harm is likely.

### When should local authorities intervene with accurate information to support community cohesion, even if the issue originates with another agency or partner?

Effective communication between partners is essential. Local Authorities should engage early with relevant agencies to ensure any response is coordinated, accurate, and consistent. Localised frameworks, partnership structures, and communication plans help clarify roles and responsibilities, including who should be contacted at different stages as situations develop.

This shared understanding supports timely decision-making about when it is appropriate for the Local Authority to issue accurate information to protect community cohesion.



### **Is there evidence that trauma or negative life experiences make people more vulnerable to misinformation, and what research exists on this?**

There's no clear evidence of a direct link between trauma and increased susceptibility to misinformation, and no well-established longitudinal studies that confirm such a relationship. People arrive at these beliefs for many different reasons, and social factors can play a significant role. One example discussed was a senior professional who, during the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, suggested slowing down the vaccination programme and later became influenced by "audience capture" – gradually tailoring their views and content to meet the expectations of an online audience. While trauma isn't proven as a cause, these kinds of behavioural and social dynamics can contribute to how individuals become more susceptible to certain types of information.

### **Is there evidence that neurological and attention-related differences affect how people engage with online information and misinformation, and do these experiences vary across individuals?**

There is currently no robust evidence that differences in brain chemistry or neurotype make someone more susceptible to misinformation. While there is substantial research on dopamine, attention, and reward processing across different populations, including neurodivergent individuals such as those with ADHD or who are autistic, there is limited direct evidence linking these differences to belief in or sharing of mis-, or disinformation.

People may experience online environments differently, particularly where content is fast-paced, emotionally charged, or technologically sophisticated, such as AI-generated audio or video. While threat actors may use varied tactics to reach different audiences, it is important to recognise that different ways of thinking bring valuable strengths.

Traits such as strong pattern recognition, deep focus, attention to detail, and a strong sense of fairness can shape how information is processed. Importantly, these same traits may support critical evaluation and the ability to identify inconsistencies or manipulation in content. Recognising and valuing cognitive diversity may therefore strengthen collective resilience to mis-, and disinformation.

### **Is 'Disinformation' essentially a new digital term for propaganda? Or is the latter something different - communicated by the state etc.**

Not exactly. Disinformation refers to false information spread with the intention to deceive. Propaganda involves information, true or false, used to promote a particular agenda, ideology, or political cause. The two can overlap, but they are not the same thing.



## **What examples are there of effective responses to disinformation helping communities?**

Each situation will be different and needs to be considered in its own context. This makes providing useful case studies fairly difficult. This is also because, whilst disinformation is not new, we are still learning about the more modern modes of circulation. However, approaches that strengthen trust and provide clear, timely information through robust and accessible communication methods are consistently effective.

Following incidents such as the Manchester synagogue attack and the Liverpool parade attack, public bodies and local partners acted quickly to provide accurate updates and challenge rumours. Rapid communication helped limit speculation, counter falsehoods and reassure communities.

## **How do you prove your countering disinformation has been effective? Was it a worthwhile use of your resources?**

At times, there may be no direct evidence, so the most reliable approach is to learn from past events and compare them over time. You can't provide evidence for something that hasn't happened yet, but this is an essential part of prevention and highlights the significance of cohesion activities.

## **What is a 'bot', and how does bot activity typically appear on social media?**

Bots are automated accounts that post or share content at speed to make certain topics seem more popular or contentious than they are. They typically amplify messages rather than create or run community groups, and their activity is usually high-volume, repetitive and aimed at boosting visibility rather than genuine local engagement.

## **How do online signals such as likes, shares, and comments influence people's willingness to engage with harmful content?**

Perceived social approval online, such as seeing others like, share, or comment positively on a post, can make individuals feel more comfortable reacting to or sharing content they might otherwise avoid. This can make harmful or divisive material appear more acceptable or mainstream.

It is also important to recognise that sensational or provocative posts often generate high engagement, and on many platforms, engagement directly drives revenue. This means emotionally charged or biased content, including material originating from outside the UK, can be amplified quickly and still have a significant impact on local communities.



Developing self-awareness about our own online behaviours is essential. Understanding our vulnerabilities and being mindful of our digital footprint, we can better protect ourselves and our organisations. This includes taking time to assess content critically, avoiding reactive sharing, and feeling confident in calling out inappropriate material, reporting criminal activity, and responding constructively to disinformation.

### **How can we create accessible spaces for critical thinking that encourage people to engage rather than disengage?**

Securing genuine engagement and buy-in from communities is essential. Approaches that encourage curiosity rather than confrontation help create accessible spaces for critical thinking, for example through professional curiosity and active listening. [Socratic questioning](#) (Receive, Reflect, Refine, Restate, Repeat) is one effective method, which helps guide conversations without relying on jargon, slogans, or buzzwords.

This approach encourages clarity, deeper understanding, and balanced dialogue. It allows people to explore ideas at their own pace, feel heard, and contribute meaningfully, making it far more likely they will stay engaged rather than feel pushed away.

The Welsh Government funds the Community Cohesion Programme to act as conduits between communities and public bodies and build cohesion in all Welsh local authorities. An important part of this work includes finding opportunities to bring different communities together and find common ground or disagree agreeably. Your regional community cohesion team may be able to help with any proposals you have.

The Digital Competence Framework, a core part of the Curriculum for Wales, places media literacy, online safety and critical thinking on the same level of importance as literacy and numeracy in our schools. The [Keeping Safe Online](#) pages on Hwb provides lots of useful resources for schools, young people, parents and others.

Welsh Government has published a [short guide](#) to help explain some of the key terms surrounding critical thinking online. Both Welsh Government and Ofcom are currently piloting community-based media literacy projects in Wales and will evaluate outcomes, in accordance with the Ofcom media literacy outcomes framework.

### **What responsibilities do social media platforms have to remove posts that are verified as disinformation?**

This is a complex area because social media platforms operate across multiple jurisdictions, each with different legal frameworks, expectations, and protections around freedom of expression. While some countries impose specific obligations on platforms, others, such as the United States, where many major platforms are based,



place strong protections on speech, which limits how far platforms are required to act.

Most platforms set their own community standards and moderation policies. When content is verified as disinformation, platforms may choose to remove it, reduce its visibility, or attach a warning label, but they are not legally obliged to remove all forms of disinformation. Only posts that breach specific laws, for example, those that meet the threshold for hate crime, harassment, or incitement, must be taken down. It is therefore important to recognise that not all disinformation will qualify as unlawful. In many cases, platforms respond by signposting reliable information or adding context, rather than removing the content entirely. Their duty is shaped by a combination of internal policies, local legislation, and the type of harm the content may cause.

In the UK, the Online Safety Act 2023 places duties on platforms to address illegal content and to mitigate risks from certain categories of harmful content.

### **How can we judge what to trust when news and institutions are increasingly questioned, and what standards apply to journalism in the UK?**

When trust feels uncertain, it can help to look beyond headlines and focus on how information is produced. In the UK, most established news organisations operate under clear professional standards, including accuracy, fairness, and the correction of mistakes.

UK broadcasters are regulated by Ofcom, which enforces rules on due accuracy, impartiality, and harm. More widely, the Online Safety Act strengthens expectations on large platforms to reduce the spread of harmful and misleading content, even where that content is not illegal.

It's also important to recognise that many news outlets and platforms consumed in the UK are based overseas, particularly in the US, where legal frameworks and editorial standards can differ. This doesn't remove the need for caution, but it helps explain why content quality and accountability can vary. Checking information against a few independent outlets and being aware of possible biases can also help build a more balanced picture, rather than relying on any single source.

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Ongoing evaluation and learning are essential, as information threats evolve rapidly.



## Helpful resources

Resource	Purpose
<a href="#"><u>How to understand Misinformation, Disinformation and Malinformation (YouTube)</u></a>	Explains the differences between misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, using clear and accessible examples.
<a href="#"><u>How to review information before you share it (YouTube)</u></a>	Provides practical tips to help people pause, check and assess content before sharing it online.
<a href="#"><u>Shout Out UK – Resources</u></a>	A collection of media literacy and civic education resources focused on critical thinking and digital awareness.
<a href="#"><u>Cranky Uncle</u></a>	An interactive resource that helps people recognise common techniques used to mislead, manipulate or distort information.
<a href="#"><u>The Nolan Principles of Public Life</u></a>	Outlines the core ethical standards expected of those working in public office and public services.
<a href="#"><u>LGA – A guide to disinformation affecting local authorities and their communities</u></a>	Practical guidance for officers on identifying, understanding and responding to disinformation at a local level. A guide for members will follow later in 2026.
<a href="#"><u>LGA – Civility in public life</u></a>	Guidance and support to promote respectful public debate and address intimidation and abuse.
<a href="#"><u>LGA – Handling abuse and intimidation</u></a>	Practical advice for councillors and officers on managing abuse, harassment and threats linked to public roles.
<a href="#"><u>Co-operation over Conflict: Wales must Act</u></a>	Explores the impacts of polarisation and conflict on communities, with recommendations for promoting cohesion in Wales.
<a href="#"><u>Community cohesion – GOV.WALES</u></a>	Overview of Welsh Government’s approach to supporting cohesive and resilient communities.
<a href="#"><u>Community cohesion principles for practitioners – GOV.WALES</u></a>	Sets out principles and good practice for practitioners working to strengthen community cohesion.



<a href="#"><u>Thoughtful – Philosophy for Children and Communities</u></a>	Supports the use of philosophical enquiry to build critical thinking, dialogue and reasoning skills. (Previously known as SAPERE)
<a href="#"><u>The Wall of Beliefs – Government Communications Service</u></a>	A framework for understanding values, beliefs and identity when engaging on challenging or divisive issues.
<a href="#"><u>For the Record (Welsh Government)</u></a>	Provides factual explanations and evidence related to Welsh Government policies, to counter misleading claims.
<a href="#"><u>BBC Verify</u></a>	Specialist BBC team focused on fact-checking, verification and open-source investigations.
<a href="#"><u>Ground News</u></a>	A tool that compares news coverage across outlets to highlight bias, blind spots and differences in framing.
<a href="#"><u>Have I Been Pwned</u></a>	An online hygiene resource that helps individuals check whether work or personal email accounts have appeared in known data breaches.
<a href="#"><u>Local Government Lawyer</u></a>	Explains the beliefs, tactics and legal misunderstandings commonly associated with “sovereign citizen” and “freeman on the land” movements, and how public bodies may encounter them.